



Marketing Research

Global Esports Event Threat Assessment: League of Legends World Championship 2025

August 2025

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Social Threats	3
Cyber Threats	3
Government Threats	4
Background	4
Social Threats	4
Koreaphobia	4
Homophobia	5
US-China relations	6
Cyber Threats	6
Risks From Use of Chinese Mobile Applications	6
Risks from Connecting to Chinese Telecommunications Infrastructure	6
Blocked Websites	7
Risk of Device Screening or Imaging	7
Chinese Government Threat to Travelers	7
Risks Related to Entry and Exit	7
Risk of Surveillance and Monitoring	8
Risk of Interrogation, Detention, or Arrest	8
Large Crowd Incidents	8
Social Media Trends	9
How Can Nisos Help?	10

All trademarks, logos and brand names are the property of their respective owners. All company, product and service names used in this material are for identification purposes only.

Executive Summary

Riot Games' League of Legends World Championship became the most watched esports event with a recorded 6.86 million peak viewers in 2024.¹ High-profile events like the League of Legends (LoL) World Championship, pose possible risks to attendees, participants, and event-affiliated personnel from a variety of threat actors with a range of motivations. Nisos monitored the threat landscape ahead of the event to stay abreast of developments among cybercriminals, state-sponsored threat actors, and event-related physical security risks. We regularly work in close partnership with corporate security, cyber threat intelligence, and trust and safety teams leading up to and during high-profile events and heightened periods of risk, providing clients with timely and actionable updates to ensure they are aware of and able to defend against cyber, physical and reputational threats.

With the LoL World Championship kicking off in October in venues across three cities in China, we identified several risks, outlined below, which our analysts are tracking for players, fans, and attendees traveling to the event.

Social Threats

Travelers to China from certain nations, backgrounds, and with certain collective identities will likely face increased risk of physical and verbal harassment by Chinese officials and LoL fans.

- South Korean nationals and individuals of Korean descent may face an increased chance of physical and verbal harassment when attending or participating in the LoL World Championship in China. While typically associated with soccer, Koreaphobia can also lead to nationalistic undertones and anti-Korean sentiments in esports in China.
- While LGBTIQ+ individuals may not face an increased chance of physical and verbal harassment from the general public in China, they may experience governmental censorship and pressure to accept Chinese cultural norms.
- US nationals and individuals who reside in the United States may experience increased scrutiny from government officials. Possible trade tensions as well as the US Department of Defense's decision to add Tencent to the military blacklist possibly increase the risk for US travelers to China.

Cyber Threats

Travelers to China will almost certainly face Chinese government-related cyber threats.

- Mobile devices with Chinese mobile payment or transportation applications have built-in features that allow the Chinese government to monitor and censor messages.
- All means of communication are likely monitored in China.

¹<https://www.statista.com/statistics/507491/esports-tournaments-by-number-viewers-global>

- Chinese police, border guards, and other security officials have the authority to review the content stored on travelers' electronic devices.

Government Threats

The Chinese government will almost certainly collect detailed personal information on all visitors to China, which may lead to questioning and detention.

- The Chinese government begins collecting extensively on travelers before they enter the country and almost certainly conducts continuous monitoring of individuals of interest once they arrive, including questioning the traveler at border crossings.
- Travelers should have no expectation of privacy in public or private locations.
- China's detention of foreign businesspeople has increased over the past two years, likely in response to increased geopolitical tensions.

Background

League of Legends, also called LoL, belongs to the free playable genre of Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA). League of Legends is a real-time strategy game, in which two teams of five players compete against each other on a map designed like an arena and try to take each other's base. Originally, the prize pool was \$100,000 for players in Sweden in 2011. It grew to \$4.5 million in China in 2017. The number of spectators also continues to grow. Over 80,000 spectators filled an entire soccer stadium in China where SK Telecom T1 and Samsung Galaxy fought for the 2017 title, and 40 million viewers also followed the event via live stream.² This year's Worlds will be hosted across three Chinese cities. Play-Ins and the Swiss Stage will commence in Beijing, with the Quarterfinals and Semifinals in Shanghai, culminating in a grand final in Chengdu.³

Social Threats

Koreaphobia

South Korean nationals and individuals of Korean descent may face an increased chance of physical and verbal harassment when attending or participating in the LoL World Championship in China. China has a documented history of Koreaphobia during sporting and esports events.

In the world of professional League of Legends, South Korea has the most active professional players (1,038 as of February 2025), who earned a total of \$39 million since 2010. This is almost double that of the next place country, China.⁴ The dominance of South Korean players over Chinese players in the LoL esports has spurred Koreaphobia (恐韩症) among Chinese fans and members of the esports community, leading to nationalistic undertones and anti-Korean sentiments. Stemming from soccer,

²[https://www.owayo\[.\]com/magazine/esports-tournaments-popular-us.htm?srsId=AfmBOop573qjl-G7BOJyU2lNjdtMrMbTrmzye10Z1cMJP4Cl-7tdBzHj](https://www.owayo[.]com/magazine/esports-tournaments-popular-us.htm?srsId=AfmBOop573qjl-G7BOJyU2lNjdtMrMbTrmzye10Z1cMJP4Cl-7tdBzHj)

³[https://lolesports\[.\]com/en-SG/news/lol-esports-in-2025](https://lolesports[.]com/en-SG/news/lol-esports-in-2025)

⁴[https://blix\[.\]gg/news/these-countries-are-taking-over-league-of-legends-whos-winning-big](https://blix[.]gg/news/these-countries-are-taking-over-league-of-legends-whos-winning-big)

the term Koreaphobia emerged during China's 32 year loss record against South Korea, which lasted until 2010, but has persisted since.⁵ In 2023, Chinese hooligans attacked South Korean soccer fans during a World Cup qualifying match between the two countries in China, which South Korea won.⁶

While the LoL World Championship is a competition between individual teams, Chinese fans commonly track how different Chinese teams perform against Korean teams. Several teams that perform especially well against Korean teams are dubbed “抗韩先锋” (kang han xian feng), which means “anti-Korean frontline.”⁷ Some fans have used crude and racist terms to describe teams with Korean “imports” in previous years when importing players was less common.⁸

While South Korea typically has a large number of Korean teams taking part in the LoL World Championships, Korean players frequently play on non-Korean teams. According to news reporting, at the 2023 LoL World Championship, 36 of the remaining 91 registered players across 16 teams were Korean.⁹

Recent social media discussions about Koreaphobia have surfaced around a competitive, first-person shooter video game, Valorant, in which Chinese teams have lost to Korean teams.¹⁰

Homophobia

While LGBTIQ+ individuals may not face an increased chance of physical and verbal harassment from the general public while in China, they may experience governmental censorship and pressure to conform to Chinese cultural norms. While the general Chinese public appears to allow for a more inclusive society, there are no laws explicitly providing protections against discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation.¹¹ Chinese authorities adhere to the principle of “don't support, don't encourage, don't condemn.”¹²

China's public opinion of LGBTIQ+ people appears to have shifted in recent years to allow for a more inclusive society. A 2024 Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law study found that 53% of respondents agreed that LGBTIQ+ people should be accepted by Chinese society. Researchers surveyed the mainland Chinese public about their familiarity with and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people. The study also found that 68% agreed and a further 30% somewhat agreed that LGBTIQ+ students should be protected from bullying and violence in schools.¹³

⁵[https://www.chinanews\[.\]com.cn/ty/ty-gnzq/news/2010/02-10/2120158.shtml](https://www.chinanews[.]com.cn/ty/ty-gnzq/news/2010/02-10/2120158.shtml)

⁶[https://www.thesun.co\[.\]uk/sport/24810474/tottenham-fans-attacked-hooligans-china-south-korea-son/](https://www.thesun.co[.]uk/sport/24810474/tottenham-fans-attacked-hooligans-china-south-korea-son/)

⁷[https://yris.yira\[.\]org/column/league-of-legends-esports-and-chinese-nationalism/](https://yris.yira[.]org/column/league-of-legends-esports-and-chinese-nationalism/)

⁸[https://www.techinasia\[.\]com/anti-korean-sentiment-in-china-league-of-legends-fans-call-world-elite-crossbred-dog-team](https://www.techinasia[.]com/anti-korean-sentiment-in-china-league-of-legends-fans-call-world-elite-crossbred-dog-team)

⁹[https://koreajoongangdaily.joins\[.\]com/news/2023-10-19/sports/esports/Worlds-is-a-very-Korean-affair-with-36-of-91-players-on-home-turf/1893067](https://koreajoongangdaily.joins[.]com/news/2023-10-19/sports/esports/Worlds-is-a-very-Korean-affair-with-36-of-91-players-on-home-turf/1893067)

¹⁰[https://bbs.hupu\[.\]com/633662685.html](https://bbs.hupu[.]com/633662685.html)

¹¹[https://www.theguardian\[.\]com/global-development/2024/jan/15/its-difficult-to-survive-chinas-lgbtq-advocate-s-face-jail-and-forced-confession](https://www.theguardian[.]com/global-development/2024/jan/15/its-difficult-to-survive-chinas-lgbtq-advocate-s-face-jail-and-forced-confession)

¹²[https://www.academia\[.\]edu/92512128/Feminists_Against_Same_Sex_Marriage_Queer_Counterpublics_in_a_Contentested_Digital_Space](https://www.academia[.]edu/92512128/Feminists_Against_Same_Sex_Marriage_Queer_Counterpublics_in_a_Contentested_Digital_Space)

¹³[https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla\[.\]edu/press/china-attitudes-press-release/](https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla[.]edu/press/china-attitudes-press-release/)

The Chinese government, conversely, has cracked down LGBTQ+ groups and events since 2016. Same-sex marriage and adoption are not allowed and LGBTQ+ people are not legally protected against discrimination.¹⁴ Chinese authorities banned “abnormal sexual behaviors” from the media in 2016.¹⁵ Dozens of accounts dealing with LGBTQ+ topics on the popular Chinese messaging app WeChat were reportedly deleted in 2021. Similarly, China’s largest Pride event was suspended as of 2021.¹⁶ However, a public outcry in China forced its most popular social media network Sina Weibo to reverse a decision to ban online gay content a few days after the content was banned.¹⁷

US-China relations

US nationals and individuals who reside in the United States may experience increased scrutiny by government officials and individuals involved in the LoL World Championship. Possible trade tensions as well as the US Department of Defense’s decision to add Tencent to the military blacklist possibly increase the risk for US travelers to China.

In January 2025, the US Department of Defense added Tencent Holdings Limited to its list of Chinese military companies operating in the United States.¹⁸ While this designation did not include sanctions against the company, it serves as a warning to US companies not to invest.¹⁹ In 2011, Tencent went from being Riot Games’ publishing partner in China to its majority stakeholder after paying \$400 million for a 93% stake in the League of Legends developer.²⁰

Cyber Threats

Risks From Use of Chinese Mobile Applications

Travelers to China will almost certainly need to use a mobile device with Chinese mobile payment or transportation applications, because China’s merchants almost exclusively use cashless transactions. While these applications are nearly ubiquitous in China and provide convenience, they have built-in features that allow the Chinese government to monitor and censor messages, access the device’s address book and photos, track the user’s location, and activate the microphone or camera, potentially exposing personal, confidential, or proprietary information.²¹

Risks from Connecting to Chinese Telecommunications Infrastructure

All means of communication, including telephones, mobile phones, faxes, emails, and text messages, are likely monitored in China. The Chinese government has publicly declared that it regularly monitors private email and internet browsing through cooperation with the limited number of internet service

¹⁴<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-beijing-lgbt-center-rcna85528>

¹⁵<https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/09/china/china-pride-month-lgbt-weibo-intl-mic-hnk>

¹⁶<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-65806846>

¹⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkLFHsmHJOg>

¹⁸<https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2025-00070.pdf>

¹⁹<https://www.pcgamer.com/games/tencent-has-been-designated-a-chinese-military-company-by-the-us-department-of-defense-which-the-conglomerate-calls-a-misunderstanding/>

²⁰<https://www.pcgamer.com/every-game-company-that-tencent-has-invested-in/>

²¹<https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/77b1dc96-82d6-497f-9836-1c4f67baa024>

providers (ISPs) in China, and the government has similar access to wireless infrastructure in the country.²²

Blocked Websites

Various popular Western social media platforms and websites are banned in China, such as ChatGPT, Facebook, Google, Twitch, and Instagram. Some Google services, however, such as Google Translate, and Google Maps, are available for use in China.²³ Websites are censored in China at the behest of the government and the ruling Communist Party. Any websites or apps perceived to undermine Party rule, or have the potential to, are typically blocked.²⁴ During periods of political tension, authorities could block news reporting, access to text-messaging, the internet, and international telephone lines.²⁵ Authorities will likely unblock Twitch and YouTube for streaming purposes during the tournament.²⁶

Risk of Device Screening or Imaging

Chinese police, border guards, and other security officials have the authority to review the content stored on travelers' electronic devices. Border officials may review the content stored or consulted on electronic devices, particularly at border crossings between mainland China and Hong Kong.²⁷ Players should refrain from publishing or supporting political statements critical of China or Chinese authorities online before traveling and while visiting China. Authorities could view this content as illegal, increasing the risk of suspension from the tournament or a ban.^{28 29 30} People can also face harsh punishment for publicly speaking about sensitive topics. Some streamers told gaming outlet Aftermath that such directives from companies were not unusual, including requests to not mention COVID-19.³¹ Traveling around sensitive areas could attract more attention from authorities including when taking photos or engaging with political groups, charities, and ethnic minority groups.³² Taiwanese businessman Morrison Lee spent almost four years in jail and under an exit ban in China. Authorities detained Lee because he had postcards deemed sensitive and a few publicly taken shots of military vehicles on his phone.³³

Chinese Government Threat to Travelers

Risks Related to Entry and Exit

The Chinese government begins extensive collection on travelers before they enter the country and almost certainly conducts continuous monitoring of individuals of interest once they arrive, including

²²<https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/china-business-travel>

²³<https://l1-beijing.com/websites-banned-in-china>

²⁴<https://www.comparitech.com/privacy-security-tools/blockedinchina>

²⁵<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/safety-and-security>

²⁶<https://esports.gg/news/league-of-legends/league-of-legends-worlds-2025-preview>

²⁷<https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/china>

²⁸<https://www.vox.com/2019/10/8/20904433/blizzard-hong-kong-hearthstone-blitzchung>

²⁹<https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/08/tech/hearthstone-hong-kong-intl-hnk-scli>

³⁰<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/safety-and-security>

³¹<https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/28/black-myth-wukong-game-controversy-china-streamers#:~:text=It%20wasn't%20immediately%20clear,requests%20to%20not%20mention%20Covid.>

³²<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/safety-and-security>

³³<https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/be-careful-taking-photos-china-or-you-may-end-secret-jail>

questioning the traveler at border crossings. China has also used exit bans to compel travelers to provide information or influence to assist the Chinese government. US citizens might only become aware of an exit ban when departing the country and not have legal recourse.³⁴ Individuals who have previously made public statements criticizing the Chinese government or worked for the US government, especially departments dealing with defense or intelligence, will almost certainly experience additional scrutiny.³⁵

Risk of Surveillance and Monitoring

Travelers should have no expectation of privacy in public or private locations and be aware that Chinese authorities may monitor any conversations.^{36 37} China possesses a sophisticated surveillance system based on a vast array of cameras and sensors, aided by facial and voice recognition software and artificial intelligence.³⁸

Risk of Interrogation, Detention, or Arrest

China's detention of foreign businesspeople has increased over the past two years, likely in response to increased geopolitical tensions. Although the recent detentions have involved foreigners living and working in Mainland China or Hong Kong, investigators assess that any foreigner in China, including travelers, could be subject to the same scrutiny and accusations. Chinese officials have interrogated foreigners in China, including businesspeople, former foreign government personnel, academics, relatives of Chinese citizens involved in legal disputes, and journalists for alleged violations of Chinese national security laws.³⁹ Additionally, security personnel have detained and deported US citizens for sending private electronic messages critical of the Chinese government.⁴⁰

Large Crowd Incidents

Large crowds at the LoL World Championship will possibly be a target for violence. In November 2024, three large-scale attacks happened in China within the span of a week: a driver drove into a crowd at a Chinese sports center, a former student attacked members of a vocational school, and a driver hit people with a vehicle near an elementary school.^{41 42 43} Chinese police stated that in two of the incidents perpetrators were unhappy with their financial situations.⁴⁴ Videos and news reports from the incidents quickly disappeared, preventing victims and their loved ones from describing their experiences and

³⁴<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/china-travel-advisory.html>

³⁵<https://archive.ph/20230929232511/https://www.wsj.com/world/the-new-rules-for-business-travel-to-china-f476f7b7#selection-4655.193-4659.100>

³⁶<https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/77b1dc96-82d6-497f-9836-1c4f67baa024>

³⁷<https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/china>

³⁸<https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/08/china-is-exporting-surveillance-tech-like-facial-recognition-globally.html>

³⁹<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/china-travel-advisory.html>

⁴⁰<https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/77b1dc96-82d6-497f-9836-1c4f67baa024>

⁴¹<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/11/12/china-car-ramming-crowd-zhuhai-dead>

⁴²<https://web.archive.org/web/20241120135433/https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/16/world/asia/wuxi-china-stabbing.html>

⁴³<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/19/world/asia/china-school-car-ramming.html>

⁴⁴<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/19/world/asia/china-school-car-ramming.html>

deleting eyewitness and media accounts countering official statements.⁴⁵ In such situations, the Chinese government has also minimized public showings of grief and promoted official accounts and assurances.⁴⁶

Social Media Trends

Discussion on mainstream and alternative social media platforms can serve as a way to identify community sentiment and activity, which can help identify risks for players, fans and teams attending LOL events. Nisos examined mentions of the LoL World Championship between 1 April 2025 and 22 July 2025, which yielded more than 5,000 results on popular social media platforms. Much of the discussion during this timeframe was either positive or neutral in sentiment, focusing on the death of a retired League of Legends player. A review of previous LOL events however revealed threats to LOL teams and player's girlfriends.^{47 48 49 50 51 52}



Graphic 1: X post honoring Shushei.⁵³

⁴⁵<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/19/world/asia/china-school-car-ramming.html>

⁴⁶<https://web.archive.org/web/20241120135433/https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/16/world/asia/wuxi-china-stabbing.html>

⁴⁷<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/t1-warns-fans-of-threats-ahead-of-league-of-legends-worlds-2023-grand-finals-084915903.html>

⁴⁸<https://www.dexerto.com/league-of-legends/t1-taking-legal-action-over-death-threats-to-lol-team-1414867/>

⁴⁹<https://x.com/T1LoL/status/1725099491727225163>

⁵⁰<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/t1-warns-fans-of-threats-ahead-of-league-of-legends-worlds-2023-grand-finals-084915903.html>

⁵¹<https://mein-mmo.de/en/wife-of-a-german-lol-pro-says-she-is-receiving-death-threats-cannot-work-anymore,759178>

⁵²<https://mein-mmo.de/en/lol-fans-sent-death-threats-to-a-players-girlfriend-because-of-worlds,738998/>

⁵³<https://x.com/FNATIC/status/1919460815209468287>

How Can Nisos Help?

Nisos offers pre-event threat landscape risk assessments and open-source intelligence monitoring and analysis (OMA), providing near real-time intelligence and insights before and during high-profile events. Dynamic threat environments like the League of Legends World Championship in China pose challenges to security teams monitoring events occurring on the ground and across the surface, deep, and dark web.