Insights: Alerts

China IP Update: Patent Trends, Court Statistics & Digital Reforms (April 2026)

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The April 2026 update from China's IP authorities highlights a maturing domestic patent system, a sharp drop in IP litigation volume, and a fully digital pivot for software copyright pledges.

Notably, China has climbed to the No. 3 position at the European Patent Office, while the Supreme People's Court (SPC) reports a 24% year-over-year drop in first-instance IP civil cases as it targets so-called "involution-style" competition (内卷, a Chinese policy term for excessive, low-yield activity that consumes resources without producing meaningful gains). Here are the key strategic takeaways.

1. R&D Now Drives 87.4%of Chinese Invention Patents

The CNIPA's 2025 China Patent Survey Report confirms that enterprises lead both patent output and commercialization. 87.4% of enterprise invention patents were obtained through internal R&D, up 0.8 points from 2024 and 2.9 points from 2021. The enterprise invention-patent industrialization rate (the share of patents actively used in production or licensing) reached 54.0%, up 0.7 points from 2024. The data signals that Chinese applicants are increasingly converting patents into commercial products rather than holding them defensively.

2. China Climbs to No. 3 at the EPO

The EPO's 2025 Patent Index reports 22,031 European patent applications filed from China in 2025, an increase of 9.7% year-over-year. China now ranks third among countries of origin (10.9% of all EPO filings) and is the fastest-growing filer in the top ten. Digital communications was China's largest sector at the EPO, while transportation and semiconductors each grew more than 30% year-over-year, signaling where Chinese applicants intend to compete in Europe.

3. SPC Reports 24% Drop in First-instance IP Civil Cases

The Supreme People's Court accepted 123,700 first-instance IP civil cases in Q12026, a decline of 24.16% year-over-year. The SPC attributes the drop to a coordinated effort against "involution-style" competition (low-value, repetitive, or strategically abusive litigation), combined with a continued emphasis on fair-competition principles. Foreign rights holders should expect heightened judicial scrutiny of formulaic or high-volume infringement complaints.

4. New CNIPA Guidelines on Patent Information Analysis

The CNIPA has published the Guidelines for IP Information Analysis and Utilization, a practical playbook intended to push patent-landscape analysis deeper into R&D, manufacturing, and commercialization decisions.

The Guidelines reflect a policy direction that treats patent data as operational infrastructure for innovation, rather than merely as an administrative legal record.

5. Paper Software Copyright Pledge Filings Discontinued

Effective April 15, 2026, the China Copyright Protection Center will no longer accept paper applications (whether in person or by mail) for software copyright pledge (security interest) registrations. All filings must be submitted online, and the Center will issue electronic certificates only. Companies using Chinese software copyrights as collateral should update internal closing checklists and security-interest workflows accordingly.

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