

China orders gaming giants to cut 'effeminate' gender imagery

September 9 2021



Shares in Tencent have been battered by China's crackdown on the gaming sector.

Chinese authorities have ordered gaming giants to end their focus on profits and cut content perceived to be breeding "effeminacy", as

Beijing tries to direct youth culture, gender ideals and the reach of big tech.

The move is the latest by authorities to tighten their grip on the embattled technology sector and sparked a collapse in the share prices of some of the industry's biggest names.

Officials on Wednesday summoned gaming enterprises including Tencent and NetEase, the two market leaders in China's multi-billion-dollar gaming scene, to discuss further curbs on the industry, which has already been ordered to limit children gaming time to three hours a week.

Among the new targets are media representations of men, which experts say are a cause for anxiety among the conservative, older generation of Communist Party leaders.

In recent days, regulators have ordered broadcasters to resist "abnormal aesthetics" such as "sissy" men, calling for more masculine representations in programming.

Late Wednesday, the official Xinhua news agency reported the latest edicts against gaming.

"Obscene and violent content and those breeding unhealthy tendencies, such as money-worship and effeminacy, should be removed," it said.

Enterprises who flout rules will be punished, authorities warned.

The target is driven by a perception among sections of society that "effeminate men are physically weak and emotionally fragile," University of Hong Kong associate professor Geng Song said, with the inference that 'feminine' men cannot defend the nation.

Song added that heterosexuality is seen as the only gender norm, leading to "anxiety" over more ambiguous representations of sexuality and identity.

Stocks tumble

"Some leaders may believe that excessive gaming is also contributing to a softening of character in young men," Derek Hird, a senior lecturer in Chinese Studies at Lancaster University, told AFP.

The latest talks add to tightening oversight on tech giants in the world's biggest gaming market, with Beijing rolling out rules to weed out the excesses of the culture among Chinese youth—from worsening eyesight to online addiction.

Besides breaking from a focus on profit and gaining fans, gaming businesses were also told to "change [game](#) rules and designs inducing addiction", said Xinhua.

Gaming companies have already stepped up restrictions on minors, drastically cutting the online gaming time of children to just three hours a week during term time.

Tencent rolled out a [facial recognition](#) "midnight patrol" function in July to root out children masquerading as adults to get around a curfew.

Investors, already on edge over recent crackdowns, ran for the hills Thursday, sending NetEase plunging 11 percent and Tencent 8.5 percent lower.

Other tech giants that have been caught in China's crosshairs recently were also hammered, with ecommerce titans Alibaba and JD.com each shedding more than 5.5 percent.

Traders had been cautiously buying back into the industry in recent sessions on hopes that the Chinese clampdown on private enterprises may be easing off.

"This demonstrates the risk for those attempting to call the bottom with so much uncertainty still hanging," Bloomberg Intelligence analyst Matthew Kanterman said.

"I don't think the overnight news is a big departure from that which we already knew, but the reaction clearly signifies the skittishness of investors around any regulatory news."

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Citation: China orders gaming giants to cut 'effeminate' gender imagery (2021, September 9) retrieved 8 May 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2021-09-china-gaming-giants-effeminate-gender.html>

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