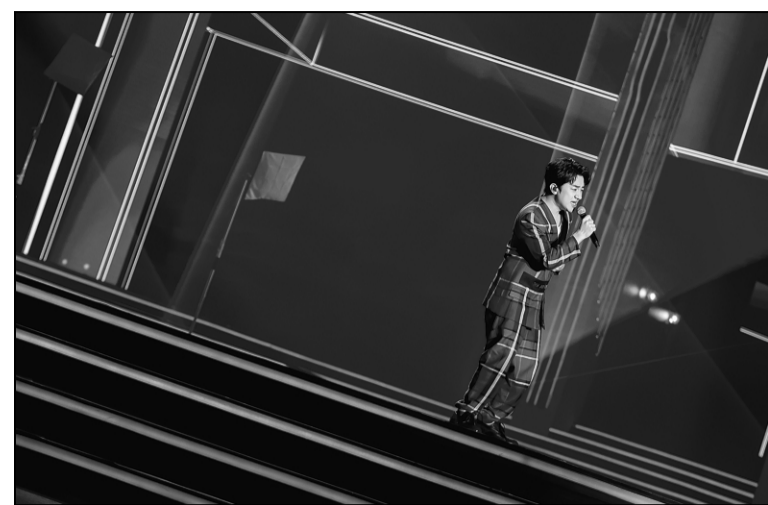


## LIFE



Hong Kong actor Wong Cho-lam performs at the closing ceremony of the China (Shenyang) Comedy Film Week.



Comedian Gong Hanlin (left) and his wife comedian Jin Zhu (center) at the closing ceremony.



Ambassadors for this year's comedy film week Zhu Shimao (center) and Jia Bing (right).

People in Northeast China are noted for their sense of humor. The region's famous fertile black soil, some claim, helps shape their outgoing nature. These traits, along with hard work and humor, are perfectly suited to the film sector. It's no coincidence that more than a century ago, Ren Qingtai from Shenyang, Liaoning province, incorporated comedic elements into China's first domestic film *Dingjun Mountain*. On Jan 22, 1949, China's first comedic animated film *Go After an Easy Prey*, premiered at the Hongda Cinema in Shenyang, now the Shenyang Cultural Palace theater.

Shenyang, the capital city of Liaoning, has a long and deep connection with comedy films and its "Northeast Style" has become an essential part of Chinese comedy. In recent years, popular comedic films and TV shows such as *You Only Live Once*, *The Last Frenzy* and *Johnny Keep Walking* have featured talents from Northeast China.

Early this summer, the city of Shenyang played host to a major comedy event. The inaugural China (Shenyang) Comedy Film Week, a five-day celebration of humor and film, concluded on the evening of June 11, drawing significant attention to the Northeast region.

With the theme "Comedy Gathers in Shenyang, Joy Blooms", the event ran from June 7-11, showcasing the region's vibrant comedic culture.

"By using comedy films as a medium, we've invited renowned comedy stars and showcased high-scoring classics to bring joy to Shenyang and celebrate this festive event," says Deng Song, deputy director of the Publicity Department of the CPC Shenyang Municipal Committee.

"We aim to highlight the beauty, rich culture and development of the Liaoning-Shenyang region to both domestic and international audiences, bolstering our efforts to create a 'high-quality model' for the integrated development of culture, sports and tourism," she says.

During the event, eight cinemas in Shenyang screened 15 classic comedy films, including *Johnny Keep Walking*, *If You Are the One* and *Goodbye Mr. Loser*.

Lin Zhenyu, the chief director of the opening and closing ceremonies of the event, says these 15 films were carefully selected, featuring early realistic comedies, Golden Rooster Award winners, and recent hits with great reviews and box office success.

"We hope this event showcases the achievements and contributions of comedy since the founding of New China," Lin says.

In addition to movie screenings, the Comedy Film Week offered a wide range of activities. Filmmakers visited various cultural and tourist landmarks in the city, interacting closely with fans. They explored pla-

ces like the Shenyang Imperial Palace, Zhongjie Street and the Xita food street.

Organizers also hosted five major events for the public, including "Coffee Youth Movie Time", the classic comedy music game "Guess Guess Guess", a showcase of domestic animated comedy films, visits to film locations of comedy movies, and a display of comedy film dubbing.

On the evening of June 11, the film week concluded with a grand event themed "Blending Tradition with Innovation, Combining Joy with Sentiment". The star-studded celebration featured renowned comedy stars, performing artists, directors, and actors delivering outstanding performances.

As the closing film of the event, this year's top-grossing May Day hit *The Last Frenzy* had its creators in attendance. Jia Bing, the lead actor and a native of Shenyang, says that the film's success is thanks to the support of hometown fans. "We'll keep making comedies to bring joy to everyone."

Jia and veteran actor Zhu Shimao

## Tradition of humor is no laughing matter

Comedy film week shows the hard work and creativity that goes into making a mark, **Li Yingxue** and **Wu Yong** report in Shenyang.



Comedian Pan Changjiang (center) performs during the inaugural China (Shenyang) Comedy Film Week. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Veteran artist Tao Yuling (right, front) onstage during a song and dance show as scenes from old movies play in the background.

served as ambassadors for the festival. Jia adds, "I'm still learning and look up to veteran Zhu Shimao to refine my acting skills and find more comedy inspiration."

The event began with song and dance performances, which repeatedly brought the audience to their feet.

Lin explains that the opening and closing ceremonies used the concept of sunflowers in their stage design. "We wanted to show that

comedy films bring not only joy but also warmth and hope, much like the city of Shenyang."

The celebration highlighted many of Shenyang's landmarks, such as the Shenyang Imperial Palace's Dazheng Hall, the Olympic Sports Center, the TV Tower, the Lily Tower, and the city's beautiful nightscape.

"Many of China's famous comedy stars come from Northeast China, including Shenyang. Comedians

from this region have consistently pursued their craft, raising Chinese comedy to new heights. Shenyang has a rich tradition and spirit, making it a natural choice to host the inaugural comedy film week," says Lin.

He also describes Shenyang as a joyful city. "In Shenyang's airports, taxis and restaurants, you always hear humorous conversations. The people of Shenyang have humor and a comedic spirit deeply ingrained in them."

Zhang Pimin, chairman of the China Film Foundation, attended the China (Shenyang) Comedy Film Week and noted the city's significant transformation in recent years.

"A few days ago, I did a livestream by the Hunhe River. I walked through a park and saw people exercising, families dining together, and friends gathering — all very joyful scenes. This atmosphere really aligns with the essence of comedy," Zhang says.

He highlights the rich comedic heritage of the Liaoning-Shenyang region, which has produced many talents. Recently, comedy actors

and creators from the area, such as Jia and Dong Chengpeng, aka Da Peng, have gained prominence.

"Hosting the comedy film week in Shenyang allows residents to learn more about comedy films and connect with actors and creators. It brings comedy into daily life and enriches the cultural experience," Zhang says.

He adds, "This event also draws national attention, promoting a better understanding of Shenyang and Northeast China. I hope Shenyang can leverage the comedy film week to focus on talent cultivation, discovery and creative work in the future."

Jiang Defu, CEO of Bona Film Group, believes the rapid growth of the film industry is closely tied to public support. Currently, comedy and action films are the most popular genres in China.

Jiang highlights that China's first interprovincial cinema chain originated in Shenyang. In 2001, Shenyang led the way in cinema system reforms, and today, dozens of cinema chains have been established nationwide, putting Shenyang at the forefront of this development.

"I believe the inaugural China Comedy Film Week in Shenyang will boost local and regional interest in Chinese cinema," Jiang says.

He hopes future editions of the film week will include training programs to cultivate more talent, making Shenyang not only the event's host city but also a hub for comedy talent.

"Shenyang is a city rich in potential. Beyond hosting a film week, it should offer extensive training for comedy films, including programs for directors, screenwriters and other film professionals. This will greatly benefit the comedy film industry," Jiang says.

Jiang Yaoyao, associate professor at Liaoning University's College of Communication, says, "The increasing popularity of northeastern comedy largely stems from its rich cultural heritage."

These traits are often showcased in northeastern comedy films. Jiang Yaoyao believes that northeasterners naturally possess an optimistic spirit and a talent for using humor to navigate life's challenges. Additionally, their sociable nature makes it easier for them to find comedic inspiration in everyday interactions, she says.

Huangfu Yichuan, a researcher at the China Film Art Research Center, sees Northeast China as a thriving hub for comedy, producing numerous influential talents and great works.

"I hope and eagerly anticipate that the comedy film week will not only become a well-known brand in China but also expand internationally as a major comedy film event," he says.

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## Shedding light on the perfect sunset as ancient expertise comes into view

With summer now upon us, the longer days and clearer skies signal the coming of more and more eye-catching sunsets.

Chasing down those last moments of light to try and catch the perfect photo is one of my favorite things to do. And judging by the number of photos I see on social media after a clear day, I'm

not the only one. This fascination with the perfect sunset, or simply the sun in general, is not just a modern trend.

Ancient cultures and religions across the globe have long paid reverence to that mysterious, fiery orb in the sky, with particular attention given to the setting of the sun at certain times of year, with the summer and winter solstices held in the highest regard. It was not uncommon for ancient cultures to erect vast buildings or monuments to recognize the sun's importance, with locations around the world, such as Stonehenge in England, Machu Picchu in Peru, and the Temple of Karnak in Egypt, all being built with a deference to the sun in mind.

This principle is one that also holds weight here in Beijing. The precision design and construction of the capital, which began in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and was further developed in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911)

dynasties, is a perfect example of ancient Chinese urban planning. At the heart of this metropolitan marvel is the city's Central Axis, a highlight of Beijing's well-preserved history, that cuts through the city's most famous landmarks including Tian'anmen Square, the Forbidden City, Jingshan Park, and the Bell and Drum towers. But more than just an example of excellent city planning, a number of the capital's streets and buildings also tie into the movement of the sun at certain times of year.

These locations were built with regard to annual solar movements, for example Qianqing Palace (The Palace of Heavenly Purity), the Seventeen-Arch Bridge in the Summer Palace, which is illuminated during the winter solstice, and the Temple of Heaven, with the sun setting per-



The sun sets behind the Temple of Heaven.

MICHAEL RHYS CARD / CHINA DAILY

fectly behind Qiniandian, the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests.

Yet, aside from these landmarks, wandering around the city's *hutong*

can bring its own sun-based rewards due to the north-south, east-west street planning, making the whole city ideal for catching a

sunset. And it's due to this meticulous planning that such stunning views have followed through to modern times, with buildings such as the CCTV headquarters in Guomao, whether by luck or design, letting the sun pass through its legs during the solstice.

We now live in a time when there are countless apps available that can predict the light, cloud cover and even the angle and position of any given sunset, and social media that showcases the most beautiful and popular places to get that ideal selfie. But there is something to be said for just getting out into the city, exploring its streets and hoping for the best.

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Second Thoughts