

China tightens regulations for online films

January 23 2014, by Louise Watt



In this Oct. 20, 2013 photo, a cameraman, left, stabilizes his camera to film an actress walking through a wooden corridor on the top of a mountain for a set of an online microfilm on the outskirts of Beijing. Chinese authorities are requiring makers of online films to gain licenses and report their content before it is posted, tightening regulation of what in recent years has been a more freewheeling genre than China's traditional film industry. (AP Photo/Alexander F. Yuan)

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in recent years has been a more freewheeling genre than China's traditional film industry.

China's online video sites have provided an accessible platform for filmmakers of all kinds to post their work, often of shorter form than those in traditional cinemas. Microfilms, often produced by amateurs and students and increasingly by professional companies, have exploded over the past few years, stretching the boundaries of what can be shown.

This week's update of a two-year-old [regulation](#) on the supervision of online dramas and microfilms has raised fears of stifling creativity. The broadcast administration now requires content makers to register with their real names, production companies to obtain operating licenses and report their content before it is put online, and video-hosting companies to keep records of uploaded content.

The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television said the purpose is to improve supervision of the Internet, cultivate a "healthy and civilized" online environment and prevent programs with excessively sexual and [violent content](#) from having a harmful influence on society.

Wei Jiangang, who makes microfilms with homosexual themes, said the industry depicts a multitude of topics and the government considers some—such as sex and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender themes—"very sensitive."



FIEL - In this Dec. 4, 2013 file photo, Chinese director Sun Zhendong, left, and his crew prepare to film the "Mr. Ball" online microfilm near a residential buildings in Changping, on the outskirts of Beijing. Chinese authorities are requiring makers of online films to gain licenses and report their content before it is posted, tightening regulation of what in recent years has been a more freewheeling genre than China's traditional film industry. (AP Photo/Andy Wong, File)

"The only purpose of such a policy I think is to affect the creativity of microfilm-making, and bring it into the regular censorship system so as to carry out ideological control of this gray area of online video," Wei said. "In cyberspace, there are loads of various opinions and voices, so the government surely doesn't want the online video market to escape censorship."

According to previous regulations, violators face fines of 20,000 RMB (\$3,300) to 50,000 RMB (\$8,200) and costs for possible damages, while

they may also be punished for a criminal offense if a crime is found to have occurred.

Broadcasting authorities already were required to censor uploaded content and faced regulations against sexually explicit and violent content, territory microfilms have strayed into as they chase viewers.

The new, tighter rules follow a more general crackdown on online expression. Since the summer, authorities have arrested dozens of people for spreading rumors, created penalties for people who post libelous information and told celebrity bloggers to guard the national interest.

Mark Natkin, managing director of Marbridge Consulting, a Beijing-based internet and mobile research company, said the updated regulation "is definitely more limiting" to microfilm makers.

"Among other things they have to now get a license which they are not assured of getting," he said. "And even if they get a license it means that they still need to clean up their content and as such it will probably be less attractive. Sex and violence both sell."

Online sites, including Youku Tudou, iQiyi and Sohu, declined to comment.

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