China bans British game

Beijing
Sydney Morning Herald
December 9, 2004 - 10:07AM

China has banned a popular British online computer game that portrays Taiwan, Tibet and Hong Kong as independent countries, state media said yesterday.

The Ministry of Culture said Football Manager 2005, developed by London-based Sports Interactive, "poses harm to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity", the Xinhua news agency said.

"Such a distortion, even in a computer game, violates the relevant Chinese laws and is anathema to the Chinese government," it cited the ministry as saying.

China considers Taiwan, which separated from the mainland in 1949 after a civil war, as a province awaiting reunification.

It has ruled Tibet since 1951 and views it as an "inalienable part" of China. Former British colony Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.

Although Football Manager 2005 is not yet legally on sale in China, it is available in pirated form and could be downloaded from the internet, Xinhua said.

Police and government departments across China have been ordered to punish websites, vendors and internet cafes which disseminate or sell the game, with fines of up to 30,000 yuan ($A4,680).

Officers may also have their business licences revoked.

Football Manager 2005 is one of the fastest-selling computer games in Britain, according to game review websites.

China launched a nationwide crackdown on online computer games earlier this year, banning those with "unhealthy" and sensitive political content in an attempt to rein in what it perceives as harmful influences on the young.

Chinese statistics show that one fifth of China's internet users are game players - a 64 per cent increase over 2002.

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