

YOUTH



Staging a successful college activity

Star director among speakers at forum on campus theater, **Chen Nan** reports.

Renowned playwright and director Stan Lai misses his days as a student when he first started making plays in a school theater.

Now, of course, it is much more organized. There's a script, a director instructing the cast and crew on where to go and what to do. There's a cast performing what's on the script, and there's a crew undertaking various jobs, such as working on makeup, stage sets, music and lighting.

"Back then we had nothing but pure passion and a dedication to theater. A couple of friends shared the same views about theater and we worked hard to realize our ideas onstage," says Lai, 68, who was born in Washington and returned to Taiwan, where his family hailed from. He studied dramatic art at the University of California, Berkeley, where he received his PhD in 1983.

His famous works, including *Secret Love in Peach Blossom Land*, *A Dream Like a Dream* and *The Village*, are regarded as classics of Chinese language theater.

"Theater is something that anyone can enjoy, and that everyone should attempt to join in with at some point in their time on campus," says Lai.

Lai was one of the guest speakers who opened the *Cross-Straits, Hong Kong and Macao Forum on Campus Theater*, which was held in Beijing on Nov 11.

With theater directors, scriptwriters and scholars from the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, the forum introduced the history of campus theater. Guest speakers shared career stories and views about current campus theater.

From Nov 11 to Sunday, 11 plays with a range of styles from the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan were streamed on Bilibili, a Chinese video-sharing platform. These include *Murdered a Cowboy* by the University of Macau and *A Feast*, jointly produced by Taipei University of the Arts and Fujian Normal University.

"Theater brings people together.



“Theater is something that anyone can enjoy, and that everyone should attempt to join in with at some point in their time on campus.”

Stan Lai, playwright and director

From top: Eleven campus theater productions were streamed online this month, including Chinese play *Zhua Zhuang Ding* ("capturing able men for the military") performed by students from Sichuan Normal University; a scene from *Jing Chai Ji* ("a romance of a hairpin") staged by the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts; and another play, *Pottery Figure Reviving*, co-produced by Communication University of China and the National Museum of China.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The exchange programs and collaborative projects among universities help the campus theater scene develop," says Hu Wei, a professor at the Central Academy of Drama. Hu recalls that the school worked with Tunghai University in Taiwan to launch a series of activities for students from both schools several years ago, such as sharing classes and creating plays together.

"Students from different backgrounds and with different views about theater become teams and learn from one another," she told the forum. "This kind of collaboration and communication also benefits students with different majors, even those who are not majoring in theater."



Scriptwriter and director Gu Lei became interested in theater as a student and later launched a stage career. Though he planned to become a scientist after graduation, his love of theater developed after he joined a school drama club.

In 2001, the year when Gu graduated from Beijing Institute of Technology with a major in biochemical engineering, he participated in the first theater festival for college students in Beijing, which was organized by the Beijing Theatre Association. His work, *Woyzeck*, adapted from German dramatist Georg Büchner's classic play of the same name, won the festival's top award, which propelled Gu to stardom.

"When I was a student, I wanted to express all my feelings through writing, directing and acting. I had a great time," recalls Gu, who worked with renowned director Lin Zhaohua while pursuing his master's degree at the Beijing

Institute of Technology in 2003.

In 2014, Gu founded his own theater company, which has been producing, on average, two new plays every year and is one of the best-known theater companies in the country.

"As time goes by, my life changes, which also brings changes to my plays. But I am still a theater enthusiast — that has not changed," Gu says.

During the forum, theater experts from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan joined online.

One of them was Mok Ian Ian, a PhD in Chinese theater who graduated from the University of Nanjing, and a renowned writer from Macao.

She says that Macao had the earliest campus theater scene in China

when St. Paul's Public School, one of the earliest missionary schools in China dating back to the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), put on a play by its teachers and students on Jan 16, 1596.

Martin Lau, dean of the School of Chinese Opera of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, talked about the development of Yueju Opera online during the forum. Yueju Opera combines Mandarin operatic traditions and Cantonese dialect, rooted in Cantonese-speaking places, such as Guangdong province, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

He says that both the mainland and Hong Kong have schools offering classes in Yueju Opera, and ties between Yueju Opera troupes from the mainland and the Hong Kong SAR have been close.

Officially recognized by the UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2009, Yueju Opera is a vivid history book, which has been developed and preserved, Lau says.

"We have worked with schools in Guangzhou to offer Yueju Opera classes. The old art form is also a popular exchange program for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area."

Contact the writer at chenan@chinadaily.com.cn

Hong Kong volunteer taps into fresh rural experiences

YINCHUAN — Tong Chun-wai, 35, from Hong Kong, has found a new career in a village at the foot of the Helan Mountains in Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

"After working at the grassroots level for a year, I have truly participated in the national campaign of rural vitalization and learned a precious lesson in the countryside," says Tong.

Tong graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and started his own business in his home city before pursuing a master's degree at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

What amazed his friends and families was his decision to work in Yinchuan, Ningxia's capital city, as a grassroots cadre.

"I just wanted to have a deeper understanding of the mainland and do something meaningful," he says.

Tong's new post was in Xingsheng village, where he works as an assistant to the village head.

The work at the grassroots level is sharply different from what he did in his own business. He needs to undertake all kinds of detailed and time-consuming tasks, from writing job briefings to helping villagers apply for social insurance.

"Initially, I was a bit frustrated, as the work here needs more patience, attention and time than I imagined. However, I've constantly been adapting myself to the new post, as I know I need to be with the villagers to understand their real needs," he says.

Tong makes full use of his talents to help local residents create a better life for themselves.

After finding that the vegetables and fruit grown in the village's greenhouses were varieties with a low added value, Tong contacted strawberry growers from East China's Jiangsu province and rented out the greenhouses to them at much higher prices.

"It's more convincing to show them the result than just talking about it. Many of the residents are still sitting on the fence, but we've made it very clear that we will offer unconditional technological support as long as they're willing to grow strawberries. We also take charge of the sales of the fruit," he says.

Education is another sector Tong pays a lot of attention to. This summer, an extracurricular class which he had planned for a long time opened smoothly, providing free teaching of math, English, and Chinese culture to about 80 pupils.

For Tong, by moving to the northwestern region, he was following his inner voice.

"Money has never been my only goal in life," says Tong. "I will stick to the path I've chosen and fully participate in the rural vitalization drive."

XINHUA

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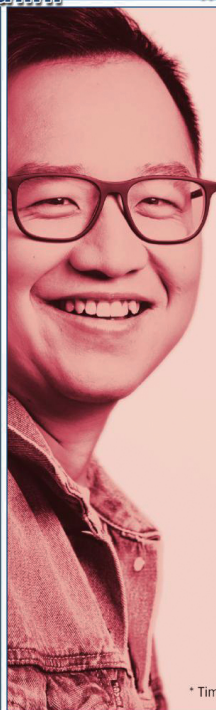
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