

Bringing  
talent in.

**Asomerit**

# China Work Visa & Work Permit.

*Service Guide*

*2026 edition · End-to-end process from job offer to residence permit, for foreign-invested employers in mainland China.*

# Table of contents

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<b>01</b>	About this guide	3
<b>02</b>	How the system works — three layers	4
<b>03</b>	Eligibility & categories at a glance	5
<b>04</b>	Layer 1 — Foreigner's Work Permit Notice	6
<b>05</b>	Layer 2 — Z Visa application	8
<b>06</b>	Z Visa document checklist by applicant type	9
<b>07</b>	Layer 3 — Arrival, work permit card & residence permit	11
<b>08</b>	Salary floors in tier-1 cities	13
<b>09</b>	Costs & typical fees	14
<b>10</b>	Most common rejection causes	15
<b>11</b>	Renewal, dependents & exit	16
<b>12</b>	Conclusion	17
<b>13</b>	Contact	18

# Who this is for, what's inside.

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This guide is written for HR managers, founders, and operations leads at foreign-invested companies who need to bring overseas talent into mainland China. It walks through the full process — from issuing a job offer in your home country to handing your new hire a Residence Permit at the local police station in Beijing or Shanghai.

The Chinese work-permit system has three sequential layers, three different government authorities, and at least nine separate documents that have to line up consistently across them. Most failed applications we see are not about insufficient credentials — they are about document inconsistencies that could have been caught before submission. This guide is structured to help you catch them.

If you have not yet scored your candidate under China's foreign work permit classification system, start with our Work Permit Eligibility Self-Check (a free interactive tool at [asomerit.com/tools](https://asomerit.com/tools)). That tool indicates which Category — A, B, or C — your candidate is likely to fall into. This guide covers the process once that question is answered.

## COMPANION RESOURCES

**Work Permit Eligibility Self-Check.** Score your candidate against the official SAFEA points table. [asomerit.com/tools](https://asomerit.com/tools)

**WFOE Registration White Paper.** If you don't yet have a PRC entity to sponsor the visa. [asomerit.com/downloads](https://asomerit.com/downloads)

**Compliance Calendar.** Tax and reporting deadlines once the hire is on payroll. [asomerit.com/downloads](https://asomerit.com/downloads)

# Three layers, three authorities.

Foreign employment in China is governed by three sequential approvals, each administered by a different authority. You cannot start layer two until layer one is complete, and the documents from each layer flow forward into the next. Get one wrong and the whole stack has to be re-issued.

01

FILED IN CHINA

## Foreigner's Work Permit Notice

The Chinese employer files through the foreign work permit system (legacy SAFEA online portal). The local foreign work administration authority verifies the employer, the role and the candidate credentials, then issues a PDF Work Permit Notice. This is the document the employee needs at the consulate.

Foreign work permit authority / Local HR Bureau · 2–4 weeks

02

FILED IN HOME COUNTRY

## Z Visa

The candidate applies at a Chinese embassy or consulate in their home country or country of legal residence, presenting the Work Permit Notice plus the supporting documents listed on page 9. The Z Visa is normally single-entry and is used to enter China so the residence-permit process can begin.

Chinese Embassy / Consulate · **1–2 weeks**

03

AFTER ARRIVAL IN CHINA

## Work Permit Card + Residence Permit

Once in China, the employer converts the Notice into a Foreigner's Work Permit Card (the physical card the employee carries), and the employee applies at the local Public Security Bureau for a Residence Permit. The Residence Permit replaces the Z Visa and covers the duration of the contract — typically 1–3 years.

Foreign work permit authority + PSB Exit-Entry · within 30 days of arrival

# Who qualifies, and at what level.

Before any of the three layers begins, the candidate must be classifiable under China’s foreign work permit classification system. Applicants fall into Category A, B, or C based on direct qualification criteria or a points-based assessment. The category affects permit validity, review scrutiny and document interpretation.



## High-end talent

**86+ pts**

Permit validity: Up to 5 years, multiple entry

Top-tier executives, recognised researchers, holders of accepted government programme nominations. Eligible for the R Visa instead of Z; green-channel processing in some cities.



## Foreign professional

**60–85 pts**

Permit validity: 1–3 years

The default for the vast majority of foreign hires. Bachelor's degree, 2+ years' experience, and role/salary documentation that meets local expectations. Standard documentation, standard timeline.



## Other foreign worker

**59 pts or below**

Permit validity: ≤ 1 year, subject to quota

Often difficult in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. Consider restructuring the role, compensation or work location to reach at least 60 points, or use an EOR arrangement where appropriate.

**Score your candidate at [asomerit.com/tools](https://asomerit.com/tools) (free, ~2 minutes).**

# What the employer files in China.

Everything starts with the sponsoring employer's online application through the foreign work permit system. This step happens inside China before the candidate travels. The local authority verifies the employer, role and candidate credentials against the classification framework, then issues a PDF Work Permit Notice (外国人来华工作许可通知).

## EMPLOYER PREREQUISITES

- Valid PRC entity licence; role aligned with registered scope and actual operations.

System registration usually takes 5–10 working days for new employers.  
Clean recent compliance record for tax, social insurance and labour matters.  
Adequate operating substance and capital plan under the 2024 capital rules.

## DOCUMENTS THE EMPLOYER ASSEMBLES

- Signed employment contract with identical Chinese and foreign-language versions.

Job description: title, duties, reporting line and salary aligned with category and city practice.  
Chopped business licence copy.  
Candidate degree, criminal record check and CV; apostille/legalisation where required.  
Health commitment or overseas certificate where accepted; China-recognised physical exam after entry.

### REVIEW WINDOW

**Pre-approval. 5 working days. Confirms the application is properly formed.**

**Notice issuance. Around 10 working days after pre-approval. The Notice is the document the candidate carries to the consulate.**

**Validity. The Notice is generally valid for 6 months from issue — the candidate should apply for the Z Visa within that window.**

# Common variations and how they're treated.

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Not every foreign hire fits the standard mould. Below are the scenarios we most commonly encounter, and the procedural variation each requires.

## 01 Standard direct hire

Foreign national hired by a PRC entity (WFOE, JV, or licensed local employer). The path described on the previous page applies as-is. ~80% of cases.

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## 02 Intra-company transfer

Employee relocating from a foreign parent or affiliate to the China entity. Prior group experience may support the role rationale, but bonus points depend on the candidate's specific qualifications. Contract, payroll and tax arrangements must be aligned before filing.

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## 03 Senior executive / Category A

86 points or direct Category A. Some candidates can apply for an R Visa instead of Z. Green-channel processing may be available in Beijing, Shanghai, Hainan FTP and Greater Bay Area cities, with faster review and longer permit validity.

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## 04 Short-term assignment (< 90 days)

Separate short-term work approval path. Supporting documents and visa category depend on activity, duration and consulate practice. Suitable for project work, training delivery, technical assistance or audits under 90 days.

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## 05 Manufacturing / industrial workers

Additional health, occupational-safety, environmental or industry reviews may be required depending on role and site. Where sector endorsement or permits are needed, add 2-4 weeks to the timeline.

## What the candidate files at the consulate.

Once the Work Permit Notice is in hand, the candidate applies for the Z Visa at a Chinese embassy or consulate in their country of nationality (or country of legal residence). The Notice is the centrepiece — without it, the visa officer will not accept the application.

### WHERE TO APPLY

Apply at the Chinese consulate in your country of nationality. Most countries route through the China Visa Application Service Centre (CVASC), the outsourced front-end that handles document intake, biometrics, and fee collection. Direct consulate applications are still possible in some cities. Mailing is generally not accepted for first-time Z Visa applications.

### WHAT THE Z VISA IS — AND ISN'T

The Z Visa is normally single-entry. After arrival, the holder must complete work permit and residence permit procedures within the permitted stay period, typically 30 days. It exists to permit entry into China so the long-term residence permit application can begin.

Multiple entries, longer stays, and dependents follow once the Residence Permit replaces the Z Visa after arrival (page 11).

### PROCESSING TIME

**Standard**  
4 working days

**Express**  
3 working days

**Rush**  
1 working day

# Universal documents — every applicant.

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Five documents form the universal Z Visa application packet, regardless of applicant type. Beyond these, you also need a category-specific supporting document — see page 10.

## 01 Valid passport

Ordinary passport, valid for at least 6 months from the date of application, with at least 2 blank visa pages.

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## 02 Passport copies

Photocopy of the personal-information page, the extension page (if any), and the most recent Chinese visa (if the applicant has previously been to China).

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## 03 Visa Application Form (online + printed)

Complete the China Online Visa Application (COVA) form with a recent colour passport photo (light background, front view, no head covering). Print a colour copy of the completed form for submission.

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## 04 Category-specific supporting document

ONE of: (a) Work Permit Notice from SAFEA — standard route; (b) Approval of Short-term Employment for assignments  $\leq$  90 days; (c) Rep Office registration certificate; (d) Cultural-affairs approval for commercial performances; (e) China National Offshore Oil Corporation invitation letter for offshore petroleum operations. See page 10 for detail.

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## 05 Residence permit in the application country (if non-nationals)

If the applicant is not a citizen of the country where they are applying, they must show a residence, work, or study permit with at least 6 months of remaining validity.

## Category-specific supporting document.

For document #04 on the previous page, the applicant supplies ONE of the five options below — depending on the nature of the work and the sponsoring entity.

A

### Standard employment

*Most professional & technical hires*

#### Notification Letter of Foreigner's Work Permit

Issued by SAFEA or the local Bureau of Foreign Experts following the Layer 1 process. Photocopy (the original is retained in China). Covers the vast majority of foreign hires.

B

### Short-term work ( $\leq$ 90 days)

*Project work, training, technical assistance*

#### Approval of Short-term Employment + sector-specific approval

For assignments under 90 days. Includes both the SAFEA short-term approval and the relevant cultural-affairs approval (if applicable). Original and photocopy of each.

C

### Representative Office

*Chief Rep / General Rep of foreign RO*

#### Rep Office Registration Certificate

Registration Certificate of Resident Representative Office issued by SAMR (photocopy), plus the Approval Letter issued by the Bureau of Commerce (photocopy). The candidate is registered as the Chief or General Representative.

D

### Commercial performance (> 90 days)

*Performing artists, sports professionals*

#### Cultural Affairs Approval

Approval document for commercial performance issued by the Chinese cultural-affairs authority. Original and photocopy. Required for performers, artists, athletes staying longer than 90 days.

E

### Offshore petroleum operations

*Offshore oil & gas specialists*

#### CNOOC Invitation Letter

Letter of Invitation to Foreigners for Offshore Petroleum Operations issued by China National Offshore Oil Corporation. Original required. Specialised — applies only to offshore oil and gas work.

# The 30–day window that matters most.

The Z Visa gets the candidate into China — but it does not provide the long–term right to stay. From arrival, the candidate must complete police registration, health check, work permit card and residence permit procedures within the permitted stay period, typically 30 days.

**01****Within 24 hours**

## Police registration

Register the foreign national's address at the local police station. If they're staying in a hotel, the hotel handles this automatically. If they move into private accommodation, they must do it themselves — bring passport, Z Visa, lease agreement.

**02****Preferably in first week**

## Health check

Mandatory medical examination at a government–designated facility. If an equivalent overseas test was completed within the last 6 months, it may be recognised in part, but local re–checks are common.

**03****File promptly**

## Work Permit Card application

The employer converts the Work Permit Notice into the physical Work Permit Card through the foreign work permit system. File as soon as police registration and health documentation are ready, leaving sufficient time before the 30–day stay expires.

# Converting the Z Visa to a long-term right.

The Residence Permit is the document that finally allows the foreign hire to stay in China for the duration of their contract. It replaces the Z Visa entirely — once it's issued, the Z Visa is no longer the operative document.

## WHAT IT IS

Issued by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) Exit-Entry Administration in the city where the employee will live and work. The Residence Permit is a sticker placed in the passport. It permits multiple entries and exits during its validity, and serves as the legal basis for renting accommodation, opening a bank account, enrolling in social insurance, and other domestic activities.

## VALIDITY PERIOD

Tied to the Work Permit Card and the underlying employment contract. Common durations:

- Category A (R Visa eligible): up to 5 years.
- Category B (typical Z Visa hire): 1, 2, or 3 years depending on the contract term and salary level.
- Category C: 1 year maximum, often shorter and subject to renewal conditions.

## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- Z Visa entry stamp + the Work Permit Card.
- Police registration certificate (the one issued in step 01 of page 11).
- Lease agreement or owner's certificate for the residence in China.
- Health certificate (the Chinese one, not the home-country test).
- Two passport photos. Fee 400–800 RMB depending on validity period.

TIER-1 CITY SALARY FLOORS

# Beijing & Shanghai have their own thresholds.

Beijing and Shanghai apply stricter salary–commitment thresholds for salary–based Category A routes and certain Category B filings. If salary is used as a qualification basis, confirm the current local average–wage multiple before submission; other routes may rely primarily on points and credentials.

## BEIJING

*Local average wage: RMB 11,937 / month*

### CATEGORY A FLOOR

**RMB 859,464 / year**

*6x local average wage*

### CATEGORY B FLOOR

**RMB 572,976 / year**

*4x local average wage*

## SHANGHAI

*Local average wage: RMB 12,434 / month*

### CATEGORY A FLOOR

**RMB 895,248 / year**

*6x local average wage*

### CATEGORY B FLOOR

**RMB 596,832 / year**

*4x local average wage*

*Figures are indicative for early 2026 and apply to salary–commitment routes / relevant Category B filings in Beijing and Shanghai. Local average wages are republished annually and thresholds should be confirmed before filing.*

## What you'll actually spend.

Approximate out-of-pocket costs for a single Z Visa application in 2026, excluding salary and ongoing payroll costs. Fees vary by nationality (visa fees) and city (residence permit). Asomerit's service fees are not included.

	Item	Approximate cost (RMB)
LAYER 1	Work Permit Notice application	Free (employer-side)
LAYER 2	Z Visa fee (varies by nationality, single entry)	350 – 1,200
	CVASC service charge (where applicable)	200 – 350
	Document apostille / consular legalisation (home country)	USD 100 – 500
LAYER 3	Health check at designated hospital	400 – 600
	Work Permit Card issuance	Free
	Residence Permit (PSB fee, 1 year)	400
	Residence Permit (PSB fee, 1–3 years)	500 – 800
ONGOING	Annual renewal — same fees apply at each renewal	—

**TYPICAL TOTAL — STANDARD CATEGORY B APPLICANT**

# RMB 4,000 – 8,000

*All-in for the first year, excluding salary, relocation, accommodation, and our service fees. Family dependents add ~RMB 500–800 each for accompanying S1 visa and residence permits.*

# Seven things that go wrong most often.

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From 200+ Z Visa engagements across the past 36 months. Most rejections are document errors, not eligibility failures.

## 01 Name mismatch across documents

Passport: "John Smith". Degree: "John A. Smith". Offer: "Smith, John". Standardise the legal name across every document before authentication begins. The cost of fixing this after submission is 4–8 weeks of re-issuance.

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## 02 Degree authenticated but criminal-record check expired

Both must be apostilled or consular-legalised, and the criminal-record check is typically only valid for 6 months from issue. Synchronise the timing so neither has expired at filing.

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## 03 Salary below the applicable local threshold

For salary-based Category A routes and certain Category B filings, Beijing and Shanghai apply 6x and 4x local-average-wage thresholds. Confirm the applicable route and city rules before issuing the offer.

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## 04 Proposed role does not align with business scope

The job title and duties should be consistent with the employer's registered business scope and actual operations. If the scope is too narrow, an amendment can add 4–8 weeks.

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## 05 Health certificate timing or facility issue

Overseas health checks are only sometimes recognised. Use an approved facility where possible, or plan for a designated medical examination after arrival in China.

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## 06 Missing extension page or last-visa copy

Required if the candidate has been to China before. People assume "the new visa replaces the old" — but the consulate wants to see the trail.

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## 07 Apostille on the wrong page

Apostilles cover the document they're attached to, not the entire stapled packet. Each underlying document — degree, transcript, criminal record — typically needs its own apostille.

## Once the first permit is in hand.

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A Z Visa application is not a one-time event — it sets up an ongoing relationship with three Chinese authorities that will need maintenance for as long as the foreign hire stays in China.

### RENEWAL

The Work Permit Card and Residence Permit must be renewed before expiry. Renewal typically begins around 30 days before expiry and may require updated health documentation and updated salary/role evidence. Renewal is generally simpler than the initial application — but a missed renewal can trigger exit-and-re-apply procedures.

### FAMILY DEPENDENTS

Spouses and minor children of work-permit holders are eligible for accompanying S1 visas and Residence Permits. Required: marriage certificate (apostilled or legalised), birth certificates for children (same), copies of the principal applicant's work permit and Residence Permit. Children may attend international or Chinese schools depending on nationality and city. Dependents cannot work on an S1 — they would need to convert to their own Z Visa.

### EXIT

When employment ends, the employer must cancel the Work Permit Card. The foreign national should promptly handle residence-permit cancellation, change or stay-permit arrangements with the local Exit-Entry Administration. Plan this before the contract end date.



# Conclusion

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Bringing a foreign hire into China in 2026 is a structured, predictable process — three layers, three authorities, roughly nine to twelve weeks end-to-end for a standard Category B applicant. None of the individual steps are difficult; the difficulty lies in keeping nine to twelve different documents consistent across them.

Most rejections we see are not about whether the candidate qualifies — they qualify. The rejections are about a passport that says one name, a degree that says another name, and an offer letter that says a third. Or a salary package that does not meet the applicable city route. Or a criminal-record check that was authenticated but expired between issuance and submission. These are mechanical errors — and they are more cost-effective to prevent than to fix.

Asomerit handles the full Z Visa workflow for foreign-invested clients — offer-letter drafting, apostille coordination with home-country counsel, foreign work permit system filing, candidate liaison through the consulate, and on-the-ground filings with the local authority and PSB after arrival. We work in English with HR, in Chinese with the authorities, and keep the documents aligned across both sides.

**Schedule a free consultation**

asomerit.com · tommy.zhang@asomerit.com · +86 136 2138 1368





# Bring foreign talent into China, without surprises.

Asomerit handles the full Z Visa workflow for foreign-invested clients across China — from job-offer drafting and document authentication, to foreign work permit system filing, candidate coordination at the consulate, and on-the-ground filings with the local work-permit authority and exit-entry police.

## CONTACT

### **Tommy Zhang**

Founder & Chief Consultant

tommy.zhang@asomerit.com  
+86 136 2138 1368

B706, Hengan Building  
No. 17, North Third Ring Road East  
Chaoyang District, Beijing