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Chinese opera star named UNESCO Artist for Peace



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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) today [designated](#) Chinese opera performer Zhang Jun as an Artist for Peace.

The designation comes in recognition of Mr. Zhang’s “long-term commitment to promoting intangible cultural heritage, especially the Kunqu Opera,” according to UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova.

Mr. Zhang is a leading promoter of Kunqu, one of the oldest forms of Chinese opera, inscribed in 2008 on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

“As an Artist for Peace, Zhang Jun will help raise national and international awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding, including Kunqu Opera,” UNESCO stated in a news release.

Speaking at the designation ceremony held today at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO, Mr. Zhang said, “While fragile, Kunqu cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization and ... promotes intercultural dialogues, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.”

Kunqu was developed under the Ming dynasty (14th–17th centuries) in the city of Kunshan in southeast China and is characterized by the combination of song, recital and complex choreographic techniques, which include acrobatic and symbolic gestures. Credited with inspiring a revival of Chinese theatre in the Ming era, the genre almost disappeared from the stage in the 20th century.

Sha Zukang, Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said Mr. Zhang has hosted more than 300 educational and interactive performances of Kunqu, and, “he has used these occasions to champion peace and development, disseminating the hopeful message of cross-cultural understanding.”

Mr. Sha, who is also Secretary-General of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, said he would seek UNESCO’s indulgence, “in allowing me to ask Mr. Zhang to also promote sustainable development, while serving as UNESCO’s Artist for Peace.”

Among UNESCO’s other Artists for Peace are the singers, Shirley Bassey, Celine Dion and Gilberto Gil; the architect Zaha Hadid; and the actress Gong Li.

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