



From left: A rendering of Shenzhen Opera & Dance Theatre in Shenzhen Bay. The rehearsal hall of the Bay Opera of Shenzhen. The audience seating area of Pingshan Theatre.

By YUAN SHENGGAO

After more than 40 years of rapid economic growth, Shenzhen, a special economic zone in China, provides not only various high-tech and industrial products to the global industry and supply chains but now high-quality cultural and artistic products.

These cultural and artistic offerings have unique Shenzhen genes and reflect the energy and entrepreneurial spirit of China's youngest and most vigorous megacity.

Going global

After four consecutive performances over the previous three days, Shenzhen dance drama *Wing Chun* concluded its serial performance in France on the afternoon of Oct 6 at the Palais des Congres in Paris.

The dance drama also ran for 12 performances at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London from late August to early September.

Wing Chun perfectly integrates outstanding traditional Chinese culture, including martial arts and dance, with modern artistic means to shape the story of an ordinary hero chasing his dream. Foreign audiences praised the drama's artistic creativity and profound cultural significance.

Lu Shaye, China's ambassador to France, gave a score of 110 points (presumably with the full score set at 100) for *Wing Chun*.

He believes that the dance drama opens a window for the French people to have a deeper understanding of traditional Chinese culture and modern art, and contributes to the mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples.

As some observers said, although the story of *Wing Chun* took place in the past, it reflects the spirit of Shenzhen. *Wing Chun* was produced in Shenzhen and its groundbreaking narrative features are in line with Shenzhen's innovative urban surroundings. The images presented in the performance not only reflect ancient Shenzhen but let the audience see the future of the city.

In another move that shows Shenzhen cultural industry's global pace, from March 11-22, the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra presented eight high-level symphonic concerts for audiences in eight British cities: Birmingham, London, Sheffield, Manchester, Edinburgh, Perth, Basingstoke and Croydon.



A scenic view of the Bay Opera of Shenzhen. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Shenzhen, famous for its entrepreneurial spirit, now exporting high culture to world stage

Trailblazing city gets in touch with artistic side

Picky audiences

A city that can export such international high-level literary and artistic products must, as a consequence, have a cultured and sophisticated audience and consumer group.

The classic opera *Phantom of the Opera* performed 40 consecutive performances in Shenzhen over five weeks this summer, attracting about 50,000 people in all, exceeding the record of 24 performances for a play in Shenzhen.

Shenzhen's box office revenue exceeded 45 million yuan (\$6.36 million), breaking the record of 22 million yuan for a play staged in Shenzhen.

After the gyms, fitness theme parks and greenways that populate this garden city, walking into theaters, cinemas, museums and libraries

is increasingly a part of everyday life for Shenzhen residents.

Fast chaser

Behind the consumption of culture and art in Shenzhen is the local government's attention to the city's cultural industry, with its huge investment and firm belief in development prospects.

In December 2018, Shenzhen began the planning and construction of "10 cultural facilities in the new era" including Shenzhen Opera House, Shenzhen Reform and Opening-up Exhibition Hall, Shenzhen Science and Technology Museum (new hall), Shenzhen Maritime Museum, Shenzhen Natural History Museum, Shenzhen Art Museum, Shenzhen Creative Design Institute and Shenzhen Conservatory of Music. In addition,

there are two new cultural facilities — the Shenzhen Book City Bay Area Store and the new Shenzhen Museum.

Although these cultural sites might come as standard to many big cities, Shenzhen was just a stretch of barren land belonging to rural Bao'an county to the north of Hong Kong just 40 years ago. The city is moving fast to catch up with its global peers in terms of cultural industry and infrastructures.

The local government sees the cultural industry not only as a basic public service but an important calling card, which can enhance the soft power of urban culture and become a new source of economic growth.

The cultural industry includes a whole chain of creative, financing, production, performance, publicity, sales and other artistic services, as

well as related education, cultural innovation, tourism and other industries.

Inclusiveness

Behind this is not only Shenzhen's strong economic development as a foundation, but the city's professional cultural and artistic talents, and scientific cultural industry management.

Unlike the cultural management departments in many other cities, there is a trend in Shenzhen where literary and artistic units only retain the management team and their business content can be outsourced to the market and industry.

In the view of Dai Jilan, deputy chief of the Shenzhen Cultural Center, this places high requirements on the professionalism of the cultural management department.

"Because literary and artistic works are like delicious food, (with) different chefs, the taste of the dishes produced will be different. There are thousands of artists and their works have their own strengths. How to choose the right artists with our requirements is a test of the level of decision-making," said Dai, who graduated from China's top Central Academy of Drama in 1999 with a degree in dramatic literature.

Dai believes that the scientific and inclusive connotations of Shenzhen city also contribute to the success of *Wing Chun* to an extent.

"The cultural departments in Shenzhen understand the characteristics of Shenzhen's urban culture, the laws of art and more importantly the artists, so they can make the right choice at every corner in the face of various complicated factors that is in line with the purpose of making Shenzhen original," she pointed out. "The cultural authorities do not restrict creators with such compulsory requirements of 'winning awards' or even the market, and thus give artists enough space to create."

Opera valley

A typical example of Shenzhen digging deep into local culture is the Changshou Dramaville. The project is located in Changshou village at the foot of Maluan Mountain in Pingshan district. This ancient village contains a community of Hakka huts with a history of about 300 years.

In June 2023, Longma Entertainment Company was introduced to establish the project together with Zhang Guoli, a well-known Chinese performing artist, so as to integrate the history and culture of the ancient village with drama creation and performance.

After several years of hard work, this ancient village has built a small theater that can host 300 people and built cultural facilities such as a drama library, cultural exhibition hall, art studio, and a cultural and creative space, which can help drama creation, learning and exchanges, as well as supporting bed-and-breakfast businesses, restaurants, cafes and so on.

In the future, Pingshan will take advantage of the project to integrate drama creation, rehearsal, training, performance and consumption and make a characteristic industry chain.

By HAO NAN
haonan@chinadaily.com.cn

The dance drama *Wing Chun*, which was originally produced by Shenzhen Opera & Dance Theatre, recently sparked a wave of "China fever" during its three-day tour in Paris, France.

The event marked a new move by Shenzhen of South China's Guangdong province as the country's cultural gateway to the world. *Wing Chun* is a southern Chinese form of kung fu that originated during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

In the days leading up to the performance, the largest outdoor screen in France, located on the building of Citadium in downtown Paris, repeatedly displayed posters of *Wing Chun*, announcing it as "an extraordinary and unparalleled live dance drama" and inviting everyone to "immerse themselves in Asian aesthetics".

One month after 12 performances in London, the show lifted its curtain on the evening of Oct 4, local time at the Palais des Congres, where *Wing Chun* was staged, had an audience that included figures from the French literary, political and business circles.

The audience erupted into applause several times, with spectators giving standing ovations and capturing the exhilarating moments on their smartphones.

Lucy Lee, CEO and producer of a French production company responsible for the Paris tour of the dance drama, said: "The best way to establish a cultural brand in Western countries is through commercial performances, which are also the



Dance drama *Wing Chun* is staged at the Palais des Congres. LIU GUANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Kung fu drama inspires audiences during tour in France

true test of an artistic work. Only a successful commercial performance signifies market acceptance and effective international communication."

"From the feedback of local audiences and mainstream media outlets, it is evident that French audiences are very interested in *Wing Chun*," she noted.

During the three-day performance, some audience members traveled from London to Paris to see how *Wing Chun* was presented on different stages. Some were intrigued by the Chinese and Lingnan cultures expressed in the dance drama.

Jean Nouvel, winner of the pres-

tigious Pritzker Architecture Prize, shared his praise after watching the performance, noting that *Wing Chun* involved a series of Chinese traditions and culture, which are being spread globally and that its birthplace, Shenzhen, is a city full of creativity.

Dance KOL Akamz, with more than 24.3 million followers on the social media platform TikTok, said the dance drama offered him deeper insights into kung fu and its characters.

Athena Sofia, a French fashion influencer with some 80,000 Instagram followers, praised the stunning costumes of *Wing Chun*,

highlighting how well they enhanced the dancers' movements. Sofia also mentioned that she loved all the female characters and felt the powerful energy they conveyed through the performance.

In addition to the large audience, the international status of *Wing Chun* was emphasized by its performance venue. Situated in the 17th arrondissement of Paris, the Palais des Congres is a modern complex that integrates concerts, exhibitions and commerce.

It receives more than 1.2 million visits and hosts more than 200 domestic and international events annually, serving as an important

venue for cultural and artistic exchanges in France. Renowned productions such as *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake* have been performed there.

Moreover, the approval process for *Wing Chun* in Paris took only a few months, whereas it typically takes about two years for a French theater to introduce a new performance project. This indicates that *Wing Chun*, which has toured more than 38 domestic and overseas cities, is recognized in the international performance market and is capable of promoting cultural exchanges between China and the world.