

Tracking the Web Across China: From the 'Wang Ba' of the West. . .

[Jennifer 8. Lee](#). [New York Times](#), Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]29 Mar 2000: H.6.

Abstract

Yet, thanks to modem connections and the efforts of local entrepreneurs, the Internet is trickling into back alleys and basements of the most remote regions of western China. A nationwide system of local Internet service providers was completed last year; now the seven westernmost provinces -- half of China's land, with 20 percent of its population -- account for 5 percent of the country's Internet use.

So, in early January when I set out with my backpack and no itinerary for a seven-week trek through the mountains and deserts of western China, e-mail was the intercontinental umbilical cord that tethered me to my anxious mother 12,000 miles away in New York City. From Inner Mongolia to Kashgar to Lhasa, I hunted for the elusive wang ba, or "Net bar," to send reassuring updates.

Forty-five percent of China's Internet users live in Shanghai, Beijing or in the affluent province of Guangdong, which account for just 8 percent of the country's total population. Eighty percent of users live in large cities; almost 80 percent are men and 85 percent are 18 to 35, according to a government-sponsored survey by the China Internet Network Information Center. Few rural residents can afford computers or the fees charged by their local Internet bars, the equivalent of \$2.50 to \$4 an hour. (Urban Internet bars are cheaper.)

Jennifer 8. Lee is studying international relations at Beijing University.

THE roads here are sometimes barely roads. Bathrooms are pits in the ground. Fur coats are a necessity, not fashion. In a nod to tradition, and for self-defense, some men travel with swords at their sides.

Yet, thanks to modem connections and the efforts of local entrepreneurs, the Internet is trickling into back alleys and basements of the most remote regions of western China. A nationwide system of local Internet service providers was completed last year; now the seven westernmost provinces -- half of China's land, with 20 percent of its population -- account for 5 percent of the country's Internet use.

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Mongolia to Kashgar to Lhasa, I hunted for the elusive wang ba, or "Net bar," to send reassuring updates.

(Some things are better left out of such dispatches: I did not tell my mother about the time my bus almost slipped off an icy mountain road, or about another bus that fell off a cliff outside Lhasa, killing 12 people.)

In the one-room Net bar in Kashgar, where eight personal computers were strung together with a tangle of wires, the coal-burning stove spewing black smoke was not enough to keep my fingers from becoming too cold to type. In the monastery town of Xiahe in the Gansu Province, Internet users look out the window at the mule-drawn carts and the nomadic herdsmen who trudge along the town's one main street, oblivious to the information revolution.

While the Internet may be a web of dreams, China is a country of stark realities. Like its roads and infrastructure, China's Internet is being sewn together piecemeal and unevenly, but it is coming together.

Depending on where you go and whom you ask, China is alternately prosperous or poor, cutting-edge modern or heartachingly backward. Multinational corporations salivate over magazine images of Levi-clad adolescents eating at the McDonald's in Shanghai and talking on their Nokia cell phones. But that slice of the demographic pie is very slim and very urban. More than two-thirds of China's 1.2 billion population is rural, and the overwhelming majority of that rural population is poor.

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The Internet presence reflects these disparities. A wang ba can be a sleek mirrored club where uniformed attendants bring tea to customers at their computers or a dirt-floor hovel where men huddle under dim lighting.

Beyond larger cities, wang ba customers are largely foreign tourists seeking quaint, traditional villages but demanding modern communications services. Many wang ba's use the names Hotmail and Yahoo as synonyms for Internet access on their store signs. These services' increasing presence is leading the way for infiltration of the Internet throughout the underdeveloped areas of China. Nonetheless, local residents who go to wang ba's seem more interested in the multiplayer video games than in the potential for revolutionizing commerce.

Tim Jin, who owns Tim's Internet Cafe in Dali in the Yunnan province, estimates that 95 percent of his customers are foreigners, 4 percent come from other parts of China and less than 1 percent are local residents.

As for e-commerce, Mr. Jin said, a number of the communities surrounding Dali still do their purchasing and bargaining at weekly outdoor markets.

"No way we can do an e-commerce site here," he said, citing the lack of infrastructure in Yunnan, the difficulty of transportation and the low population density.

"In big cities and through foreign mail-order companies, maybe. Locally, there's no way."

In the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, which is not connected to the rest of China by railroad, Tsering Tashi opened the Khang Li Internet Bar as soon as Tibet established an Internet service provider last year. He said it was the only Tibetan-owned Internet bar in Tibet. Within 10 months, he said, he recovered his original investment of almost \$10,000. Still, nearly all of his customers are tourists.

"Tibetans almost never use high technology; they don't understand it," Mr. Tashi said. "They have heard of the Internet, but the Internet cafe is a wholly new concept to them."

In the off-season, October through February, he converts most of his Internet cafe into a clothing store.

Sluggish connections are a problem throughout China. In mid-February, Mr. Jin closed his cafe for two days because the Internet was too slow, particularly the e-mail provider Hotmail, which 80 percent of his customers use.

Of course, China is changing rapidly, and so is the Internet. Entrepreneurs say they are optimistic that logistical obstacles can be overcome. But corporate profits in China have historically been elusive. Ask any multinational corporation that has set up shop in China in the last decade, eager to tap into the billion-customer market.

A majority of companies is still waiting for the investments to pay off. Plagued by distribution difficulties, inflated estimates of demand and bureaucratic red tape, more businesses are leaving China, deciding that the market can wait.

Predictably, profits in e-commerce are elusive as well, though not just in China. E-business opportunities in China could therefore prove to be doubly difficult.

But low costs and tourists' cash, it turns out, can become a very workable, albeit modest, business plan. "Our fundamental goal is to make money," Mr. Tashi said. "So far, the Internet has been very good for making money."

China: "Internet Police" software installed in Shaanxi Internet bars

[BBC Monitoring Media](#); London [London]07 Aug 2001: 1.

Abstract

Moreover, the "Internet Police" are able to capture designated computer screens and cast them on the screen of the central controlling office under the local public security bureau, where police will be on duty round the clock from the end of September, when the installation work in all Internet bars in the city has been finished.

Full Text

Text of report in English by official Chinese news agency Xinhua (New China News Agency)

Xi'an, 7 August: Over 800 Internet bars in this capital of northwest China's Shaanxi Province recently installed a kind of Internet security software called "Internet Police" to enforce online safety regulations.

The software, with over a dozen functions, is highly effective, according to the local public security department. For instance, visitors attempting to enter banned web sites or pages will be warned, and the screen will be automatically shielded off once the page is opened.

Moreover, the "Internet Police" are able to capture designated computer screens and cast them on the screen of the central controlling office under the local public security bureau, where police will be on duty round the clock from the end of September, when the installation work in all Internet bars in the city has been finished.

The software also has several other functions including online registration, automatic alarms and upgrades, information distribution and Internet surfing records tracing.

Report: China Pulls Plug on Net Bars / 17,488 shops closed for failure to block porn or subversive sites

[THE ASSOCIATED PRESS. Newsday, Combined editions; Long Island, N.Y.](#) [Long Island, N.Y.]23 Nov 2001: A59.

Abstract

Shanghai, China - Chinese authorities have shut down more than 17,000 Internet bars for failing to block Web sites considered subversive or pornographic, a state-run newspaper reported.

The closures came during a nationwide sweep of China's 94,000 Internet bars that was launched in April, the Shanghai-based Wen [Wen Hui Bao] reported Tuesday.

AP Photo - A Chinese teenager watches while another uses a computer at the Feiyu Net Cafe in Beijing in June. About 4.5 million people in China rely on computers at Internet bars.

Full Text

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Called "wang ba" in Mandarin Chinese, most Internet bars here are nothing more than dimly lit one- room shops with a dozen personal computers.

They are now found in almost every Chinese city and even large villages.

Almost 27 million of China's 1.3 billion people now log on, up from 4 million just two years ago, according to government figures.

Of current users, about 4.5 million rely on Internet bars, the Wen Hui Bao said.

"Some youths will submerge themselves in Internet bars for long periods, playing unhealthy games and adversely affecting their development as normal students," the newspaper said.

Only about half the nation's Internet bars have installed all the necessary software to block restricted Web sites and keep record of user activities, the report said.

In addition to the 17,488 Internet bars shut down, another 28,000 were ordered to install monitoring software soon, it said.

The software was required as part of regulations issued by Beijing last year aimed at controlling the Internet's use.

The government wants to encourage the Internet's growth as a commercial medium.

But Beijing fears its other use as a forum for political dissent.

Democracy advocates and members of the outlawed Falun Gong sect have used the Internet to publicize information the communist regime considers subversive.

More than a dozen people have been arrested over the past two years for online dissent.

Web sites run by foreign news organizations are also blocked by the Chinese government. Regulations also target Web sites containing pornographic material.

Online games: Killer app

[China Economic Quarterly](#); Beijing (Second Quarter 2004): n/a.

The author, Andrew Yeh, is a correspondent of the China Economic Quarterly in Beijing.

Virtual sword-and-sorcery has found a new home in China, where online fantasy games involving tens of thousands of simultaneous players have become a cash spigot for the once-moribund internet industry.

China already has nearly 80m internet users, second only to America; about one-sixth of these, or 13.8m, regularly play online games. This gives China more online gamers than South Korea, Taiwan and Japan combined (see Table 1). Technology research firm International Data Corp. (IDC) forecasts the gaming population will rise to 40m by 2007. Rock-bottom access fees mean that the value of this market is fairly small, but brokerage DBS Vickers Securities expects total gaming revenues in China to quadruple from US\$241m in 2003 to US\$835m in 2006.

Unlike many China-inspired fantasies of limitless market growth, these rosy forecasts are fairly plausible. Despite politically-motivated shutdowns, internet bars (the main access point for gamers) are ubiquitous; urban disposable income is rising rapidly; and home computer use and broadband connectivity are growing fast. Relatively immune to the piracy that undercuts other software and entertainment businesses in China, online gaming has proved a profitable formula not only for specialised game companies but also for internet portal Netease.com, which saw earnings soar last year on the back of a successful game launch. The big question is how soon Chinese firms can move beyond being tollbooth operators for games produced elsewhere (mostly South Korea), and grab a slice of the far more lucrative game development market.

Poison for pirates In Western countries and Japan, the main market is for two-to-four player console games (played on boxes like the Nintendo GameCube hooked up to a television). In China, as in Korea, the principal market is online fantasy games involving hundreds or thousands of simultaneous players. He Wei, a game researcher at telecoms consultancy BDA China in Beijing, thinks Chinese have a particular affinity for online games since they live in densely-populated areas, have little private space and are more accustomed to indoor than outdoor recreation. Online fantasy worlds also offer a rich escape for Chinese children growing up in the solitude of one-child families.

There is also a very powerful commercial incentive for game developers and operators in China's lawless software environment. Pirates can easily copy console and PC games and destroy the profits of their developers. Piracy of online games is more difficult. DBS Vickers estimates that pirate servers and "hooking" (stealing passwords) cost Chinese game operators 10-20 percent of potential revenues. This compares to piracy rates of 90 percent or more for most off-the-shelf software programs.

There are two big reasons for online gaming's resistance to piracy. First, legitimate game prices are already very low: per-hour charges average 30-40 fen, or about five US cents, and gamers typically spend Rmb30-50 per month. At these prices pirates don't have much margin to operate - although some pirate sites are run for free by dedicated gamers, or support themselves by selling ads.

Table 1
Penetration of online gaming in East Asia, 2003

	China	Korea	Taiwan	Japan
Est. potential gamers*, m	185.9	11.0	4.3	24.3
Actual gamers, m	13.8	5.9	2.2	5.0
Penetration rate, %	7.4	53.5	51.5	20.6

Source: IDC, DBS Vickers *Potential gamers calculated as a fraction of population aged 10-39

More important, an online game is not so much a product as an experience, whose appeal is directly proportionate to the number of users. Playing a hit game on a legitimate server enables interaction with tens of thousands of players; pirate servers accommodate far fewer. According to Steven Huang, a researcher at Xin De Group, most pirate servers deliberately keep their operations small because collecting more fees puts them at risk of revealing their location. It is also fairly easy for game developers and operators to prevent any single employee from getting access to the entire complex source code of a game.

Playing to excess The distribution backbone for online games in China is the internet bar or *wangba*. Half of the country's online players play at internet bars, according to figures from www.17173.com, a popular game site now owned by portal Sohu.com (see Table 2). Home users can download the games from the operator's website or from CDs distributed by the operators for free. Most gamers, whether they play at home or at an internet bar, access their accounts by buying prepaid charge cards with passwords, similar to the recharge cards used by many mobile phone users.

Table 2
Where China's gamers
game

	% of total
Internet bar	50.1
Home	41.5
School	6.0
Office	1.9
Other	0.6

Source: 17173.com

Reliance on internet bars is a bit risky for the operators, since *wangba* are continually being closed by local authorities because of legitimate concerns about fire safety, quasi-legitimate concerns about the socially destructive effects of online gaming, or political concerns that internet bars provide a handy way for people to spread anti-government comments in relative anonymity. Sorting out which of these motivations mostly drives restrictions of *wangba* is no easy task. Online game addiction is now a stock feature in Chinese news pages. One Shanghai fanatic reportedly doused himself with gasoline and threatened to set himself on fire in the offices of game company Shanda Interactive Entertainment after his virtual weapons were confiscated. On March 31, Xinhua reported that two Chongqing teenagers were run over by a train and killed when they passed out on a railroad track after spending 48 hours straight playing online games in an illegal internet bar.

Table 3

China game operators' internet bar presence and users, 2003

No. of bars	Peak concurrent users	
Shanda	350,000	950,000
The9	120,000	300,000
NetEase	80,000	200,000

Source: Companies

The latter incident has been widely cited in propaganda accompanying a nationwide campaign, launched in February and due to run through August, to crack down on unlicensed *wangba*. That campaign, organised by the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC), which licences internet bars, has already resulted in the closure of 8,600 outlets. In March, SAIC also issued an order prohibiting internet bars within 200 metres of schools or residential areas. But such actions count for little in China's vast internet universe: Shanda, the country's top game operator, says its games are available in 350,000 internet bars nationwide.

China is already a big market for game users, and it's easy to see how that market will expand. What's less clear is how soon China can generate an indigenous game-development industry, where the biggest bucks lie. The economics of online game development are similar (albeit on a far smaller scale) to those of the Hollywood movie industry: big up-front investments, frequent failure and occasional spectacular success.

DBS Vickers estimates that a game requires 25,000 average concurrent users (ACUs) to break even in China. Most fail to reach that threshold but a few big hits far surpass it: "The Legend of Mir 2," the current top game, has around 275,000 ACUs and at peak times involves as many as 650,000 users. Successful games generally last for about three years.

Home cooking

The two Chinese companies that have profited most from the online gaming boom have so far relied mainly on games developed by others. But both are making big bets on developing their own proprietary games. Beijing-based Netease, a Nasdaq-listed survivor of China's first internet boom, offers games on top of its traditional services like email, news and chat. Shanda, by contrast, is a pure game distributor. These two companies and another game distributor, The9 Online, together control 60 percent of China's online games market, according to DBS Vickers Securities.

Netease is one of a trio of portals (along with Sina and Sohu) that listed on Nasdaq in 1999-2000, then swiftly metamorphosed into penny stocks until 2002 when their revenues were boosted by a surge in mobile phone short-messaging, much of which is routed through the portals. Last year Netease reaped an additional bonanza from its successful launch of online gaming services, and it is now the most profitable of China's portals, though still the smallest by revenue (see Table 5).

Netease's major success has been a game it developed in-house, Westward Journey Online 2, now the eighth most popular game in China and the number-three domestically-produced game. Games are now the biggest component of Netease's revenue: in Q4 2003, games contributed 44 percent of sales, compared to 40 percent for text messaging and 15 percent for advertising. A comparison of Netease's 2002 and 2003 financials suggests that gaming revenues produce extraordinarily high profit margins.

Pressing its advantage, Netease expects to spend US\$2m-3m this year on game development. Its new game "Fantasy Westward Journey" debuted in January; the next project is a game with three-dimensional graphics. Netease's rivals - Sohu, Sina and the recently listed Tom Online - all have plans to enter the gaming market but none yet derives significant revenue from games.

For the moment, Netease still runs second behind Shanda, the kingpin of Chinese online gaming. Shanda is the licenced operator of three of the top five most-played games in China, including one it developed in-house, The World of Legend. Shanda's internet bar presence - 350,000 - is nearly triple that of its nearest competitor, and at peak times it can have almost a million concurrent users. The company employs 250 game developers and spent about US\$1.2m on game development last year.

Shanda and the other top game distributor, The9 Online, both hoped to parlay their success into lucrative overseas stockmarket listings, but were waylaid by negative international sentiment towards Chinese stocks. Shanda's much-touted mid-May initial public offering on Nasdaq raised \$152m, or about half what the company originally hoped for. The9 Online is likely to IPO later this year.

Follow Korea As with many youth fashions in China today, South Korea is the trend-setter. Korea has the highest penetration of online game players and the world's most active online game-development industry. So, unsurprisingly, the big Korean game developers so far have a lock on the Chinese game market. Four of the top five games in China are Korean-made (see Table 4).

Table 4

Most popular online games in China, 2003

Game	Developer	China operator
1. Legend of MIR II	Wemade (Korea)	Shanda
2. MIR III	Wemade (Korea)	Optisp
3. MU	Webzen (Korea)	The9
4. The World of Legend	Shanda (China)	Shanda
5. BNB	Nexon (Korea)	Shanda
6. Crossgate	Square/Enix (Japan)	Joypark
7. JX Online	Kingsoft (China)	Kingsoft
8. Westward Journey Online 2	NetEase (China)	NetEase

Source: Sina.com, ChinaVnet

The rights to a hit game are expensive: an upfront licence fee of US\$1m or more, plus royalties of around 30 percent on game revenues. This has spurred a quest by Chinese companies to develop their own games. These efforts gained official support last summer, when the Ministry of Science and Technology added online game research to its "863" R&D funding programme. At the same time, Korean game software companies are increasingly eager to develop China-specific games through joint ventures with local developers.

The results so far have been mixed. No domestic company has developed a Korean-style blockbuster, but Shanda, China's biggest game operator and developer, scored a fairly big hit last year with its "World of Legend". Netease, the internet portal that has capitalised best on the gaming mania, also has a game in the top ten and expects to develop at least one new game every year (see box, Home cooking). But Sohu's effort to get into game development via a joint venture with a Korean software firm proved an expensive flop.

Chinese agency says Internet bars are hotbed of juvenile delinquency

[BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific](#); London [London]25 May 2004: 1.



Abstract

The Chinese official news agency Xinhua has warned that unlicensed Internet bars in China are becoming hotbeds of juvenile crime and depravity. The agency said that young people were

being corrupted by cyber porn, violent and sexual video games, all-night web surfing and sex chat rooms. "Many young people, addicted to the virtual cyberspace, have become 'pathological Internet addicts' involved in all kinds of incidents," it said. Xinhua said government inspectors could not tackle the Internet bars alone and called for more help from schools, local governments and parents. The following is the text of the article by Xinhua reporters Zhai Wei, Shen Lutaο, and Zhou Wei, entitled: "Internet bars are 'tumours' that must be removed" by Xinhua (New China News Agency); subheadings as carried

According to incomplete statistics, ever since the nation launched the nationwide drive to control Internet bars, the country's cultural, business and public security authorities have conducted 500,000 inspection trips to these bars, imposed fines of 32m yuan on them, impounded or confiscated nearly 70,000 computers, ordered 21,000 bars to consolidate, ordered 5,100 others to suspend business, closed 15,900 unlawful bars, and referred 153 cases to judicial authorities.

"As result of the joint actions made by various departments in cracking down on unlawful Internet bars, these unlawful bars have to operate clandestinely. In fact, their covert operations have become an increasingly prominent problem, causing great difficulties to day- to-day management and inspection of these bars," said Liu Yuting, deputy director of the State Industrial and Commercial Administration. He said authorities in Liaoning, Shandong, Hunan and other provinces have all reported that unlawful Internet bars have been found in their remote townships and towns; and that in some areas, one small town had many unlawful Internet bars.

Full Text

The Chinese official news agency Xinhua has warned that unlicensed Internet bars in China are becoming hotbeds of juvenile crime and depravity. The agency said that young people were being corrupted by cyber porn, violent and sexual video games, all-night web surfing and sex chat rooms. "Many young people, addicted to the virtual cyberspace, have become 'pathological Internet addicts' involved in all kinds of incidents," it said. Xinhua said government inspectors could not tackle the Internet bars alone and called for more help from schools, local governments and parents. The following is the text of the article by Xinhua reporters Zhai Wei, Shen Lutaο, and Zhou Wei, entitled: "Internet bars are 'tumours' that must be removed" by Xinhua (New China News Agency); subheadings as carried

Beijing, 23 May: The numerous Internet bars that illegally cater to young people and that spread harmful material are harming our society like a "tumour".

According to incomplete statistics, ever since the nation launched the nationwide drive to control Internet bars, the country's cultural, business and public security authorities have conducted 500,000 inspection trips to these bars, imposed fines of 32m yuan on them, impounded or confiscated nearly 70,000 computers, ordered 21,000 bars to consolidate, ordered 5,100 others to suspend business, closed 15,900 unlawful bars, and referred 153 cases to judicial authorities.

Because of these numerous "tumours" that continue to exist despite repeated crackdowns, people now call for stronger actions and act as quickly as possible so that there will be a clean space for young people!

The virtual world: Is it a hell or a paradise?

One 15-year-old juvenile being incarcerated at the Beijing Juvenile Reformatory is serving a long sentence for gang raping a young girl with two other juveniles. According to his confession, he began to watch pornographic pictures when he was only 10 years old; and when he was a little older he began to browse pornographic web sites.

His case is absolutely not an accidental phenomenon. According to Shang Xiuyun, a judge at the Beijing Haiding District People's Court, in September 2003 when the court's juvenile court conducted a poll among 100 juvenile inmates, it found that 66 per cent of them regularly visited electronic game bars, 30 per cent regularly visited Internet bars, and 61 per cent regularly read and browsed pornographic publications and videos.

According to a study that experts conducted among 3,000 students in 53 different middle schools in six Beijing city districts, 22 per cent of the students had the experiences of browsing pornographic web sites, and 19.6 per cent of the students, tempted by their friends, had sex-related chats over the Internet.

Zhang Xinjian, deputy director of the Department of Cultural Market under the Ministry of Culture, pointed out: Many of the video games played at these bars are pornographic, homicidal and violent; and these games have significantly influenced the juvenile game addicts and set for them bad examples to follow.

Information released by the Ministry of Public Security shows that the unlawful Internet bars have become territories prone to causing juvenile delinquency. Since January 2003, the Shanghai Hongkou District Procuratorate has accepted six juvenile delinquency cases - which involve 15 people - caused by Internet content. This figure accounts for 26 per cent of the number of juvenile delinquency cases the procuratorate has accepted to handle. Meanwhile, the number of cases about juvenile delinquency in other forms has stabilized and even declined a little.

Legal experts and juvenile education personnel pointed out that bad culture has become the direct agent of juvenile delinquency in China. They said people should not neglect the corrosive effects that the unlawful Internet bars have created among young people with their pornography and products about violence.

Addiction nurtures psychological problems

We have found from our investigations that most of the Internet bars' visitors are students. Many young people, addicted to the virtual cyberspace, have become "pathological Internet addicts" involved in all kinds of incidents. According to Yu Haiting, vice-president of the Zhengzhou People's Hospital, No 8, many young Internet addicts find pleasure only from the Internet and they would feel lonely and depressed if they cannot. Their vegetative nervous systems are not functioning normally and they may even have all kinds of illusions and obsessions. Middle school students, who are in the process of physical and mental development, are people who are particularly likely to be addicted to surfing the Internet. Like being addicted to heroin, young people addicted to surfing the Internet can seldom extricate themselves from the obsession.

In April, an angry Mr Hu in Beijing wrote a letter to Beijing Ribao [Beijing Daily newspaper]. In the letter, he told the painful story about how his son became totally indifferent to his school work after becoming addicted to playing at a sleazy Internet bar. Ever since an Internet bar opened business in the area where Mr Hu resides, his son, who used to be a very good student, has become a frequent visitor of the bar, and the web sites he would browse include those with pornographic pictures. Because of his son's habit, Mr Hu is now verging on mental collapse.

"Young people are the biggest victims of the great deal of pornography available on the Internet," said Yu Xiaowen, member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee and vice-chairman of the Shaanxi Committee of the China Democratic National Construction Association. He said young people obsessed with browsing cyber pornography have often degenerated to becoming criminals because of their reckless pursuit of sexual stimulation.

Young people are likely to become deeply addicted to extremely arousing videos because of their stimulating content, virtual time and space and totally unrestrained behaviour. More often than not they would ignore the difference between the video's virtual life and real life, thinking that those totally irresponsible acts are normal.

The experts warned that once this misconception has formed in young people's minds, they would do everything to emulate, including cheating, stealing, and using violence on others, causing one tragedy after another in real life.

When will the cat-and-mouse game end?

Despite the greater efforts made by the government and departments concerned in tightening the controls over Internet bars, tragedies still occur every now and then. Last March, one 17-year-old boy in Chongqing's Yongchuan City stabbed a 15-year-old boy to death as result of disputes caused by their Internet chats. Three students in Huilong, a town in Chongqing's Shapingba District, who had surfed the Internet the whole night before, fell asleep on railway tracks and two of the students were killed by a train.

According to an official in charge of the National Group for Coordinating Controls of Internet bars, the group was still far away from its objective despite the successes it had achieved.

During a mission in which we joined the Central Inspection Group - composed of personnel of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, and the National Administration of Industry and Commerce - in raiding an unlawful Internet bar in Guangzhou's Haizhu District, we witnessed this strange phenomenon: After the group, which operated at the municipal industrial and commercial bureau, contacted the district bureau and instructed it to check and close the bar, what followed was a long wait. When the group members repeatedly contacted the district bureau by phone, the reply they got 40 minutes later was this: They could not find the bar because the official in charge of the industrial and commercial centre in the area had been replaced. We doubted whether any law enforcement personnel would bother to come to investigate if it were an ordinary person who reported the unlawful bar. We were also not sure how long that informant would have to wait.

Without a doubt, the management of some local authorities over Internet bars is lax, and the laxity has affected the in-depth development of the controls.

"As result of the joint actions made by various departments in cracking down on unlawful Internet bars, these unlawful bars have to operate clandestinely. In fact, their covert operations have become an increasingly prominent problem, causing great difficulties to day- to-day management and inspection of these bars," said Liu Yuting, deputy director of the State Industrial and Commercial Administration. He said authorities in Liaoning, Shandong, Hunan and other provinces have all reported that unlawful Internet bars have been found in their remote townships and towns; and that in some areas, one small town had many unlawful Internet bars.

"The problem of not having enough personnel in enforcing cultural regulations at grassroots units also hinders the control of unlawful Internet bars." According to an official of the Ministry of Culture, by the end of 2003, the nation's cultural markets had 292,000 business units, including the 132,000 units in cities and 160,000 others in county seats and areas below county level. This shows that the number of units operated in counties' cultural markets already exceeded that in cities. However, most of the nation's 11,000 full- time inspectors worked in cities, creating a phenomenon that is inconsistent with real needs. The excessively heavy workload of the cultural market inspectors has hindered the development of the control operations.

Managing Internet bars is a systems engineering project - a project that should be shared by the government, schools and students' guardians. Only when they work together can they come up with management measures which are in line with the actual state and with the law along which the bars conduct their business, and can they create a wholesome and harmonious atmosphere.

The job of removing the "tumours" must be thorough. Young people are the future of the nation. They are the main force of national construction. Thus, our society as a whole is duty bound to clear up the sky under which young people can grow up healthy.

Credit: Xinhua news agency domestic service, Beijing, in Chinese 0754 23 May 04

China sees Internet bars contraction

[Xinhua News Agency - CEIS](#); Woodside [Woodside]27 Apr 2013.

Abstract

BEIJING, April 27 (Xinhua) -- The number of Internet bars in China fell in 2012 due to a boom in household broadband and mobile Internet.

In China, children under the age of 18 are prohibited from visiting Internet bars. Last year, the Ministry of Culture investigated 34,200 cases concerning illegal operations of Internet bars, resolving over 31,600 of them, according to the report.

China sees Internet bars contraction

BEIJING, April 27 (Xinhua) -- The number of Internet bars in China fell in 2012 due to a boom in household broadband and mobile Internet.

The country had 136,000 cyberbars nationwide as of the end of 2012, a decrease of 6.9 percent year on year, according to an annual report on Internet bars released by the Ministry of Culture on Saturday.

It is the first decrease in eight years.

The revenue of Internet bars plummeted by 13.2 percent to 53.7 billion yuan (8.7 bln U.S. dollars), the report showed.

Booming mobile Internet, household broadband and the hiking up of operating costs contributed to the shrinking of the industry, said the report.

However, the total number of computers installed in Internet bars increased by 3.7 percent to 11.95 million, according to the report.

Internet bars employed more than 1.03 million people, the report said.

It predicted a further downward trend for the industry.

Online games and music remain the main reasons people go to Internet bars, the report said.

It suggested Internet bars enhance operations and integrate into games rooms and cafes to develop their business.

In China, children under the age of 18 are prohibited from visiting Internet bars. Last year, the Ministry of Culture investigated 34,200 cases concerning illegal operations of Internet bars, resolving over 31,600 of them, according to the report.

China to rectify problems of Internet bars in rural areas

[Xinhua News Agency - CEIS](#); Woodside [Woodside]15 Sep 2018.

BEIJING, Sept. 15 (Xinhua) -- China will launch a campaign to address problems of Internet bars in rural areas in a bid to create a healthy cyberspace community, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The ministry requires local law enforcement authorities to intensify the crackdown on Internet bars who admit minors, fail to check customers' ID cards, and operate bars without a license.

Data showed that more than 490,000 law enforcement personnel across the country have inspected more than 190,000 bars, settled 3,573 cases, suspended 244 Internet bars for rectification and revoked the licenses of 18 bars.

The ministry has blacklisted 52 Internet bars whose licenses were revoked for admitting minors. The legal representatives or owners of these Internet bars are forbidden from opening another Internet bar for five years.

The ministry said it will continue to strengthen the management of Internet bars, step up routine inspections and improve the blacklist system.