

# Research on the Professional Mentality of Hengdian Drifter's

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**Background:** Hengdian drifters refer to outsiders who participate in shooting film and television dramas in Hengdian. It is a special group. Single access to information, precarious nature of work, unequal treatment of gender, constraints on development, and inadequate guarantee mechanisms are all to blame.

**Purpose:** This paper proposes to improve the ecology of the different actor industries by implementing a precise assessment.

**Patients and methods:** This study combines qualitative and quantitative research, adopts the questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview, and carries out fieldwork by personally experiencing the life of extras to study the ecological environment of the different actor industries and the professional mentality of extras. Before participating in the study, every participant would be offered an Informed Consent Form and all participants were guaranteed anonymity and their response will be used for a specific academic study. The Ethics Committee of the Zhejiang Normal University's, Specific academic study that will be published online. College of Teacher Education approved the study and participation of consents under 18 and the study followed the Declaration of Helsinki.

**Results:** There are gaps in social support. Little relevant policy support and financial support have not been implemented. Industry assessment criteria are not standardized. The level of digital management is low. It is difficult to guarantee the rights of mass actors.

**Conclusion:** Implement a precise assessment system, develop a refined talent evaluation mechanism, ensure the accuracy and transparency of the evaluation process. Establish digital service platforms, provide a new channel for the employment of artistic talents. Strengthen media publicity, strengthen policy support, raise social awareness.

**Keywords:** Chinese Hengdian drifters, professional mentality, industry dilemma, digital management

## Introduction

Hengdian, known as the "Hollywood of the East", is a palace of star-making where countless large-scale and exquisite movies were born. Like herbivores in the jungle, there are at least 200,000 extras yearly in Hengdian. They are like herbivores in the jungle. They can survive by being diligent and thrifty, but if they want to move to the top of the food chain, they will find that there is almost no grip. They do not even have an entire labor contract and remain in a "gray area" of legal protection.<sup>1</sup>

With the release of "I Am a Passerby", directed by Er Dongsheng, "Hengdian drifter" has gradually attracted public attention. The extra actor industry is also gradually standardized and transparent under the promotion of policies. In 2018, a delegation from the United Front Work Department of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee came to Hengdian to investigate the management and service of "Hengdian drifters" actors. It proposed that the Work Department set up a staff fellowship to create opportunities and build a platform for those promising actors. At the same time, with the emergence of brisk subject matter, light production, and younger audiences—the "Light Era" is taking shape in China,<sup>2</sup> constantly dismantling the influence of long history, big stars, heavy productions, and the extras usher in more opportunities.<sup>3</sup> After the depression caused by the epidemic, the different actor industry has gradually recovered. This research restores the status quo of the different actor industries from professional mentality and industry dilemma perspectives. It shows its actual situation to the outside world to achieve better development and allow people

who want to engage in this industry to understand this profession better. Occupation mentality contains the value, significance and ideal of occupation and reflects the personality characteristics of occupation psychology. In this paper, the concept representation of occupation mentality is the group's identification with occupation and its psychological reaction, including the negative psychology produced by the identification and disidentification of occupation.<sup>4</sup>

## Literature Review

### Study on the Survival Status of Extras

"Hengdian drifters" refers explicitly to the group of mass actors who gathered in Hengdian. Their existence is slightly disorganized, with a rent of 300RMB a month.<sup>5</sup> The word "drift" accurately describes this state, drifting without boundaries. "Hengdian drifter" is not an industry that can accumulate over time.<sup>6</sup> Many of them cannot hold on and give up in a short time, while new faces soon join them. Some of those committed to filming will ask for a character role when they are not worried about food and clothing, but within three months, they will say, "it does not matter what I play because I just want to be fed".<sup>7</sup> Some insisted on floating in Hengdian. They would carry a small book with dense notes about where they played corpses, how much money they earned, and which superstar they took part in.<sup>8</sup> During the day, they may stand in a world of make-believe in front of the camera, but at night they may be at a loss for tomorrow's living expenses and where they can get the next free boxed lunch for the crew.<sup>9</sup>

### Research on the Current Developmental State of the Extra Industry

#### The Current Management State of the Extra Industry

With the development of the Chinese film and television industry, the group plays this industrial chain rapidly develops and expands, but the loose management of industry organization is very obvious. The first is the arbitrary nature of the trade, which is currently conducted in two ways: the daily free-for-all at the studios and the "group leader" who rents rooms and keeps the actors in captivity, which inevitably leads to withholding labor payments. The second is about the rights of mass actors. 53.46% said they were mistreated at work, but only about 1.98% of the treatment has been reported to the law, indicating that the system of defending rights in the industry is not sound. Pepper's 2015 article *The Life of Mass Actors-a dream that cannot be put to rest* describes the gray industry chain of mass actors, in which layers of "middlemen exploit the wages of mass actors" and little is left in their hands. According to the actor Jiang Han, mass actors are often poorly treated by crew members and cheated by unscrupulous companies and pyramid schemes. It is not uncommon for first-time mass actors to fall into various scams accidentally.

In addition, there is a serious lack of laws in the industry. The relationship between the extras and the crew is a labor legal relationship, but extras as a special type of work do not exist in any of the labor relations stipulated in the Interpretation of the Supreme People's Court on Some Issues Concerning the Application of Law in the Trial of Labor Dispute Cases (III). So, they do not have the rights that labor law should have. The police and law enforcement agencies can only turn a blind eye when the extras' interests are damaged and only make amends when criminal cases occur.<sup>10</sup>

The earliest actors' unions in the United States were established to guarantee actors' basic welfare, working hours and working conditions.<sup>11</sup> With the growth of actors' groups and increased social attention, domestic actors' unions were organized, but protecting actors' interests was still not fully implemented. To this end, Liu Yanfei proposed to draw on the merits of the Screen Actors' Union in Hollywood and establish an extras' union with the nature of an association.<sup>10</sup>

#### Study on the Prospects of the Management State of the Extra Industry

Zhang Cheng in *Shortboard! Shortcomings!* Mass Actors focus on the despicable side of the industry. The mixed agents and the uneven quality of mass actors are all impediments to the smooth development of the industry. In an interview with assistant director Tie Ying, Wang Yang used Tie Ying's swords to convey the director and the crew's views on mass actors to the community: they are living props and challenging to manage, and there is indeed discrimination against mass actors within the crew.

Some new models of development have emerged from the traditional models. In 2011, A "Hengdian Drift" in Hengdian Film and Television City introduced the "Hengdian Stress Relievers", who are mostly stressed-out urban white-collar workers and take the opportunity to experience the life of the mass actor during their holiday travel and Zhang Daqian is one of them.

While waiting for his scenes, he records his life as a “drifter” on DV. He publishes his anecdotes as “Star News” posts, creating a new path for mass actors in today’s rapidly developing Internet economy. Dang Hong also explores the sociological significance and humanistic concerns embedded in the film *I am a Passerby*, affirming the value of the life and struggles of the mass actors.<sup>12</sup> Zhao Weifang comments on *The New King of Comedy*: The film focuses on a unique group of “mass actors” in the mainland, whose rich and diverse grassroots ecology has reawakened people to think deeply about mass actors and their current situation.<sup>13</sup> The 2019 Mass Actor Commune project holds a mass actor competition in Qingdao to select outstanding mass actors for the whole country while spawning a commune operating entity to drive offline education and training, funds, and actor agency projects on the ground.

The Hengdian actors’ union has been reformed in recent years to unify all scenes and mass actors. The original group heads have been forced to “lay off”. The union has also protected the mass actors, and anyone can complain to the unit manager and defend their rights.<sup>14</sup> Some schools and management bodies also pay more attention to the “Hengdian drifters: group”. For example, in 2017, Kong Ziyang proposed that training should be provided to “Hengdian drifters” in terms of bodybuilding and acting guidance to improve the essential quality of those actors and promote their living conditions to buoy up the development of Hengdian’s film and television industry.<sup>15</sup> Xiang Chenglong points out through his research and analysis that the training should be categorized according to the different situations of “Hengdian drifters”, focusing on the combination of demonstration and guidance, career simulation and teaching, and considering the use of interspersed teaching in the process of filming similar to that of a film set, while some courses on humanities and psychological guidance should be added to enhance the overall quality and build a comprehensive personality.<sup>16</sup>

## Review of the Study

Currently, the research on “Hengdian drifters” mainly focuses on “film literature”, including analysing the content of relevant films, filming methods, and other film art techniques. The analysis of the mass actors is still relatively scarce; a few studies have analyzed the plight of “Hengdian drifters” and the industry’s current situation, but there is no systematic description of the professional mentality of those actors and the development of the industry. Now, “Hengdian drifters” face pressure such as low quality, the gradual saturation of the market, and the recovery period after the epidemic. They are a unique group that urgently needs further planning and guidance for this profession regarding career mentality and industry development. However, the current research on “Hengdian drifters” can hardly meet this demand.

## Methods

This study combines qualitative and quantitative research, adopts the questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview, and carries out fieldwork by personally experiencing the life of extras to study the ecological environment of the different actor industries and the professional mentality of extras. Before participating in the study, every participant would be offered an Informed Consent Form and all participants were guaranteed anonymity and their response will be used for a specific academic study. The Ethics Committee of the Zhejiang Normal University’s, Specific academic study that will be published online. College of Teacher Education approved the study and participation of consents under 18 and the study followed the Declaration of Helsinki.

## Questionnaire Survey

Based on scholars’ previous research, through field research, preliminary questionnaire test and expert consultation, the questionnaire “Hengpiao career mentality and industry dilemma survey” was constructed to understand its career characteristics and current situation, career planning, personal ability, income and expenditure, etc.

Before the formal survey, the team carried out a small preliminary survey to examine the rationality of the question design and modified and improved the questionnaire based on the analysis results of the preliminary survey to carry out the formal survey. This survey questionnaire is mainly an online questionnaire. A total of 650 questionnaires were distributed in the form of random and online distribution. 7 missing and invalid questionnaires were eliminated, and 644 valid questionnaires were recovered, with an effective rate of 99.07%.

The preliminary analysis of the sample composition can found that, first, 94.41% of the samples are from the non-Zhejiang province, the age of 18–35 years old (78.6%), males accounted for as high as 73.29%, so “horizontal drift” is

a group of male youth outside the province as the main force; Second, 72.05% of the “horizontal drifters” in the sample are currently single, among which job instability, lack of car or house, and lack of security directly affect the difficulty of choosing a spouse. Third, the educational level is low, and they have received less performance-related training. Only 19.91% of Hengpiao have a bachelor’s degree or above, and 46.97% of Hengpiao have not received any performance-related training before becoming Hengpiao. There are 33.75% extras, 32.35% prospect actors, 11.66% group special actors in the survey sample, and the rest 22.24%, act as special actors or above types of group actors. Combined with the specific data provided by the Actors Guild, it is found that extras account for the largest proportion. And such as special, special actors will be much less. The following is the sample distribution structure:

## Semi-Structured Interview

The interview outline designed based on the core questions can deeply understand the current situation and mentality of the horizontal drifters, get more real and intuitive information, further explore the causes and development trends of the problems faced by the horizontal drifters, and lay the foundation for scientific and effective solutions.

This study selected 21 representative horizontal drifters, including 13 males and 8 females. The interview was conducted in the form of a face-to-face interview. With the permission of the interviewees, the interview recordings were arranged into written materials. They were coded in the format of “Interviewee order - gender - interviewee initials” to keep the interviewee’s information confidential.

## Fieldwork

The members of this study will conduct an in-depth field investigation to experience the life of “horizontal drift” by themselves. They will immediately obtain first-hand information through direct observation and field investigation and adjust the research content according to the situation to have a deeper understanding of the horizontal drift group. Time to maintain two weeks, in the whole process of investigation, members put aside the identity of students, in-depth experience of multiple cast horizontal drift work and life, and horizontal drift people to establish a good relationship, to carry out in-depth communication.

## Results

### Sample Structure and Basic Status

A total of 650 questionnaires were distributed, and 650 questionnaires were returned, with a return rate of 100%. After eliminating 7 invalid questionnaires, the actual number of valid questionnaires collected was 644, with an effective rate of 99.07%. The following is the basic information of the sample in [Table 1](#):

A preliminary analysis of the sample composition shows that 94.41% of the drifters in the sample are not from Zhejiang Province. Their age is between 18 and 35 years old (78.6%), with 73.29% being male, indicating that “Hengdian drifters” are a group constituted mainly by young men from the out-of-province. Secondly, 72.05% of the samples are currently single. The factors like unstable jobs, lack of cars and housing, and lack of security directly affect the difficulty of choosing a spouse. Thirdly, their educational level is low, and they have received little acting-related training. 46.97% of the “Hengdian drifters” said they had not received any acting-related training before becoming mass actors. Lastly, this industry has a hierarchical division with a pyramid shape. 33.75% of the survey samples are mass actors, 32.35% are foreground actors, 11.66% are figurants, and the remaining 22.24% act as guest performers. Combined with the specific data provided by the actors’ union, it is found that mass actors account for the most significant number of actors, while the types of actors, like guest performers, will be much less.

## Analysis of the Career Mindset of the “Hengdian Drifters”

### Initial Career Motivation: Dreaming is the Main Theme

Based on two dimensions, realistic value and emotional value, the study constructs “Hengdian drifters” career mindset as experiential, dreaming, realistic, and in-between types as realistic-experiential, realistic-dreaming, dreaming-experiential and realistic-dreaming-experiential. The following are the definitions of each type ([Table 2](#)).

**Table 1** The Distribution Table of Sample Structure

Features	Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	472	73.29
	Female	172	26.71
Age	Under 18	2	0.31
	18–25	280	43.48
	26–35	226	35.09
	36–45	90	13.98
	46–55	33	5.12
	More than 55	13	2.02
Educational background	Junior high school	110	17.08
	Senior high school	201	31.21
	College	205	31.83
	Undergraduate and above	128	19.88
Hometown	Inside Zhejiang province	36	5.59
	Outside Zhejiang Province	608	94.41
Marital status	Single	464	72.05
	Married	180	28.95
Relevant experience	Major in film and television	103	15.99
	Participated in film and television companies or outside training classes	114	17.70
	Have expertise in musical instruments, hosting or ventriloquism	89	13.82
	Others	124	19.25
	No relevant experience	302	46.89

**Table 2** Description of Different Professional Mentalities

Types	Features
Dreaming	I like acting very much, my dream is to become an excellent actor, and I work hard to be seen by others
Realistic	Taking into account the practical factors, in order to make a living, I want to make a lot of money; I am a graduate of film and television related majors and I am engaged in a professionally matched career; I have been discovered. Influenced or introduced by acquaintances; I have no more suitable jobs.
Experiential	Mainly to experience the life of an actor, and some to meet stars.
Realistic experiential	Between the reality type and the experience type, it not only takes into experiential account the real factors, but also has the purpose of experience.
Realistic dreaming	Between the realistic type and the dream-chasing type, it not only takes into dreaming account the factors of reality, but also pursues dreams.
Dreaming experiential	Between the dream-seeking type and the experiential type, it has both the purpose of experience and the dream.
Realistic dreaming experiential	Between the dream-chasing type, the experience type, and the reality type they have both the purpose of experience and the consideration of realistic factors, and they also have dreams in their hearts.

A psychometric scale is developed based on the definition of each type to judge the initial heart of “Hengdian drifters”. From the type frequency chart, it is clear that the percentage of the highest type is 26.2%, with dreaming as the initial intention. The total percentage of realistic-dreaming, dreaming-experiential, and realistic-dreaming-experiential types is as high as 44.2%, which means nearly 70% of the “Hengdian drifters” who choose to be mass actors are related to their dreams. Dreams are essential for them to get into this profession (Table 3).

**Table 3** Analyse of Different Professional Mentalities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Dreaming	169	26.2	26.2	26.2
	Realistic	103	16.0	16.0	42.2
	Experiential	51	7.9	7.9	50.2
	Realistic - experiential	35	5.4	5.4	55.6
	Realistic-dreaming	137	21.2	21.3	76.9
	Dreaming -experiential	96	14.9	14.9	91.8
	Realistic-dreaming-experiential	53	8.2	8.2	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	644	99.8	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	<b>System</b>	1	0.2		
<b>Total</b>		645	100.0		

The author also selected a few typical extras to have an interview. One of them was a young girl who had just arrived for a month and was at the age to study but came to work as a mass actor in Hengdian. She said, “It is quite hard, but it is my choice. I think slowly, and I will do better. After all, I can do what I like”. Her words also revealed how much she looks forward to this career. Another man in his thirties from Jiangxi worked in Hengdian for two years. He told us that his family was not supportive of him coming to Hengdian because he still had no stable relationship or job at age 30. However, despite his family’s opposition just for his dream, he came here saying, “I just want to have a try, and I am willing to be unsuccessful”. In addition, 80% of the 20 or so actors we interviewed mentioned their dreams when they talked about their career beginnings, so it was evident that “I have a dream” is the central theme for the actors and actresses who choose to work as mass performers. It is also the core motivation for the industry to remain vibrant.

Scholars Min Xu and Stijn Reijnders also found through interviews with 15 extras that most of them become extras with dreams and high aspirations. This coincides with our conclusion. But the difference is that they will be an experience is roughly divided into three phases, on the first stage, in addition to the dream of group play, also shows that group play “into” the media is the hope to express self through performance experience the other roles, and they think it is worth, as a kind of to explore and experience different lifestyles, there are even some actors who believe that they can have a double life in the real world and the media through acting. That’s something we have not dug into yet. But it is worth affirming that our conclusions all prove that group performance comes with a pursuit, but this pursuit is different for each person, and even for the same person, there will be earth-shaking changes when they go through different stages. When they first step into the film and television industry, most people wear “rose-colored glasses” and have a strong curiosity and desire to explore. Established destinations: defining success varies from person to person.<sup>17</sup>

“Do you feel that you have achieved your goals in Hengdian?” “How far do you plan to go in Hengdian?” When the mass actors were asked these questions, some had stony faces, and some were full of anticipation. Although the vast majority of the drifters come to Hengdian with the “dream of stardom”, after a while, they will re-examine themselves and set a more feasible goal for themselves, so what exactly is the definition of success for mass actors? (Table 4).

The data shows that 58.1% of the mass actors intend to become No.1 or No.2 protagonists, supporting actors, or guest actors. When asked to what extent they want to develop in Hengdian; 7.1% of them want to switch to behind-the-scenes work in film and television, such as group leader, director, scene manager, etc.; 12.2% of the extras imply that they want to make a wealthy living; and the remaining 18.1% have not set a goal, saying they will take one step at a time.

Some mass actors are enthusiastic about becoming the second Wang Baoqiang or hoping to get one or two critical roles in films and dramas. However, such goals are often challenging, and the possibility of achieving their goals is very low. We know that Wang Baoqiang is one in a million, while the rest may always be just a blurred back in the camera. In the interview, an older adult told us that he had been coming to Hengdian for nearly ten years. At first, he felt that he had a talent for acting and wanted to be seen by the director and the audience, but he had not gotten an opportunity to do so. He looked at the leads in their early twenties, speaking not very fluent lines

**Table 4** Analyse the Expected Level of Development

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	No.1 or No.2 protagonists, supporting actors or guest actors	374	58.0	58.1	58.1
	Group leader, director, scene manager, etc	46	7.1	7.1	65.2
	Start their own film and television company	28	4.3	4.3	69.6
	Make a rich living	79	12.2	12.3	81.8
	Have not set a goal	117	18.1	18.2	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>99.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Missing</b>	<b>System</b>	1	0.2		
<b>Total</b>		<b>645</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

in the spotlight, and recognized deeply the ceiling imposed by his origins and looks. How could the ordinary man stand out as the shining star among thousands of mass actors?

Hengdian is never short of light chasers, but what will happen to those tired “Hengdian drifters” who have been neglected, forgotten, and lost their light for so long? Perhaps they will lose their way and become one of the 18.1% who “do not set goals and take one step at a time”. Of course, when faced with reality, one has to keep one’s head down, and some of these actors think of changing their goals once they realize the market. Some of them have taken the opportunity to learn many skills and expand their network, and they try their hand at some behind-The-scenes work or even start a film company. The mass actors are also making short videos, editing, and scripting. Many of them can shine on cameras of their own. Another category of mass actors defines success as being able to live an affluent life. Whether an actor or behind-The-scenes worker, their first concern is to meet their needs, and they are perhaps more concerned with the stability of their lives than the ups and downs of the journey to their dreams.

## The Long Road to the Dream: The Ideal is Never the Reality

### Difficulty in Achieving Developmental Goals

When the actors were asked, “have you achieved your goals” only 6.2% said they had achieved them. Other 30.1% of the mass actors replied that they were probable to achieve them, but 34.2% suggested they were unsure about the results. It can be seen that the vast majority of the “Hengdian drifters” are still in the struggling stage, and only a tiny percentage of them achieve their goals. Therefore, some cannot persevere and finally leave with honest regret. A martial artist interviewed on-site answered, “I used to hope that I could work as a stuntman for the protagonists, but this business is all about youthfulness, often reversing day and night, which consumes the body’s health. Now that I am getting older, I cannot complete many movements. I cannot merely think about my dreams at work. Sometimes I feel that I am getting further away from my goal”. An aunt, a mass actress in her fifties, said, “When I was young, I came here to become a star, but I have been going round and round in Hengdian for many years and have t come across any opportunities. Although I am still holding on now, I am not as confident as I once was”. (Table 5).

### Long-Term Development Planning is Difficult

The data shows that the most extended duration of “Hengdian drifters” is 1 to 5 years, 25% within three months, 19.9% between 3 months and one year, and only 9.2% over five years, which indicates that it is difficult to hold on the work of mass actors for a long time. In addition, when comparing mass actors with different initial intentions, it is found that there are more realistic types than dreamers among the mass actors who have persisted for more than five years. Through in-depth interviews, it is noticeable that dream-type “Hengdian drifters” set reasonable goals for themselves at the beginning. Either ambitious or empty, they have to face many unknown challenges or even failures and are more likely to lose their way, so many will choose to give up. By contrast, realistic “Hengdian drifters” have clear and realistic goals and are willing to work hard for these visible and achievable goals without significant psychological disparity or psychological pressure. Thus, they are more likely to persevere and survive. However, regardless of the “Hengdian drifters” types, only a handful could stick around, just like the river flowing in and out (Table 6).

**Table 5** Analyse of the Degree of Goal Achievement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Has been realized	40	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Not yet, but very likely	194	30.1	30.1	36.3
	Not yet, medium possibility	190	29.5	29.5	65.8
	Not yet, and very unlikely	146	22.6	22.7	88.5
	Impossible	29	4.5	4.5	93.0
	No ideal	45	7.0	7.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>		644	99.8	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	<b>System</b>	1	0.2		
<b>Total</b>		645	100.0		

**Table 6** Analyse of Time to Be a “Hengdian Drifter”

			Time to Be a “Hengdian Drifter”				Total
			< 3 Months	3–12 Months	1–5 years	> 5 years	
<b>Type</b>	<b>Dreaming</b>	Count	30	37	85	17	169
		% within <b>Type</b>	17.8%	21.9%	50.3%	10.1%	100.0%
		% within <b>Time</b>	18.6%	28.9%	28.7%	28.8%	26.2%
		% of Total	4.7%	5.7%	13.2%	2.6%	26.2%
	<b>Realistic</b>	Count	22	12	47	22	103
		% within <b>Type</b>	21.4%	11.7%	45.6%	21.4%	100.0%
		% within <b>Time</b>	13.7%	9.4%	15.9%	37.3%	16.0%
		% of Total	3.4%	1.9%	7.3%	3.4%	16.0%
	<b>Experiential</b>	Count	21	15	14	1	51
		% within <b>Type</b>	41.2%	29.4%	27.5%	2.0%	100.0%
		% within <b>Time</b>	13.0%	11.7%	4.7%	1.7%	7.9%
		% of Total	3.3%	2.3%	2.2%	0.2%	7.9%
	<b>Realistic-experiential</b>	Count	12	9	14	0	35
		% within <b>Type</b>	34.3%	25.7%	40.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within <b>Time</b>	7.5%	7.0%	4.7%	0.0%	5.4%
		% of Total	1.9%	1.4%	2.2%	0.0%	5.4%
	<b>Realistic-dreaming</b>	Count	31	21	71	14	137
		% within <b>Type</b>	22.6%	15.3%	51.8%	10.2%	100.0%
		% within <b>Time</b>	19.3%	16.4%	24.0%	23.7%	21.3%
		% of Total	4.8%	3.3%	11.0%	2.2%	21.3%
	<b>Dreaming-experiential</b>	Count	34	22	39	1	96
		% within <b>Type</b>	35.4%	22.9%	40.6%	1.0%	100.0%
		% within <b>Time</b>	21.1%	17.2%	13.2%	1.7%	14.9%
		% of Total	5.3%	3.4%	6.1%	0.2%	14.9%
	<b>Realistic-dreaming-experiential</b>	Count	11	12	26	4	53
		% within <b>Type</b>	20.8%	22.6%	49.1%	7.5%	100.0%
		% within <b>Time</b>	6.8%	9.4%	8.8%	6.8%	8.2%
		% of Total	1.7%	1.9%	4.0%	0.6%	8.2%
<b>Total</b>		Count	161	128	296	59	644
		% within <b>Type</b>	25.0%	19.9%	46.0%	9.2%	100.0%
		% within <b>Time</b>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	25.0%	19.9%	46.0%	9.2%	100.0%

**Table 7** Analyse of Weather Considering Giving Up

		Have You Considered Giving Up			Total
		Considered Giving Up and Intending to Leave	Considered Giving Up But Still Holding On	Never	
Total	Count	74	390	180	644
	% Within Type	11.5%	60.6%	28.0%	100.0%
	% Wish considered giving up	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	11.5%	60.6%	28.0%	100.0%

In addition to the lack of development opportunities and the contradiction with survival, scholars Min Xu and Stijn Reijnders also mentioned another reason for the difficulty of extras' dreams: As extras participate in the production every day, they see the difference between "on screen" and "on set", witness and participate in the process of reconciling reality and fiction, and they will gradually break the filter on the film and television industry and experience the process of demystification. Therefore, many extras find that the job is not what they expected after a period of time. The hard-working environment, the no longer mysterious "inside story" of filming, and so on can shatter their dreams. Of course, some of them are welcomed as newly acquired "inside information", some of them go behind the scenes to learn and work on filming and lighting, and some of them learn to make their videos, as we mentioned in the previous "Definition of Success".

### The Winding Road Map: A Negative Career Mindset

When asked, "Have you ever considered giving up?" only 28% of the mass actors said "no". While all the rest admitted that they had considered giving up, 60.6% of them were still holding on. Most "Hengdian drifters" are not determined enough at heart, contrasting their initial professional mindset. The negative mindset can also be revealed through it.

Through the interview, it can be found that many of those extras who had considered giving up have no definite plans to do so. Some actors sighed, "I have been trying for so long. I want to try again, although I do not know how long I will have to wait". "Many of my friends have already gone back to their homes, but I am not sure what I can do, so I'm thinking of making a plan before making the next decision". "My girlfriend also persuaded me to change a job. However, I like performance, and I am quite entangled now". From the interview, three types can be concluded. Firstly, the actors want to hold on despite facing many obstacles. Secondly, they have no better options under this circumstance. Lastly, they are reluctant but unsure of their capabilities (Table 7).

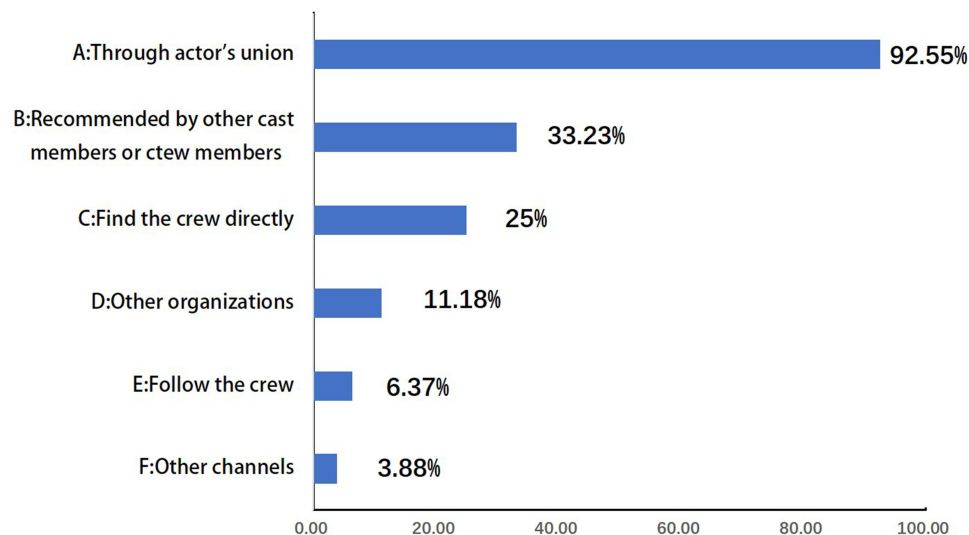
On the question of how long they can persevere, the data shows that the attitude of mass actors can be mainly classified into two categories, "It depends" and "I will always hold on until the day my dream comes true". These two options cover the views of nearly 90% of mass actors and could divide two different professional attitudes. While 57% of the people who replied "It depends" can prove the confusion of the mass actors about their careers, which is also a sign of negativity. Concerning achieving the career goals above, more than 60% of the mass actors are uncertain or even hostile about whether they can achieve their goals. This reveals that the current career ecology is not healthy.

In addition, the dreamers among the extras hold the second-highest proportion of negative mindsets. While the positive mindset like "I will always hold on until the day my dream comes true" stands at the second to last of all types. Therefore, it can be seen that although the dreamers come to Hengdian with the purest intentions, their professional mentality is more markedly divided and relatively more damaging than other types. It proves that the dreaming mass actors will become aware of the vast gap between reality and the ideal after a period of working life—their professional mentality changes, even in stark contrast to their original intentions (Table 8).

**Table 8** Analyse How Long Can You Hold on Crosstabulation

			How Long Can You Hold On					Total
			No Ideal	Be About to Leave	Hang on a Little Longer	Till the Dream Comes True	Always Stick	
类型	<b>Dreaming</b>	Count % within <b>Type</b> % within <b>How long can you hold on</b> % of Total	106 62.7% 28.5% 16.5%	2 1.2% 40.0% 0.3%	5 3.0% 15.2% 0.8%	46 27.2% 22.3% 7.1%	10 5.9% 35.7% 1.6%	169 100.0% 26.2% 26.2%
	<b>Realistic</b>	Count % within <b>Type</b> % within <b>How long can you hold on</b> % of Total	56 54.4% 15.1% 8.7%	0 0.0% 0.0% 0.0%	4 3.9% 12.1% 0.6%	39 37.9% 18.9% 6.1%	4 3.9% 14.3% 0.6%	103 100.0% 16.0% 16.0%
	<b>Experiential</b>	Count % within <b>Type</b> % within <b>How long can you hold on</b> % of Total	27 52.9% 7.3% 4.2%	1 2.0% 20.0% 0.2%	6 11.8% 18.2% 0.9%	16 31.4% 7.8% 2.5%	1 2.0% 3.6% 0.2%	51 100.0% 7.9% 7.9%
	<b>Realistic experiential</b>	Count % within <b>Type</b> % within <b>How long can you hold on</b> % of Total	24 68.6% 6.5% 3.7%	0 0.0% 0.0% 0.0%	2 5.7% 6.1% 0.3%	9 25.7% 4.4% 1.4%	0 0.0% 0.0% 0.0%	35 100.0% 5.4% 5.4%
	<b>Realistic dreaming</b>	Count % within <b>Type</b> % within <b>How long can you hold on</b> % of Total	70 51.1% 18.8% 10.9%	0 0.0% 0.0% 0.0%	8 5.8% 24.2% 1.2%	51 37.2% 24.8% 7.9%	8 5.8% 28.6% 1.2%	137 100.0% 21.3% 21.3%
	<b>Dreaming experiential</b>	Count % within <b>Type</b> % within <b>How long can you hold on</b> % of Total	58 60.4% 15.6% 9.0%	1 1.0% 20.0% 0.2%	5 5.2% 15.2% 0.8%	31 32.3% 15.0% 4.8%	1 1.0% 3.6% 0.2%	96 100.0% 14.9% 14.9%
	<b>Realistic dreaming experiential</b>	Count % within <b>Type</b> % within <b>How long can you hold on</b> % of Total	31 58.5% 8.3% 4.8%	1 1.9% 20.0% 0.2%	3 5.7% 9.1% 0.5%	14 26.4% 6.8% 2.2%	4 7.5% 14.3% 0.6%	53 100.0% 8.2% 8.2%
<b>Total</b>		Count % within <b>Type</b> % within <b>How long can you hold on</b> % of Total	372 57.8% 100.0% 57.8%	5 0.8% 100.0% 0.8%	33 5.1% 100.0% 5.1%	206 32.0% 100.0% 32.0%	28 4.3% 100.0% 4.3%	644 100.0% 100.0% 100.0%

Scholars Min Xu and Stijn Reijnders suggest, then, that those who have persisted in working in groups may have reasons for this: they have learned to live within a hierarchy while making plans for advancement; Acting itself helps them achieve certain changes in their roles, such as being more outgoing, more expressive, and learning to give of themselves on a new level.



**Figure 1** Channels to obtain information.

## Analysis of the Industry Dilemma for Extras

### Single Access to Information for Extras

As an emerging industry, the Hengdian Film and Television City Actors' Union was not established until it had a relatively standardized career model. The survey shows that the "Hengdian drifters" obtain work through actors' unions, theatre groups, and recommendations from other organizations. The actor's union is the main channel for mass actors to obtain most performance opportunities. Other channels have a greater test on the contacts of mass actors. The emergence of the actors' union has gradually changed the access to work from private to standardized (Figure 1).

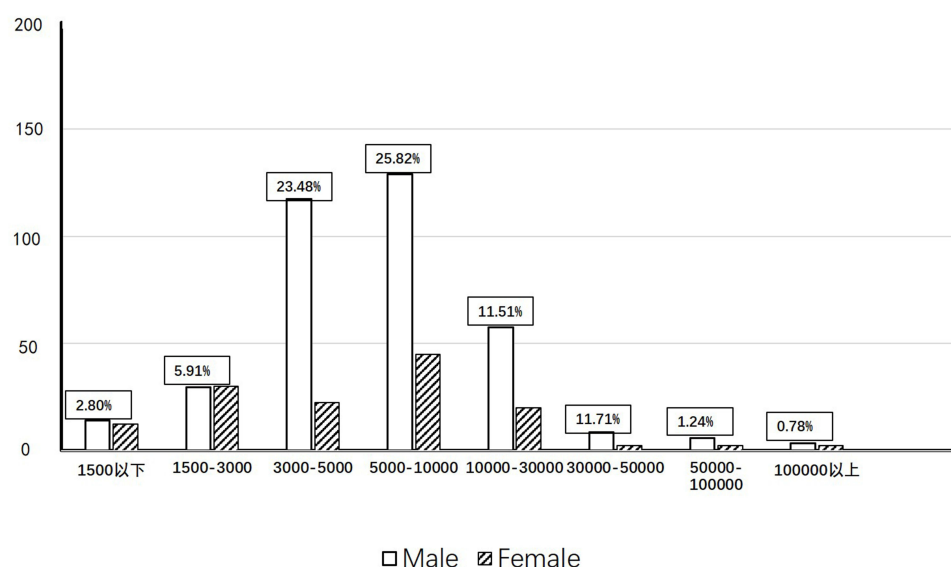
### The Unstable Nature of the Work of Extras

Firstly, the work schedule for mass actors is volatile, and they may face unemployment at any time. Due to the unique and short-lived nature of the work, the employment and liquidation cycle is often short, and the employment market is oversupplied. There are no employment contracts for mass actors. The "instant employment" is a standard description for their daily routine. Through the interviews, it is easy to learn that the job of a mass actor is to be contacted by the head of the group, who then signs up for the job according to the group's needs. The random nature of the selection of mass actors by the head means that every day the mass actor has to worry about whether they will have a job the next day, and it turns out that very few mass actors can get an everyday job. Without the protection of the employment contract, extras are at risk of losing their jobs at any time, and most of them complained in the survey that it is common for them to be treated unequally in terms of payment. The need to guarantee the job stability of mass actors following the law has become urgent for the large group of the "Hengdian drifters".

The second is the instability of working hours. This is mainly reflected in the uncertainty of working hours, working periods, and work cycles. The actors do not control their time when they join the cast and crew and must cooperate fully with the crew's schedule. "Extras' performance work is not tiring, but time-consuming." These were the words we heard most often while waiting on set. Because of such a chaotic schedule, the routine of the mass actors is also greatly affected, with irregular sleep schedules, disturbed biological clocks, day and night reversals, etc.

### Differences in the Professional Treatment of Male and Female Extras

The first is the difference in demand. The number of men in Hengdian is much larger than that of women, related to the demand for mass actors in Hengdian. According to the survey, the demand for men in Hengdian is much greater than that for women. Because men can undertake particular occupations such as martial arts, men have more job opportunities in Hengdian. Besides the financial pressure, women are also subjected to "hidden rules".



**Figure 2** Gender maximum monthly income bar chart.

The second is the difference in income. The survey shows that the highest income of the “Hengdian drifters” approximates a standard distribution curve. The proportion of men is more significant than that of women in all the ranges except the range of RMB 1500–3000. The lowest income of the groups implies that the proportion of men is much higher than that of women in all ranges (Figures 2 and 3).

## The Restrictions in the Career Development of Extras

### High Profile Threshold

The film and television industry demands much higher profile conditions than other industries. Ordinary mass actors must meet different profile requirements to become guest actors or foreground actors. However, it is not just good-looking faces that stand a chance. Film and TV dramas also need actors with quirky looks, so sometimes the distinctive-looking ones can meet the requirements, while the average-looking faces are the hardest to bring out. One guest actor was interviewed and said,

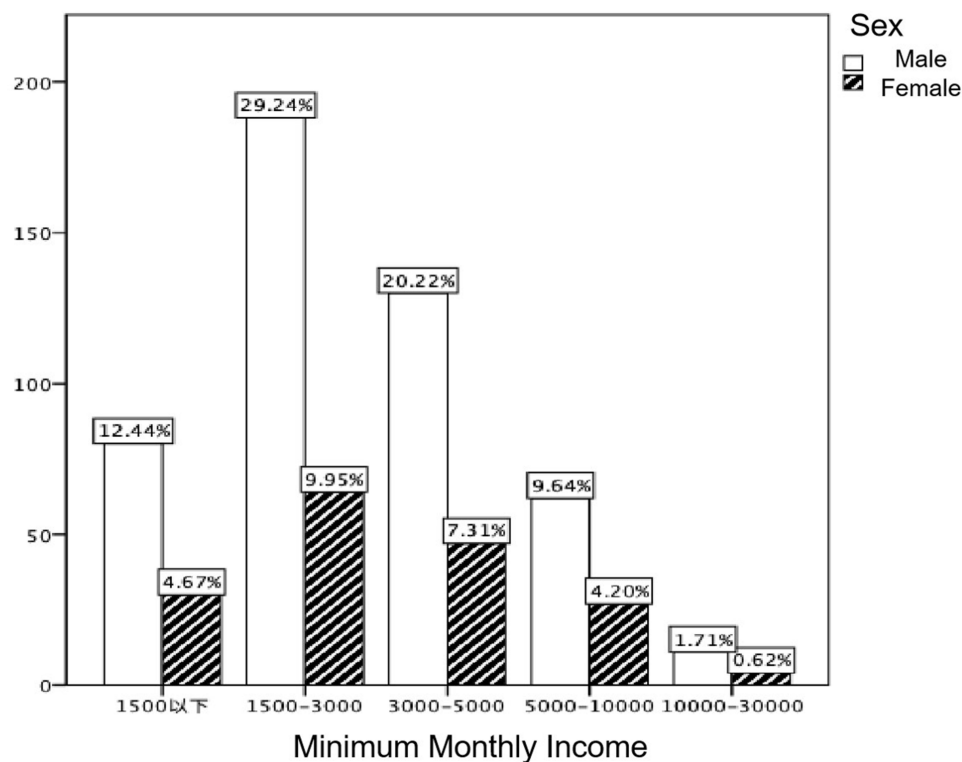
I am ugly, but I'm ugly with a twist! Without those characteristics, I probably would not have been approached for so many opportunities. You are good-looking and fit the criteria or have a distinctive look. It is hard to stand out in a mass actors' group with a famous face like an average person!

Of course, without outstanding appearance and good luck, the mass actors with average-looking faces will be undermined in the crowd.

The actors' union requires girls' hair only to be black and straight when applying for an actor's card. Having a crew card does not mean that you will be able to get a scene. Their appearance of them still needs to be approved by the director. Only the actors with good or distinctive appearances will be able to get more resources, while those with insufficient appearances will face barriers everywhere.

### Time-Consuming to Build Up

From the point of resources, the longer the time spent acting, the more resources you can have. The mass actors can have more ways to get good acting opportunities regarding their contacts, information channels, etc. From acting skills and experience, mass actors should improve their expressiveness and enrich their acting experience through constant practice and experimentation. Only in this way will they have the courage to challenge roles different from their family background. Similarly, good development is directly evident from financial income. The time spent as a “Hengdian drifter” is significantly correlated



**Figure 3** Gender minimum monthly Income bar chart.

with monthly income, with the longer time consuming, the higher the income. Thus, development in Hengdian takes time to build up, and the high cost of time has become a roadblock for most mass actors to persevere.

## The Crippling Mechanisms of the Job Security for Extras

According to the survey, mass actors have to pay for their own “five social insurance and one housing fund”, and the proportion of mass actors who have bought all of them is very small (about 6.37%). By contrast, 66.46% have not bought insurance, and 27.17% have paid only part. First, the cost of “five social insurance and one housing fund” is not a small figure for individuals. The extremely unstable income of the “Hengdian drifters” group, coupled with the pressure of survival, makes it hard for them to buy the insurance willingly. Meanwhile, the mass actors at Hengdian have a weak sense of self-protection, short long-term vision, and insufficient awareness of worries.

In the acting industry, the capital has reaped huge profits but has turned a blind eye to the rights and interests of these grassroots workers. With no contracts and commitments, the mass actors have no real lounge space, and the only personal protection they have is accident insurance bought by the actors’ union. It can be seen that there is still a big loophole in the protection mechanism, and there is still a long way to go before the interests of the extras are protected.

## Discussion

### Analysis of the Reasons Based on the Current Situation

#### There are Gaps in Social Support

Due to the low threshold for mass actors and the mixed community environment, the general public has a vague perception of mass actors. Their professional value is nowhere to be seen. Some believe working as a mass actor is a “waste of time” and “has no bright future”. As a result, many choose to give up their work as mass actors. Because of the bad label they were given early on, mass actors have not been well recognized. Their prejudice and misunderstanding are also reflected in the lives of mass actors. Surveys have revealed that the rate of singles among “Hengdian drifters” is very high, and the marriage situation for men, particularly, is bleak. When asked about this, some men answered that their

income is insufficient to support a family and that they cannot make a commitment to their spouses. Thus, they do not dare to think about marriage.

### **Little Relevant Policy Support and Financial Support Have Not Been Implemented**

Only a few policies can benefit this group of mass actors, or the current attention to them has not yet risen to the policy level. All the plans are about preliminary development proposals and general programs. Financial support is also very limited. Mass actors have always been in a “grey area” of legal regulation, where they have the fact of legal relationships but are not entitled to legal labor rights. For the extras, not accepting an acting role equals being unemployed without protection. One mass actor recalled the time during the epidemic

I was so impressed that there was a total shutdown over here, and we who lived here had to stay in rented rooms every day, with no money earned and daily expenses. We had nothing but the union’s spontaneous subsidy of 500 yuan for one person.

Compared with other professions, mass actors have almost no special policy, which shows how hard it is for them to survive.

### **There are Deficiencies in the Union’s Management System**

#### **Industry Assessment Criteria are Not Standardized**

The “Hengdian drifters” can be divided into four categories: mass actors, foreground actors, guest actors, and typecast actors. According to the current recruitment system for various types of actors, there are no fixed, unified, and open criteria for selecting foreground actors and guest actors. The selection is mainly based on the subjective judgment of the judges, so the differences between the actors attending the auditions in different batches are still very significant, which shows that the vague industry assessment and selection criteria make it difficult to ensure fairness of the industry. A mass actor said in our interview, “The actors’ union is not open and impartial, and the union has a big loophole for advertising actors.”

#### **The Level of Digital Management is Low**

Currently, the work information from the actors’ union is still sent through the WeChat group, lacking an intelligent website that can be easily operated, which will cause problems such as the delayed release of information and fragmented message reception. It is not only inconvenient to ensure that mass actors get the latest recruitment information the first time but also not conducive to the management staff summary and overall analysis of data. It greatly increases the work intensity of the management staff, so the orderliness of the WeChat group also needs to be examined. A “Hengdian drifter” replied in the interview, “Under the casting coordination imposed by the actors’ union, the mass actors do not have direct contact with the director, and everyone can only be in a group with a report for the scene. When fighting for a role, everyone has to fight for internet speed, making it more difficult to get an opportunity.” It is common for most mass actors to receive fewer than a few scenes in a month. The low level of digital management and the high cost of manual management in Hengdian has led to its inefficient management.

#### **It is Difficult to Guarantee the Rights of Mass Actors**

It is said that apart from the actor’s contract, there is no employment contract between the mass actors and the actors’ union, which makes it hard to protect the rights and interests of the mass actors, who are at risk of being “unemployed” at any time. Since the mass actors’ employment agency is not an agency with a business registration license, the loose partnership with the crew or “group leader” is not permanent and stable. Therefore, it does not have the typical characteristics of a basic labor relationship. Although such a relationship should be considered the labor relationship, the legal rights and interests of mass actors are hardly protected due to the verbal agreement and the single management organization of the industry. There is no other way for the “Hengdian drifter” community to establish a legal labor relationship.

## Limitation

First, the sample coverage rate is low. Compared with the more than 200,000 transverse floating populations in Hengdian annually, the 644 samples are not representative enough. Second, in the questionnaire survey, it is difficult for the horizontal drifters to overcome subjective assumptions, low cultural level and uneven personal quality, which will inevitably lead to bias in the survey results, which will interfere with the survey to a certain extent. The research on career mentality is still not deep enough, especially in the method and content are very large room for expansion; The current countermeasures and suggestions are biased towards direction guidance and have not been refined to be implemented.

## Conclusion

### Recommendations

#### Implement a Precise Assessment System

##### Develop a Refined Talent Evaluation Mechanism

The key to implementing the refined assessment system is to formulate a refined talent evaluation mechanism and strive to improve the evaluation mechanism for different types of extras. It includes the specification of the image of the extras, the multi-angle evaluation of the quality of the actors, and the optimization of the selection system standards. The quality of the actors should be considered from the aspects of vocal music, lines, body, and performance, broaden the dimension of the grade evaluation standard, and refine the scoring rules. With the help of big data, continuous tracking of actors' work can be used to realize the whole assessment process. The assessment results are included in the selection and scoring range to optimize the actor quality rating evaluation system.

##### Ensure the Accuracy and Transparency of the Evaluation Process

The accuracy and transparency of the evaluation system and the order of the selection process should be ensured to realize the effective implementation of the refined extras rating system. Therefore, it is necessary to set up relevant institutions to supervise the selection process, negotiate with the crew to formulate talent evaluation mechanisms and method standards, stipulate the specific process of evaluation, maintain the order of the process, ensure that evaluation standards, evaluation process, and evaluation results are released to the public on time to accept social supervision and achieve accurate, transparent, and order. Establishing a transparent and accurate evaluation system cannot be separated from the efforts of evaluators. The evaluation system should be set up to punish illegal behaviors such as black-box operations. The actual evaluation results should be connected with evaluators' appointment, selection, evaluation, and promotion to improve their sense of responsibility and evaluation ability.

##### Establish Digital Service Platforms

They rely on the Internet to establish a comprehensive service system for actors, performing arts companies, and relevant government departments. Through real-time updating of artistic talent data and recruitment information, the employment problem of "Hengdian drifters" groups will be improved, and the development of Hengdian's characteristic culture will be further promoted. Specifically, it mainly includes three parts. First, establish a talent resource information database, update data in real-time, implement dynamic management, realize the sharing of artistic talent information in the region, and form a personal small resource center for each different "Hengdian drifters" actor. Second, integrate recruitment information. Establish links with recruitment websites to realize information sharing, dig out recruitment information of various performing arts companies in an all-round, multi-angle and deep way, and classify recruitment information from roles, salary, working hours, special requirements, and other aspects of talent needs of performing arts companies. Third, interactive services with relevant government functional departments should be informed. According to the platform data, government departments should guide "Hengdian drifters" groups to flow to areas where artistic talents are needed and improve talent sharing efficiency based on optimizing talent structure allocation. At the same time, it can also create the operation mode of "digital" Hengdian World Studios in the new era, provide a new channel for the employment of artistic talents, integrate various regional cultures in the "Hengdian drifters" culture and carry out cross-field transformation, to make it become a cultural resource with economic benefits.

## Raise Social Awareness

### Strengthen Media Publicity

Firstly, the forms of media publicity should be diversified. The specific method is to create a Weibo website, forum, WeChat official account, and other self-media dedicated to the “Hengdian drifters” family. It can also be promoted through news media, promotional texts, banners, LEDs, and support peripherals. Second, establish a sound media management mechanism, and implement media propaganda funds to produce propaganda materials, awards, and subsidies for outstanding propaganda staff. At the same time, the channels for propaganda, appeals, and expressions should be broadened, and the Weibo, WeChat, and client terminals of relevant functional departments should be established and improved to make their publicity and appeal expression mechanism that concentrates people’s wisdom.

### Strengthen Policy Support

First, strengthen legislation and improve the legal support system. The legal nature of the cast and crew should be determined legislatively, and the nature of extras’ work should be further determined. Rules and regulations for extras protection should be established within the crew, such as regulating the contract system between the crew and the masses. Second, increase financial assistance and improve the fiscal and taxation support system. Increase the innovation capital injection of the Hengdian film and television industry, invest more financial support for the “Hengdian drifters” group, and encourage the local government to provide a guarantee fund to help the “Hengdian drifters” start a business and solve the problem of re-employment. Third, establish a sound social service system. The government should help the “Hengdian drifters” groups obtain more basic rights and interests and allocate various service resources reasonably.

## Future Studies

The future research direction of this topic should focus on putting countermeasures and suggestions into practice from the theory, closing the internal connection between causes and countermeasures, filling the gaps in policies and institutions, regularizing and rationalising the occupation of horizontal drift, and forming a set of optimization mechanism that can be implemented. About drifting group professional point of view, should use a more scientific and precise method of psychological research, make a clear definition of the constituent elements of drifting professional mentality, characteristic dimension, influence mechanism and so on, so that more accurate assessment of the professional mentality development tools, explore the stage characteristics of drifting professional attitude, develop more effective career development planning, etc. and authors studies directions for the future research: how to implement the proposed countermeasures from theory to practice, and further refine and optimize the system.

## Disclosure

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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