China clamps down on video games
Correspondents in Beijing
The Australian
JUNE 01, 2004

CHINA has set up a censorship committee to monitor imported video game content to weed out any that could threaten "national unity" or "divulge state secrets", state press reported. "Online games with content threatening state security, damaging the nation's glory, disturbing social order and infringing on other's legitimate rights will also be prohibited," said a Ministry of Culture statement carried by Xinhua news agency. Only those online games with exclusive authorization from the Ministry of Culture can be imported, while all foreign games must be examined before entering the Chinese market.

Those imported games that are already in China must be examined before September 1, or the game operators will be punished, it said.

The announcement follows the banning of the Swedish-made computer game "Hearts of Iron", which infuriated authorities when it showed Manchuria, Tibet and Xinjiang as independent nations, and included Taiwan as a part of Japan.

"All these severely distort historical facts and violate China's gaming and Internet service regulations," the ministry said. "The game should be immediately prohibited."

In March, another online game, "Project IGI2: Covert Strike", irked officials, who claimed it intentionally blackened China and the Chinese army's image.

The game, created by the Norway-based Innerloop Studios AS and published by the British-based Codemasters, features a freelance mercenary stealing intelligence and conducting sabotage in China.

Tuo Zuhai, an official with the ministry, said the main problem was that the contents of these games always related to sex, violence, gambling and superstition.

He added that more than 80 per cent of online games being used in China were foreign and had not been checked by the authorities for content, which could adversely affect young people's mental health.

"The Ministry of Culture will import some foreign online games whose contents accord with Chinese national conditions and bring positive effects to young people's mentality," Mr Tuo added.

With the popularity of the internet, computer games have become a booming industry in China, with analysts predicting enormous growth with rising demand and the improvement of the broadband network and domestic game developers.

Agence France-Presse

This report appears on australianIT.com.au.