

POLICY REVIEW

Unhealthy idol worship in crosshairs

Entertainment industry falls in line as scrutiny of shows aimed at youth rises

By CHEN NAN
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China's National Radio and Television Administration issued a notice last month that cast a spotlight on the country's idol industry.

Reality television competitions for those hoping to become idols can no longer be shown according to the notice issued on Sept 2.

It further stated that online platforms should create more teen-friendly programs to ensure that young people receive more wholesome content. Broader rectifications of "fan culture" and the "idol industry" have also been urged.

The Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee also issued a notice on Sept 2 about regulating the entertainment industry, highlighting the negative influence of *fan quan*, or fan clubs, on children.

According to a report released by the China Internet Network Information Center on July 20, about 8 percent of the country's 183 million netizens under the age of 18 follow celebrities online, and most are middle school students.

One of the country's most popular boy bands is Teens in Times, or TNT. The seven-member group was launched in 2019 and soon developed a large fan base, with over 8 million followers on Sina Weibo, China's Twitter-like social media platform.

After the notices were issued, two TNT members — Yan Haoxiang and He Junlin, both aged 17 — withdrew from *Xia Ri Shao Nian Tuan*, a reality show on livestreaming platform Mango TV.

Gong Yu, founder and CEO of iQiyi, another video website known for producing talent shows like *China Rap* and *Idol Producer*, announced that the platform has canceled the programs.

On Aug 20, talent agency Asia Starry Sky announced the creation of a band called Panda Boys. Consisting of seven boys aged between 7 and 11, the group made their debut in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province, and soon stirred controversy on social media platforms.

Amid overwhelming criticism about profiting from school-age children, Panda Boys disbanded just four days later.

There have been increasing concerns about the influence idol culture is having on young Chinese, with scandals involving celebrities — such as Chinese-Canadian star Kris Wu, who is dealing with rape accusations; actress Zheng Shuang, who allegedly abandoned her partner and their two surrogate babies and has been fined 299 million yuan (\$46.3 million) for tax evasion; and Chinese actor Zhang Zhehan, who visited Japan's Yasukuni Shrine, which China regards as a symbol of past Japanese militarism — sparking public outrage.

On Sept 18, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued a notice on strengthening the management of agencies and celebrities and on promoting a healthy environment for the performing arts industry.

Besides regulating showbiz staff and licensing agents, it stated that organizers of performances should bar children from participating in fan club activities, including paying for membership, purchasing idol-related merchandise and voting in contests, and event organizers must get permission from parents when they invite



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

“Many young people want to become stars because they think it's an easy way to make money.”

Netizen reflects

children to perform publicly.

Agencies involved in modeling, casting and acting that sign children should guarantee that they receive the schooling mandated in the Law on the Protection of Minors, the Education Law and the Compulsory Education Law, the latter of which outlines China's nine-year mandatory education standards.

Agencies are also prohibited from misguiding their young charges or encouraging them to focus on chasing fame.

“There are many ways to achieve fame overnight due to the popularity of social media platforms. This can lead young people to obses-

sively compare themselves to others in an unhealthy way,” a netizen commented.

Another wrote: “Many young people want to become stars because they think it's an easy way to make money. They want to live a life in the spotlight. However, it's sad that they do not want a career and just want to be famous.”

Competitive talent shows offer young people a short cut to fulfilling their dreams of becoming stars. Shows like *Produce 101* and *Youth With You*, which follow the trainee system used to groom South Korean pop idols, have been massively popular in China in recent years.

Catering to the constant need for fresh faces, companies have raced to recruit and train young people, especially teenagers, to follow in the footsteps of successful groups like TF Boys, Rocket Girls 101 and Nine Percent.

According to “Si Ming,” a former agent for a Chinese boy band jointly produced by Chinese and South Korean entertainment companies who preferred not to give her real name, the companies pay for dance and vocal classes, provide accommodation and even give trainees considerable monthly living allowances. Parents travel from all over the country to take their children to auditions.

Celebrities, social media stars to face regular tax investigations

By CHEN NAN

China is set to conduct regular tax investigations into entertainers, with the goal of promoting a healthy environment in the entertainment industry, according to a notice issued by the State Taxation Administration on Sept 18.

Celebrities and online influencers are required to set up tax accounts for their studios or businesses in accordance with the law, and have their tax declarations and payments

audited and verified by authorities.

The administration will help studios and companies owned by entertainers establish an accounting system that meets regulatory standards.

On Sept 16, the Beijing Municipal Radio and Television Bureau also issued guidelines on regulating sky-high celebrity salaries and strengthening the management of the TV drama industry.

In May, Chinese actress Zheng Shuang was reportedly paid 160 mil-

lion yuan (\$24.6 million) for 77 days of filming for her role in *A Chinese Ghost Story*, a TV series adapted from a collection of supernatural stories set in ancient China. Her huge paycheck quickly triggered outrage on Chinese social media.

The guidelines also point out that actors' salaries should not exceed 40 percent of the production costs for film and TV work.

According to a report in Beijing Daily, the bureau has verified the production costs of 48 TV dramas,

especially payments made to actors and actresses.

The guidelines highlight yin-yang contracts, which are named for having two different parts, one public and one under the table, which have been an open secret in China's film and TV industry for years.

Some celebrities have evaded taxes by benefiting from the dual-pay schemes, leading the regulator to take action. In August, Zheng was ordered to pay 299 million yuan in unpaid taxes, overdue fees and fines,

while in 2018, Chinese actress Fan Bingbing was ordered to pay 883 million yuan to cover back taxes and fines.

According to a Voice of China radio program, 660 artist agency companies had been shut down by the end of August. Celebrity-owned and talent-affiliated companies have long been seen as channels used for tax avoidance and evasion.

The report said that by 2025, the total value of China's performing arts industry will reach 67.9 billion yuan.

Policy Digest

National parks balance green, economic goals

While some developing countries still struggle to strike a balance between environmental preservation and economic development, many national park dwellers in China find themselves in a winning situation.

According to Zhao Yingmin, vice-minister of ecology and environment, China has found a way to ensure that residents and communities benefit from the creation of national parks by enrolling them in conservation efforts.

Promoting eco-friendly businesses is the key, he said at a news conference on Oct 13 during the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, or COP 15, in Kunming, capital of Yunnan province.

“In particular, by integrating efforts to advance ecological progress with the national poverty eradication drive, we have kept biodiversity intact, boosted the development of local communities and helped residents increase their incomes and eliminate poverty,” Zhao said.

China announced its first group of officially designated national parks on Oct 12 at COP 15. The country is placing increasing emphasis on conservation.

Regulations allowing people to run eco-friendly businesses and prioritize job opportunities at national parks have also been enacted, Zhao said, citing the Sanjiangyuan National Park as an example of the proper balance between the creation of national parks and local development.

Created to protect part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, over 17,000 herds-men have been offered jobs as rangers at Sanjiangyuan, resulting in an average annual increase in income of 21,600 yuan (\$3,343).

Digital driver's licenses available in more cities

Drivers in a further 110 cities will be able to apply for digital driver's licenses.

On Sept 1, China began issuing digital licenses in 28 cities, including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province.

From as early as Oct 20, drivers in the 110 cities, which include Shanxi province's Taiyuan, Liaoning province's Shenyang and Heilongjiang province's Harbin, will be able to apply for a digital license through an official mobile app, the Ministry of Public Security said on Oct 13.

More than 16 million applications have been submitted so far across the country.

China plans to spread the use of digital driver's licenses across the country in 2022, the ministry said earlier this year.

Telecom, online fraud cases are declining nationwide

A continuous drop in the number of cases related to phone and online fraud has been reported recently, thanks to a national campaign launched last October to combat these crimes.

Compared to the same period last year, cases of fraudulent phone and internet activity decreased in June, July and August, the Ministry of Public Security said on Oct 11.

To date, six nationwide operations have been carried to crack down on criminal gangs and eliminate the fraudulent use of SIM cards and bank cards.

Law enforcement operations have sought to prevent gangs from easily trafficking such cards, which has significantly increased the cost of fraud, and reined in the number of cases.

Police have busted 27,000 gangs since October last year and some 450,000 individuals suspected of involvement have been punished, including over 1,000 who worked for financial institutions and telecommunications companies, the ministry said.

ZHANG YUNBI

“The huge profits are a major reason for tax evasion,” the report said.

Stars should use their influence properly and not cheat the government, said Pan Yan, secretary-general of the China Association of Performing Arts.

“Celebrities shouldn't use their companies to escape from responsibilities, like fulfilling their tax obligations. It's a basic obligation for any law-abiding citizen,” she said. “We hope that both celebrities and their companies will abide by the law and devote more energy to their art to promote the development of the industry and set a good example for the public.”