

WU YIXUE

Political advice is serious business

Many celebrities from Hong Kong were made members of provincial political consultative conferences across China this week, sparking a heated public debate.

One such celebrity is Hong Kong film star Stephen Chow Sing-chi, who ought to have participated in the opening session of the Guangdong provincial political advisory body's conference on Wednesday. But he was absent.

Hong Kong actress Diana Peng, who is rumored to have acted in some adult movies in the early part of her career, was made a political adviser in Gansu province on Tuesday, sparking an even fiercer online debate than Chow.

Some people have questioned the selection of non-local celebrities as members of political advisory bodies. Such questions are not justified, but the celebrities should better fulfill their social and political duties to win people's trust.

Article 20 of the charter of the top political advisory body says: "The National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference shall be composed of the Communist Party of China, the various democratic parties, public personages without party affiliation, people's organizations, ethnic groups and people of all walks of life, compatriots of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Macao Special Administrative Region and Taiwan, returned overseas Chinese

and specially invited personalities, who are divided into a number of sectors. The composition of the CPPCC local committees shall be made up in the light of the local actual conditions with reference to that of the CPPCC National Committee."

That means, local advisory bodies can appoint influential people from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan as members, just as the national political advisory body does. After all, good advice from entertainment industry celebrities, businesspeople and sports stars can be helpful for local development.

In this sense, the appointment of Chow, who is "very interested in politics and feels honored to be a political adviser", as a member of the Guangdong political advisory body seems a win-win development for both parties. The inclusion of a film star from Hong Kong as political adviser in Guangdong can help expand cultural exchanges between the two places. And if his suggestions yield good results, they can lead to a boom in Guangdong's cultural industry.

Peng has said she is willing to invest more in Gansu's film industry.

Those who enjoy talking about her rumored early career life ignore her struggle as a nobody to become a professional actress. Her proposal can help the relatively underdeveloped northwestern province to prop up the local economy if she can win more support.

Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing and

his son Richard Lee are members of Beijing's political advisory body, and along with other members from Hong Kong they are doing their job quite well. For instance, speaking at the Beijing political consultation conference on Monday, Richard Lee suggested ways to improve the capital's air quality.

Of course, the celebrities, no matter from Hong Kong or the mainland, have to fulfill their duties. Experience tells us that people who excel in the entertainment industry, sports fields or business are not necessarily good political advisers.

A political adviser has to spend a lot of time perusing reports and records, and investigating events, as well as keeping himself abreast of news and current affairs to come up with practical and helpful proposals.

No wonder, people are asking how can celebrities, given their tight schedules, take time out to play the role of a constructive political adviser. And Chow's absence from the opening session of the Guangdong advisory body's conference has lent credence to their view.

Many entertainment and sports stars have been made members of the national as well as local political advisory bodies. They include filmmakers Zhang Yimou and Feng Xiaogang, actress Gong Li, TV anchor Ni Ping, skit star Zhao Benshan and 2004 Olympic 110m hurdle champion Liu Xiang.

But despite their outstanding

achievements in their respective fields, their selection as political advisers have created controversies. Indeed, some of them have failed to fulfill their responsibilities.

The absence of Liu Xiang from four annual sessions of the national committee of the country's top political advisory body sparked a fierce online debate, with many netizens seeking his disqualification as a member.

Ni Ping evoked a public uproar at the 2011 annual session of the top advisory body by saying: "I love my country, so I have never cast a negative or abstention vote".

Some people interpreted her remarks as incompetent, while others said she should be disqualified as a political adviser.

Other cases can be cited to show how incompetent some celebrities-turned-advisers have been. Their frequent absence from important advisory body meetings and their inability to come up with good proposals have undermined their position.

Since people are becoming increasingly sensitive to celebrities, China's political advisory bodies, both national and local, should remove incompetent members and offer the limited seats to more people who can really read public opinion and submit good, workable proposals for national and local development.

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LETTERS

Go green before it's too late

Beijing residents hoped to see clear blue skies after Sunday's snowfall. Monday morning held promise and people thought that Beijing would be spared another round of high (rather hazardous) pollution level this winter.

But Tuesday proved them wrong. The Beijing air was thick with suspended particulates by the evening, which seemed an ominous sign for the week ahead.

China became the talking point across the world for the wrong reason just a few days ago because of the smog and pollution levels in a large part of the country. And it seems we are set to suffer another spell of high pollution in the days ahead.

Beijing residents are praying for strong winds to blow away the smog from the atmosphere. True, strong winds can bring relief for Beijingers. But they will not solve the pollution problem of the country. At best, the winds will carry the suspended particulates to a neighboring place, Hebei province or Tianjin municipality, for example.

Hebei is already experiencing high pollution levels. Thick smog and low visibility forced the cancellation of many flights from Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital, and closure of 22 of the 27 expressways on Tuesday. Can we imagine what will happen if strong winds blow more suspended particulates from Beijing to Hebei?

This winter has been the coldest in decades in China and is partly responsible for the thick smog enveloping parts of the country.

But again wild weather fluctuations can be blamed on climate change, and climate change is directly related to environmental pollution. The only permanent solution to the smog problem is to shift from fossil fuels to clean and renewable energy.

The government has indeed taken measures to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. But it has to expedite its efforts and restore the environment before it is too late.

JOHN-EE, via e-mail

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STEPHAN RICHTER

US faces the gun and tax cliffs

The fiscal cliff and the "gun cliff" — the two big tasks US President Barack Obama faces in his second term — are not separate issues. The resolution of both will speak volumes about the true grit of American civilization.

The trouble with the United States is simple: Virtually all the problems it faces, from guns to taxes, are eminently solvable. But solving them requires a basic sense of right and wrong, and that is precisely what is in question.

As its "moral compass", the US relies on an ill-fated, mechanistic concept of splitting the difference. That may sound like pragmatism but is not given that one side regularly negotiates from cynical, extremist positions.

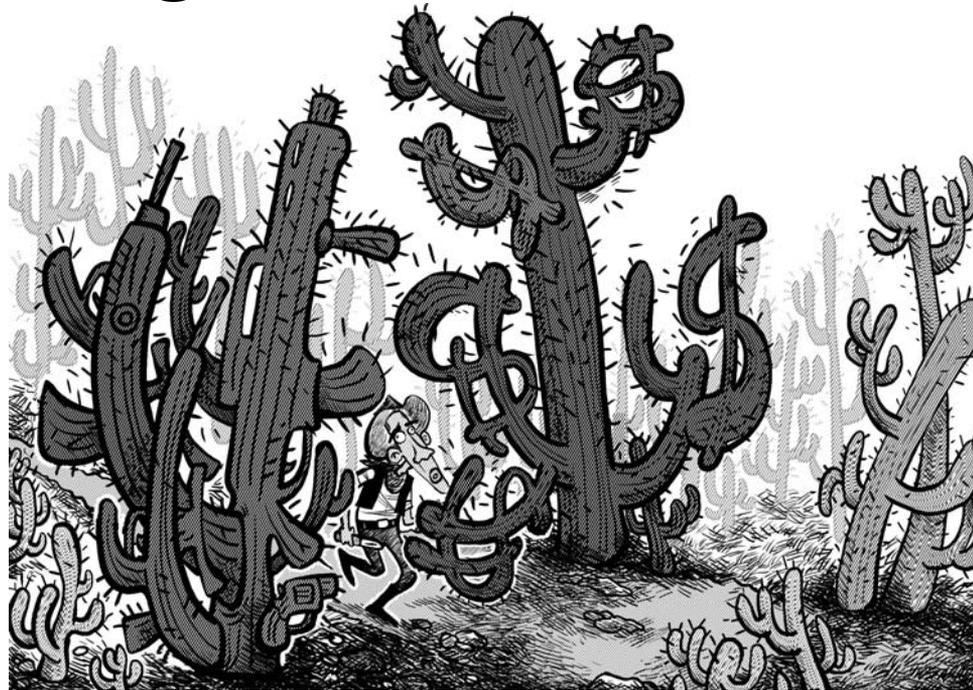
Viewed in a global context, what is at stake is not just a stronger US economy or a tougher gun law. At stake is American civilization itself.

For all the pride that has traditionally been wound up in America's greatness, a society that is fundamentally incapable of agreeing on the most basic issues of fairness and decency at home puts more under threat than just the question of governability. That may sound like a stretch, but only initially, if one asks where is the evidence that the US, considering its level of economic and political development, is any more peaceable and governable than Egypt.

Somehow, the US seems stuck in the concepts of the Old Testament. The perverse self-justification of all those gun buyers who now sheepishly argue "why should my freedom be restricted just because some kids got shot?" attests not just to a level of naiveté, but inhumanity that begs disbelief.

It remains to be seen whether, on the gun issue, Obama really achieves more than the customary default position of other US presidents in times of national tragedy. Serving as the sermonizer-in-chief is a far cry from providing effective leadership. And yet one can feel with the US president. Outlawing and collecting all assault weapons would seem to be the most basic measure of civilization in any society.

The crux of the issue is that Americans must abandon their childish ideas of an island unto himself or herself. We all live as part of a much, much larger group. The people must understand that using assault weapons for hunting or shooting is not an expression of



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freedom, but an expression of human sickness or perversion.

The US National Rifle Association has 4 million members, and far from all favor the essentially unrestricted use of assault weapons. And yet American politicians and society are afraid to take on the gun lobby.

What the NRA is peddling is an incredible hoax. Americans can no longer go on accumulating limitless debt but they can still buy weapons at every Walmart and plenty of other stores. The offer on hand to deal with one's frustrations is not to consume, but to shoot.

The blindness of American society, which is generally a very fearful one, is staggering. Putting that many weapons out there — almost 1 for every American man, woman and child — is not just bewildering. It is plain dumb.

Republicans always cherish supply-side economics. They ought to know that the stuff out there will exhibit a tendency to be used. In addition, these are nerve-wracking times for many people. They feel extremely insecure economically. Seeing Americans going on a gun-buying spree in the decade when incomes stagnated and a quarter of the population was

for all practical purposes unemployed must be considered somewhat suicidal.

It is not unlike the "wisdom" shown by the Reagan administration to equip Afghan "freedom fighters" with stinger missiles to shoot down Soviet helicopters. It sounded good until the day American planes in the skies over Afghanistan were being shot down with the same US-made weapons.

The US should fix its problems not for people abroad to continue holding it in high regard. It ought to do so for one reason and one reason alone: self-preservation. Self-preservation of the nation, by the way, was the sole intent of the Second Amendment, contrary to how some recent court cases have sought to reinterpret the US constitution to serve the commercial arguments promoted by the NRA and its acolytes.

The only grammatically correct way to read the Second Amendment ("A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.") is not to see it as two independent clauses. Rather, the first half clearly qualifies (in fact, conditions) the second.

Moreover, the oppressor against whom the people need to militate today is no longer the state. If anything, it is the NRA and other gun-toting people who hold civilized America hostage with their gun fetish.

The people cannot defend themselves against the proliferation of assault weapons and other unnecessary weapons, but their "state" — their government — can. Self-preservation is the one and only reason the US should resolve the gun issue. If it fails that test, it will have a hard time staying on the track of modernity.

As a matter of fact, after the Newtown school massacre, there cannot be any doubt that a revised Second Amendment to the US constitution is urgently required. And it should read: "A well regulated society, being necessary to the security of a free people, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall be abridged." The very notion of civilization demands no less.

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FROM THE CHINESE PRESS

Ticket booking app unfair to many

The "battle" for train tickets to travel during Spring Festival has intensified in recent days. Relevant departments have implemented stricter supervision measures for online and telephone booking, as well as for sales from counters. The measures to make online ticket booking easier have definitely helped some people, but they have also infringed the rights of others to buy tickets, says an article on xinhuanet.com. Excerpts:

Tech-savvy people are using a browser that allows users to "jump" ahead of others when booking train tickets online. The browsers also have add-ons designed to help people buy seats at 12306.cn, the official ticketing website of the Ministry of Railways. The software has become extremely popular with Internet- and apps-friendly people before the Spring Festival travel rush.

The browsers also have a function that alerts users to refund and issue of tickets immediately, which has made it convenient for some people to seize the opportunity and book a ticket.

But people who don't know how to use the "smart" software are finding it increasingly difficult to book a ticket and their desperation is growing by the second. The "smart" browser has further magnified the unfairness that technological development can bring about.

There is no doubt that the browsers have plugged many a loophole in the online ticketing system, but they have become gimmicks in the hands of people who are out to break social rules.

People's anxiousness to get a train ticket mirrors their desperation to return home to enjoy Spring Festival with their families. But desperation should not be an excuse for some people to twist the rules of fairness to their advantage and undermine social equality.

Many people speaking about "fairness" do not even bat an eyelid before using unfair means and violating social rules to fulfill their interests. A fair social order can be built only if all citizens respect and obey the rules. And the enterprises selling the "smart" browsers should realize that their software is making life difficult for those not familiar with the Internet and apps.

The majority of migrant workers, who comprise a large number of train passengers during Spring Festival, are not familiar with the Internet and might not even know how to use such software. Trains are part of the public transportation system and should provide equal opportunity to everyone to travel, irrespective of whether or not they know how to use the Internet.

The railway authorities should take steps to improve the ticket booking system in way that helps everyone, especially migrant workers. They should also try to increase the number of trains during Spring Festival to help more people to travel home to enjoy the holidays with their families and friends.

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