LIFE

SUPER IDOL REWRITES THE SCRIPT

Seeking better work-life balance, multi-talented celebrity with nearly 42 million Weibo followers broadcasts his relationship with nature and climbing, **Xing Wen** reports.



Above: Popular idol Wang Yibo has found a sense of work-life balance by immersing himself in mountains and on rocky terrain, starring in documentary *Exploring the Unknown with Wang Yibo*.
Inset: A poster of the documentary. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

For China's 28-year-old super idol, Wang Yibo, the rhythm of life has long been set to the relentless beat of the entertainment industry — counted in takes, tracks, and flashbulbs.

"I worked so much that I had almost no life of my own," he reflects.

Born in Luoyang, Henan province, Wang began learning street dancing at a very young age, which later led him to become a member of a popular boy group.

Over the past decade, he has taken on various roles: TV variety show host, dance mentor on talent shows, actor, singer, and professional motorcycle racer, all of which have cemented his status as one of the country's most sought-after idols, with nearly 42 million followers on Sina Weibo.

But in recent years, he decided to rewrite the script.

By creating and starring in a documentary series following his journeys into some of the planet's most untouched lands, he has found true work-life balance. Produced by Warner Bros. Discovery, the first season of *Exploring the Unknown with Wang Yibo* took him on rare adventures, including trekking through rainforests in Hainan province with outdoor experts to track gibbons and attempting to ski in Qinghai province, as well as exploring karst caves, rappelling into colossal sinkholes, and rock climbing in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

"When I first entered the entertainment industry as a teenager, I pushed myself relentlessly and worked extremely hard. But eventually, I felt utterly exhausted and longed to step outside and connect with nature," says Wang.

"Every response I get from nature is the most genuine kind of feedback."

On May 20, the series became a gold award-winner in the series-documentary category at the United States' 46th Telly Awards.

Notably, his first encounter with climbing during production sparked a lasting passion, one he continues to pursue in the series' following season.

The new season, recently aired on Tencent Video, follows Wang on a six-week North American RV (recreational vehicle) road trip. Along the way, he trains at climbing spots, practicing disciplines such as traditional climbing, aid climbing, and deep-water soloing.

All of this builds toward the journey's ultimate goal — to complete a multiday ascent on the Liberty Cap's massive rock face in Yosemite National Park.

"Making this documentary is a great way to achieve work-life balance. I'm doing what I love while also working," Wang says.

This season invites American Jimmy Chin, a professional mountaineer, photographer, skier, Oscar award-winning film director, and rock climbing enthusiast, as Wang's climbing mentor, along with James Ryder Stroud, an American Mountain Guides Association certified climbing guide who served as Wang's climbing partner.

With Chin and Stroud's guidance and companionship, Wang completed challenges such as a crack climbing route in Indian Creek and a traditional multi-pitch route up Castleton Tower in Utah, as well as an independent attempt at aid climbing in Squamish, Canada.

Along the way, Wang also met people from various professions and joined them in experiencing activities such as tree climbing, fishing, slacklining, mountain biking and disc golf.

"Climbing requires constantly challenging and pushing yourself, which is what attracts me to it," Wang says.

"It allows me to connect with nature while also providing a sense of physical strain or risk exposure. These sensory experiences make me feel truly alive."

"Climbing pushes you outside your comfort zone. It's scary and hard, and you fail all the time. And you have to learn how to embrace failure and get better," adds Chin.

"It takes discipline and focus, and makes you very present. You are not thinking about the future; you are not thinking about the past; you just think about the next five feet.

"The best part is that Wang is genuinely stoked. You can see how much fun he's having," Chin observes.

Thanks to the documentary's two seasons, an increasing number of people have learned about the sport of climbing.

Many viewers have followed in Wang's footsteps from the first season by visiting Yangshuo county in Guangxi, which boasts over 70 independent crags and more than 1,200 climbing routes, to learn rock climbing.

He Lingxuan, president of the Yangshuo Climbing Association, says the county features a high concentration of classic southern karst cliffs within a very compact area.

"The angles for finger grips and the footholds for applying pressure are more naturally ergonomic compared to artificial climbing walls," he says.

Liu Yongbang, the rock climber who introduced Wang to climbing in the first season, notes: "After the program aired, many trainees have approached me to book the same climbing route that Wang embarked on."

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Wang talks with one of his climbing guides in an episode of the documentary.









Above and below: The new season of *Exploring the Unknown with Wang Yibo*, recently aired on Tencent Video, follows him on a six-week North American RV road trip during which he trains at various climbing spots, practicing disciplines such as traditional climbing, aid climbing and deep-water soloing.

