Short Term Policy Brief 107

China’s Visa Policy

September 2014

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1. China's Visa Policy

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is a sovereign state located in Northeast Asia, referred to hereafter as China. This paper will discuss China’s visa policy.

The Chinese Constitution specifies that the state has the power to establish special administrative regions (SARs), local administrative areas directly under the Central Government, when necessary. Currently, China consists of 23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities directly under the Central Government and 2 SARs (Hong Kong and Macao). In this paper, China includes all its latter components, unless specified otherwise. The term mainland China, however, generally excludes SARs. Although not geographically accurate, in accordance with statute, the term “mainland” means any part of China other than the current SARs.

1.1. China’s policy-making on visa issues and the actors involved

The main authority responsible for implementing of China’s diplomatic principles, policies, and related laws and regulations is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA).

The following organisations process visa applications by foreign citizens for entry into and transit through China: Chinese embassies, Consulates General, the Office of the Commissioner of the MoFA in the Hong Kong and Macao SARs, and other resident organisations abroad authorised by the MoFA.

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1 The information in this section is from http://www.visaforchina.com.au/BNE_EN/generalinformation/visaknowledge/269644.shtml
2 See http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-02/19/content_815536.htm
3 Mainland Judgements (Reciprocal Enforcement) Bill
4 See http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng
The MoFA and authorised local foreign affairs offices issue, alter, and extend diplomatic and service visas and issue residence permits to holders of this type of visa.

The Ministry of Public Security and authorised local public security bureaus inspect the entry and exit of foreigners, issue of visas at ports of entry, extend and alter ordinary visas, and issue of residence permits to holders of ordinary visas already in China.

The Immigration Department of the Government of the Hong Kong SAR and the Public Security Police Force of the Government of Macao SAR are responsible for matters relating to foreigners’ entry into and exit from their respective SAR.

1.2. Types of short-stay visas and conditions of entry

Exchanges, visits, study tours and other activities (F): Issued to those who are invited to China for:

Commerce & Trade (M): Issued to those who are invited to China for this purpose;

Tourist (L): Issued to those who are going to travel to China for this purpose;

Family reunion, foster care or visiting relatives with permanent residence in China (Q1): Issued family members of Chinese citizens or foreigners with Chinese permanent residence who intend to enter China for a long-term family reunion, or to those who intend to enter China for the purpose of foster care (intended stay exceeding 180 days);
(Q2): Issued to those who intend to visit relatives who are Chinese citizens residing in China or foreigners with permanent residence in China for no more than 180 days;

Visiting relatives working or studying in China or other private affairs (S1): Issued to relatives of foreigners working or studying in China for the purpose of long-term visit, or to those who intend to visit China for other private reasons (intended stay exceeding 180 days);
(S2): Issued to those wishing to visit family members who are foreigners working or studying
in China, or to those who intend to enter China for other private reasons for no more than 180 days;

**Employment or Commercial performances (Z):** Issued to those taking up a post or employment, or giving commercial performances in China;

**Transit (G):** Issued to those intending to transit China en route to a third country (or region);

**As a crew member or a motor vehicle driver (C):** Issued to foreign crew members of aircrafts, trains, ships, motor vehicle drivers engaged in cross-border transport activities, and also to accompanying family members of the above-mentioned ships’ crew members;

**Student:**
(X1): Issued to those intending to study in China for more than 180 days;
(X2): Issued to those intending to study in China for more than 180 days;

**Introduced talent (R):** Issued to those who have high-level qualified talents or whose skills are urgently needed in China;

**Journalist:**
(J1): Issued to resident foreign journalists/media staff of foreign news organizations stationed in China more than 180 days;
(J2): Issued to foreign journalists/media staff on temporary news coverage missions staying no more than 180 days.

1.3. **Entry into China without a visa**

According to bilateral agreements, citizens of some countries holding appropriate passports may enter China without a visa.

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5 See Appendix 2 - List of Agreements on Mutual Visa Exemption between the P.R. China and Foreign Countries
Citizens of Singapore, Brunei, and Japan holding ordinary passports may enter China without a visa through authorised ports of entry provided that they come for tourism, family visits, business or transit, and intend to stay in China for no more than 15 days. The following personnel of the above-mentioned countries must apply for a visa in advance if they hold ordinary passports, intend to stay in China more than 15 days, and travel to China for tourism, family visit or business, stay, employment, permanent residence, or on a news reporting mission. Those who hold Japanese diplomatic and service passports of Singapore and Brunei can can stay no more than 30 days without a visa.

Foreigners holding ordinary passports of countries that have diplomatic relations with China, who intend to tour Hong Kong or Macao, or participate in group tours of no more than 6 days organised by official travel services to the Zhu Jiang (Pearl River) Delta Area do not need to apply for a visa. The Zhu Jiang Delta Area refers to the administrative area of: Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen, Zhaoqing, and Huizhou. In order to go on a tour to Shantou, the above-mentioned group is to stay within the administrative area of Shantou and leave China from that area.

Foreigners with confirmed tickets on international flights transiting directly through China and staying for no more than 24 hours within the airport do not need to apply for a transit visa. Anyone exiting the airport temporarily should obtain permission from immigration authorities.

Citizens of the following 45 countries with valid international travel documents and confirmed air tickets for a connecting flight to a third country can apply for a 72-hour transit visa exemption at ports of entry in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherland, Poland, Portugal, Slovak, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Russia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Singapore, Brunei, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar.

Citizens holding passports of the following 21 countries who are on a group tour (minimum

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*For more information please see [http://www.mps.gov.cn/n16/n84147/n84196/3912430.html](http://www.mps.gov.cn/n16/n84147/n84196/3912430.html)*
five persons) to Hainan Province *(staying up to 15 days)* organised international travel services approved by the National Tourism Administration of China and registered in Hainan Province, do not need to apply for a visa: Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, France, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan.

Citizens holding passports of the following 3 countries who are on a group tour (minimum two persons) to Hainan Province *(staying no more than 21 days)* organised by the international travel services approved by the National Tourism Administration of China and registered in Hainan Province, do not need to apply for a visa: Republic of Korea, Germany and Russia.

Foreigners holding a valid Foreigner’s Permanent Residence Card of the PRC, Residence Permit for Foreigners in China and foreigners holding an APEC Business Travel Card may enter China without a visa.

2. Visa Conditions and Procedures for Citizens of China

There are certain visa conditions and procedures for Chinese citizens applying for short-stay visas to key non-Schengen states.

While the embassies and consulates of Ireland, the US, Japan, South Korea, and Russia have their own visa centres, the embassies of the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand work in cooperation with VFS Global, an outsourcing and technology service that manages visa and passport administrative tasks\(^7\).

All have similar requirements for application: original passport, passport-sized photograph(s) that meet(s) the requirements of the relevant embassy or VFS, relevant fee, and supporting documents.

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\(^7\) See [http://www.vfsglobal.com/about_us/company_profile.asp](http://www.vfsglobal.com/about_us/company_profile.asp)
UK

The applicant must be outside the UK, the Channel Islands, or the Isle of Man to apply for a visa. The applicant will need to register for an account, follow the application guidelines and book an appointment at the VFS visa application center.

- A Chinese citizen can apply online for a UK visa to visit, work, study or join a family member or partner (e.g., spouse) already resident in the UK. A trial UK visa service is currently available only for citizens applying for a general, child or business visitor visa from Mainland China and who can visit specific visa application centres throughout China.³

- There are currently 3 types of short-stay visas to the UK: (1) General Visitor Visa, (2) Child Visitor Visa and (3) Business Visitor Visa. These visas allow staying in the UK for up to 6 months; and to study in the country for up to 30 days, as long as this is not the main purpose of the visit. The visas do not allow the applicant to take up work (paid or unpaid), to live in the UK for long periods of time through frequent visits, marry or register a civil partnership, or to obtain private medical treatment or public funds.

IE

All visa applications should be completed online, with a printed version taken to the relevant Consulate/Visa Office in China. The applicant is required to be able to support and accommodate him/herself without working in Ireland. Support and accommodation may be provided by relatives or friends in Ireland, but not from public funds. Visa applications are handled at the Beijing Visa Office and the Shanghai Consulate General.

- Ireland offers the following types of short-term visas: Tourist, Visit (by family of friend of non EEA/Irish National or family member of Irish citizen), Business, Conference, ADS Tourist Visa, and Family Member of EU/EEA citizen.

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³ All information provided in this section is from the official British Embassy in Beijing website. See https://www.gov.uk/general-visit-visa
⁹ Specific visa application centres include: Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Jinan, Nanjing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Shenzhen, Wuhan.
³⁰ All information provided in this section is from the official Embassy of Ireland in China website. Please see http://www.embassyofireland.cn
• China is one of 16 countries that can benefit from the Irish Short-stay Visa Waiver Programme. Persons who have entered the UK on foot of a UK ‘C’ General visa and have been granted leave to remain in the UK for *up to 180 days* may travel to Ireland, within the time remaining in the UK, without obtaining an Irish visa; and be granted permission to remain in Ireland *up to a maximum of 90 days* or the time left to remain in the UK, whichever is shorter. Each distinct period of leave to remain in the UK requires a prior legal entry into the UK before travel to Ireland, no matter what the duration of the UK visa.

**US**[^11]

The US offers the *following short-stay visas* for citizens of the China: Business and Tourism (B1/B2), Study in the U.S. (F.M.), Exchange Visitors (J), U.S. government-sponsored exchange visitors, and Media and Journalists. It offers a range of non-immigrant visas for Chinese citizens, who can select a visa type on the US Embassy China website, complete the online application form, schedule an appointment through the appointment centre,[^12] pay the fee and pick up the passport at a local CITIC Bank. Most applicants will have to go to the embassy for an interview.

**Canada**[^13]

Canada offers one type of *short-term visa*, the temporary resident visa, divided into the following categories: visitor visas, study and work permit.

VFS maintains *Canada Visa Application Centres* (CVAC) in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing and provides only the following services: collecting visa applications, returning of passports to applicants and scheduling interviews on behalf of the Canadian visa office.

[^11]: All information provided in this section is from the official US Embassy in Beijing website. Please see [http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/niv_howtoapply.html](http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/niv_howtoapply.html)

[^12]: One can make an appointment on the following website: [http://ustraveldocs.com/](http://ustraveldocs.com/)

[^13]: All information provided in this section is from [http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/china-chine/](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/china-chine/)
All applicants are then assessed in accordance with Canada’s immigration visa rules and guidelines. The decision is made solely by immigration officers of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

An agreement exists between Canada and China on Approved Destination Status (ADS). Consequently, Canada may be promoted in China as a tourist destination. ADS also permits the organisation of group travel from China.

**Australia**

Australia offers the following types of short-stay visas to Chinese citizens: temporary work (short stay activity) visa (subclass 400), visitor visa (subclass 600), medical treatment visa (subclass 602) and transit visa (subclass 771).

The VFS-operated Australian Visa Application Centers (AVAC) are located in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. They collect visa application documents, application fees, track online visa applications, and return passports to applicants. The AVAC work in accordance with the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP). As in the case of Canada, AVAC does not make decisions. Applications will be assessed by the Visa Office in accordance with Australian immigration legislation and policy.

Applicants must submit an application form for the relevant visa subclass. Application forms for persons aged under 18 years must be signed by a parent or legal guardian, submitted in person, or mailed to the relevant AVAC. Any documents that are not in English must be accompanied by a certified translation, for certain visa types.

**New Zealand**

New Zealand offers the following short-stay visas: visitor, work, student, transit, group and group transit visas. New Zealand has a Working Holiday scheme eligible for 1,000 Chinese citizens per year. To enter New Zealand for one year the applicants must meet certain conditions.

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15 All information provided in this section is from the official website of the New Zealand Embassy in Beijing. Please see [http://www.nzembassy.com/china/going-to-nz/working-in-nz/china-working-holiday-scheme](http://www.nzembassy.com/china/going-to-nz/working-in-nz/china-working-holiday-scheme)
requirements concerning health, character, education and English language ability. Applications are made online through the Immigration New Zealand website.

The New Zealand Visa Application Centres are located in Guangzhou, Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. They are authorised by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) to receive applications for temporary entry and residence class visas. The Centres in provide facilitation services only, while immigration officers at the INZ branches in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong decide the outcome of the application.

Japan

Japan offers the following short-stay visas: Working Holiday Visa, Temporary Visitor Visa, Transit Visa and Employment or Working Visa. If the purpose of travel is tourism, the applicant can apply for a short-stay visa for up to 15 days through a travel agency in China. The tour agencies that manage tourism in Japan are listed on the websites of the Japanese Embassy and Consulates in China.

Group tourism is sponsored by an accredited travel agency in China which applies for the visas on behalf of an entire group. In Japan, the group must be accompanied by an escort at all times. While an escort is not required for individual tourists, individuals must submit a travel schedule and ask a travel agency in China to apply for a visa based on documents submitted.

If certain requirements are met, multiple entry visas (valid for 3 years) can be issued to individuals visiting Okinawa and the Tohoku area (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima). The Okinawa and Tohoku area visas are separate visas for travel that must not exceed 90 days. Similar to individual tourists, the application should be made through an accredited travel agency in China.

The Japanese Embassy/Consulates in China are as follows: the Embassy of Japan in Beijing, Consular Office in Dalian and Consulate-General in Chongqing, Guangzhou, Hong-Kong, Qingdao, Shanghai and Shenyang.

16 All information provided in this section is from http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/essential/visa.html and the official Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan website: http://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/visa/
South Korea\textsuperscript{17}

Applicants are required to have a valid passport and a Korean visa. However, visa-free entry for a limited time under certain conditions following the *Citizens of the Countries under the Visa Exemption Agreement* is permitted. Chinese diplomats intending to stay in South Korea under 30 days fall under the Visa Exemption Agreement.

In order to promote the transit tourism industry through a vitalisation of the Transit Tourism Program, the Government of the Republic of Korea has established a no-visa entry policy for foreigners in transit. The policy allows foreigners who transit through the Incheon International Airport to a third country or through the Incheon International Airport, Gimhae International Airport, Yangyang International Airport, Cheongju International Airport or Muan International Airport to Jeju Island to enter Korea without a visa. A Chinese citizen who holds an entry visa for, and is bound for a specified list of European countries\textsuperscript{18} via Korea or returns to China via Korea departing from the list of European countries can benefit from the Transit Tourism Programme.

There is also a no-visa entry for Chinese Group Tourists in Transit (72 hours) in Jeju Island departing from China and arriving at the Incheon International Airport, Gimhae International Airport, Yangyang International Airport, Cheongju International Airport or Muan International Airport, who intends to stay in the following destinations for tourists: Incheon, Gimhae, Yangyang or Muan. The individual has to hold a passport issued by the People’s Republic of China, must join a Chinese group tourist program hosted by Korean or Chinese travel agents recognised by the Korea-China memorandum. Other rules dictate which airport the individual needs to depart from, depending on what his/her port of entry was. Status of Stay and Period: Tourism & Transit (B-2) visa, 15 days.

\textsuperscript{17} All information provided in this section is from http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/GK/GK_EN_2_1_1.jsp and http://www.immigration.go.kr/HP/IMM80/index.do

\textsuperscript{18} The specific list of countries include: Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Romania, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Malta, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Iceland, Ireland, Estonia, the United Kingdom, Austria, Italy, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Portugal, Poland, France, Finland, Hungary

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Russia

Russia offers the following short-stay visas to Chinese citizens: business visa, worker visa, student visa, tourist visa, private visa and transit visa. An applicant is required to submit their visa applications and supporting documents directly to the Embassy or Consulate of the Russian Federation. Applicants traveling to Russia do not need to provide a medical insurance or written guarantee for all medical expenses by the receiving party. However, private and worker visa applicants will need to provide medical certificates and AIDS testing reports if entering for more than 90 days. Children younger than 18 have to provide the notarised permission by both parents. All applicants, except for tourist visa and transit visa applicants, will need to submit the Russian Immigration Authority’s Invitation with their application. Business visa and student visa applicants may provide a Foreign Ministry Invitation instead. Tourist visa applicants will only need to provide a Foreign Tourist Tour Confirmation and voucher issued by inbound Russian travel agency with their application and passport. Transit visa applicants will also need to provide a visa issued by the third country and transportation ticket for the whole route. Chinese citizens will also need to provide a copy of their identification cards.

Applicants must complete and print an electronic version of their Russian visa application form. Application and supporting documents must be submitted to the Consulate General of the Russian Federation in Shanghai. Applicants are required to fill in a one-sided visa application form in English or in Russian.

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19 The information provided in this section is from the official Consulate General of the Russian Federation in Shanghai and Russian Embassy in China websites. Please see http://www.rusconshanghai.org.cn and http://www.russia.org.cn/eng/

20 See https://www.visa.kdmid.ru