Social Performance Training in China
Moving from a Monologue Culture to a Dialogue Culture

Yongwen Peng

For centuries, Chinese society has been a culture of the monologue. Most people listen to lectures and execute instructions from those with a higher status than theirs. Since China’s “reform and opening” policy launched in the late 1970s, democratic reforms, the adoption of a market economy, and the wide use of information and internet technologies have created more opportunities for people to express their opinions openly. Interactive communication is now commonplace. Dialogue between different classes, groups, organizations, and individuals—for example, between the government and citizens, and between higher-level and lower-level officials—has become more frequent.

Most citizens, however, are not yet used to a dialogic culture and cannot express themselves fluently and effectively in a private dialogue or in public. This is a bottleneck slowing down the transformation of Chinese society. To a certain degree, the long-term development of a harmonious Chinese society relies on people’s capability to engage in dialogue in various social situations. Social performance studies (SPS) and the practices it generates are playing a constructive role in converting Chinese society from a monologue culture to a dialogue culture, an idea first put forth by William Huizhu Sun in his 2005 article “Innovation: A Culture of Dialogue Challenging a Culture of Monologue.”

In the past decade or so, experiments in social performance training led by a team from the Shanghai Theatre Academy (STA) have been carried out in various fields and industries, for example in the Procurators Office of Investigations and Prosecutions in the legal system and in hotel administration in the business world. The training has helped professionals improve their ability to converse and interact with others and as a result facilitate the overall exchange of ideas. The STA team puts emphasis on training people to use dialogue both proactively and reactively across a range of circumstances.

What is “proactive” and “reactive” in a dialogue? Sun, who came up with this conceptual pairing in a 2011 article, believes that in the Chinese language (Mandarin) the concept of kedong, “guest-move,” or reactive, as opposed to zhudong, either host-move or proactive, did not

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previously exist. That is because the concept of being “(pro)active,” zhudong, had only one antonym, beidong—being “passive.” In the monologue culture of the past, only the person with authority could actively speak and/or act; all those who are subordinate had to passively listen and obey. Sun articulates the new concept kedong, “reactive,” emphasizing an equality in the interaction between the two parties in dialogue with each other. Zhudong, active or proactive, and kedong, reactive, is a new pairing of concepts in the Chinese language.

In SPS, zhudong and kedong refer to an equal reciprocal interaction between social performers. The person initiating an action, like the serving side in a tennis game, is active in the beginning. The person on the other side reacts by hitting the ball back. On the stage, spoken dialogue is a back-and-forth interaction. In a specific social scenario, who is being proactive and who is being reactive is important. During a dialogic exchange, the proactive role can change hands repeatedly. One side or the other controls the switch by means of body language and the tone and emotion expressed. The degree of control each participant has over the different means of expression reveals their skill level and professionalism. Understanding the basic ways of “dialoguing” is the focus of the STA social performance training team, which offers its training program to a range of professions.

Social Performance Training in Law

In China’s legal system, the government runs the police force and the courts conduct trials, while the procuratorates supervise the legal system. There is an urgent need for the procurators to improve their ability to listen carefully and express themselves accurately in the enormous number of discussions and debates that occur daily in the legal system. The procuratorate system in Shanghai has cooperated with the STA social performance team to train two kinds of procurators: one is the public procurator, or the procurator of the Department of Public Prosecution. After someone is arrested and prosecuted, the public procurator will testify, cross-examine, and argue against the defendant in court. The public procurator’s work is somewhat like that of a district attorney in the US system. Their training began in 2006. The other is the procurator of the Supervision Department of Police Investigations. If the police request an arrest, the procurators determine if a suspect can be arrested. The Supervision Department’s procurator functions somewhat like a grand jury in the US system. Their training started in 2015. As China endeavors to build a more democratic society, a lot of debate and dialogue is taking place in and outside of the courts; a culture of dialogue is being formed.

At a Shanghai Hospital

A case in Shanghai in the summer of 2015 reflects the importance of the procurator’s ability to conduct an effective dialogue and to shift between being proactive and reactive.

The criminal suspect, Ms. Wan, was the grandmother of an infant born in a Shanghai hospital. Three days after birth, the newborn died in the hospital. Ms. Wan’s husband organized a group of many relatives who came to the hospital to demand an explanation. The protesters attracted dozens of onlookers in the maternity ward. Two policemen arrived and took Ms. Wan and her family to a meeting room. The policemen listened to both sides of the story in order to gain an understanding of the situation. When the hospital staff members were leaving the room, Ms. Wan’s family lost control of their emotions and assaulted the policemen. Although they were given stern warnings, some family members broke chairs and smashed windows. The two policemen called for more police. After more police arrived, the offending family members were verbally arraigned by the police. Hearing the charges, Ms. Wan and her sister lay down on the ground keeping the police from performing the arrest.

1. To protect the privacy of the people involved, all the names have been changed.
their duties by grabbing and pulling the officers and refusing to let go. One officer suffered minor injuries. The policemen believed Ms. Wan and her family were guilty of obstruction of justice for interfering with police as they performed their public duties. So the policemen applied to the local procuratorate for arrest warrants. Procurator Liu from the Supervision Department received the application, reviewed the files and materials of the case, double-checked the important evidence, and reinterviewed the people involved. After that, he organized a meeting to serve as an “arrest hearing” and created a multiparty dialogue to decide if Ms. Wan should be arrested. Attendees included representatives of the police and the hospital, and the attorney and families of the criminal suspects.

Throughout the meeting, Procurator Liu—who had been trained by the STA team—played the role not only of the investigator of the charges, but also the facilitator of dialogue. He properly maintained a balance between being proactive and reactive, which somewhat surprised the police representatives because they usually expected the prosecutor to side with them. In this case, each party involved was given the opportunity to express themselves and fully voice their concerns, and each party was expected to listen to and respect the other. At the start, Procurator Liu put himself in a neutral position much like the referee of a sports match. With a moderate tone, he told all the attendees the objective and significance of this hearing. Procurator Liu asked each person to express her or his opinion on whether or not Ms. Wan was a “social hazard.” If a suspect is thought to be a “social hazard” that suspect will be arrested. This determination is the procurator’s most important decision.

First, Procurator Liu invited the suspect’s defense lawyer to speak. The lawyer argued that the suspect’s behavior should be forgiven due to the highly emotional cause of the behavior. The lawyer also argued that Ms. Wan’s actions would not harm society due to her and her family’s relatively low social status. Then the police representatives took the floor. They focused on exactly what had happened at the hospital: the violence instigated by the suspect’s criminal behavior. Using clear facts and evidence, the police alleged that the suspect had committed the crime of interference with their public function and therefore should be arrested. Next, the hospital representative gave her opinion. She believed the incident should not be viewed in isolation. Under the current social environment many doctors are in danger of being attacked or even killed by dissatisfied patients and/or their relatives. The hospital representative felt the incident should be regarded as violence against doctors. She alleged that the actions of the suspect damaged hospital property, interfered with medical procedures, and caused serious mental and psychological harm to the doctors. Finally, the criminal suspect’s family was granted the chance to speak. The family clearly realized how serious their behavior had been and expressed regret as individuals and as a family. The family had been in active communication with the hospital, compensated the financial loss of the hospital, paid off the hospital bill, and received forgiveness from the hospital.

After all parties presented evidence and expressed their opinions and feelings, Procurator Liu reacted and expressed his opinions, considering both the legal rules and human feelings:

I want to underline two points. The first point is for the criminal suspect and their family. You have lived in this city for more than a decade, worked here both as employees and employers. I believe you have chosen this city because there is a good environment here, including a positive public security environment, good medical treatment, sufficient employment opportunities, etc. And this kind of environment demands that the police act swiftly and fairly. So their law enforcement authority does not, at any time, allow for any type of invasion.²

². Quotes from the meeting are from the recording supplied to us by the procurator. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.
He spoke firmly and stressed the last sentence to show his firm support of the police. He continued:

The second point is for all of you. We all look forward to a child of our own, but not everyone will experience the pain of losing a child. Men are not like plants without affection. We cannot know the experience and the extreme emotional response to losing a child. So, a dispute between the doctor and the patient caused by the loss of a child further led to a case of interference with the public function of the police. Compared to other crimes of interference with the police, crimes that completely ignore the public order and deliberately harm the physical and mental health of the police, the suspect in this case is different in respect to social hazards. We should treat her differently, and not arrest this suspect.

Understandably, the police were not pleased with the results. They felt that not only was the authority of law enforcement being challenged, but the policemen had also suffered physical injuries. Because of these two points, they wanted the procurator to allow them to arrest the suspect. However, Procurator Liu believed that this case was different from typical, deliberate troublemaking and that Ms. Wan and her family did not cause serious, violent harm. Nor did they act as they did with evil intent. The harm the suspect inflicted on society was not substantial. Besides, Ms. Wan was a first-time offender, and shortly after the dispute, her family members negotiated with the hospital to compensate for their losses. Her family and the hospital had reached a written mediation agreement and she was truly remorseful. So the procurator did not approve the police’s arrest application. He agreed with the charges but granted Ms. Wan freedom from arrest.

I interviewed Procurator Liu after the hearing. He told me that after the arrest hearing, he visited the police station because he knew the officers were not happy. He didn’t proactively explain his decision. Instead, he took the reactive approach by letting the sergeant do most of the talking, especially about the difficulty in placating the injured police officers. The police knew that the procuratorate cooperated with them most of the time and were generally pleased with the investigative function of the procuratorate in recent years. The police realized they had to go through an adaptive process to accept the changes in how things were being done — how dialogue was now part of the process. Procurators should listen to what ordinary people have to say, while still understanding the opinions of the police. The interaction and dialogue enhanced the mutual understanding of the police and the procuratorate.

The Social-Psychological Status Exercise

The procurator of the Supervision Department and the police most of the time rely on their intuition and past experiences when they attempt to interact, rather than communicate directly about their present situation. They may not be aware of their proactive and reactive roles during their interaction. So, when STA trains them, actual cases are referenced, concentrating on a “social-psychological status exercise” to help the procurators enhance their ability to consciously switch between the proactive and reactive modes. The exercise STA uses was developed to train professional actors by the former Principal of London’s Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), Nicholas Barter. It is effective, quantifiable, and user-friendly. When Barter was invited to teach at STA, we recognized that the exercise could be used in professional social performance training. It helps performers find their own rhythm in every given circumstance, and teaches them the steps to transition between being proactive and reactive during interactions with other performers. In doing this exercise, trainees convert their previous unconscious actions into conscious actions, and flexibly adjust to their appropriate roles in interactions with both high- and low-status individuals, and between proactive and reactive roles. They are trained to progress from relatively inconsistent control to more precise control.
In using this exercise in our training sessions for legal professionals, film and television clips are shown to demonstrate transitions between actions and reactions. The procurators and police officers learn to observe and adapt to people from different social classes and with different personalities, and use role-playing to experience their external mannerisms and internal emotional and mental changes in different scenarios and with different identities. It was found that these exercises effectively enhanced their ability to switch between action and reaction and to dialogue with others.

Yang Junxia, a former STA performance studies doctoral student, now a professor at the Yunnan Arts University, has documented and analyzed Barter’s social-psychological status exercise in an article (Yang 2011). According to Yang, people of a higher social-psychological status tend to lead the action, controlling the communication with those of lower status. When a person plays a role, whether a fictional one onstage or a social role offstage, she needs to know the role’s social-psychological status in order to understand the dynamics of an interaction. There are three exercises, each with four participants:

1. Two persons engage in a dialogue; their partners observe and each indicates the other’s status by holding an arm at a certain height. Each height is assigned a number indicating the status rank.

2. Each dialogist speaks and acts according to the status rank her partner indicates before speaking each line. One player gradually raises her status from 2 to 10, while the other lowers hers from 10 to 2.

3. The person controlling her partner’s status announces the status rank number randomly, 2–10, before each line and her partner must act accordingly.

Figure 1. The social-psychological status exercise. Workshop led by Nicholas Barter, 2010, Shanghai Theatre Academy. (Photo by Yongwen Peng)
The procurators who have gone through this status training say that now they can better define their own psychological state and better control their verbal and physical expressions, based on their observation of the given circumstance and the people around them, just like an actor does when performing onstage in a drama.³

**Procurators’ Proaction and Reaction**

Compared to the procurator of the Supervision Department, the public procurator, who is the prosecutor in court, usually gives more proactive social performances. The internal documents about the training of the Shanghai procurator states:

The prosecutor shall interrogate the defendant, the witnesses, and the expert witnesses in court, cross-examine the evidence, recommend a verdict to the judge, and argue against the defendant and his advocates. In practice, the prosecutors tell the judge what kind of crime they believe the suspect or suspects has/have committed and also how serious the crime is. Although the verdict is not determined by the prosecutor’s performance, the outcome of the trial is often directly related to it. How the procurator argues the case directly affects whether the verdict recommended by the public prosecutor is adopted by the people’s procuratorate. The prosecutor shall not only make sure that his/her performance is accurate, normative, and logically strong, but he/she also must have the skill to make good use of various methods of questioning, arguing, and speaking in order to prevail in court. (Shanghai Procuratorate 2006)

Therefore, in the social performance training STA has provided to prosecutors since 2006, we have focused on developing proactive and assertive performance skills.

How a prosecutor performs in court is based on how s/he uses the evidence against the defendant that has been collected. For example, Procurator Zhang of Shanghai People’s Procuratorate received a case in which the head of a state-owned foreign trading company was accused of transferring the company’s funds to the account of his private company. Neither in the hearing nor later in court did the defendant admit to this transaction. Without a confession from the defendant, Procurator Zhang spent one and a half months investigating relevant bank records to obtain key evidence. In court, Procurator Zhang acted proactively and aggressively. Eventually, Zhang convinced the defendant to plead guilty.

Sometimes, to refute evidence the prosecutor has presented, the defendant and/or an advocate will present evidence favorable to their side. How much time the prosecutor should use for offensive action and how much for defensive reaction is difficult to plan in advance. A skilled prosecutor senses in court how to balance action and reaction; the ability to shift smoothly from offense to defense and back is essential.

For example, Procurator Zhang was involved in the public prosecution of a significant case in Shanghai where the suspect was accused of illegally manipulating a publicly traded limited stock company, and also of illegally interfering with the operations of the stock market. The prosecutor and defender were far apart in their understanding of the charges. The defendant had an advantage because he had professional knowledge of the operations. To prepare for the trial, Procurator Zhang went to the detention house where the accused was being held and questioned the defendant prior to the open debate in court. At this stage, Zhang asked the defendant questions but mostly remained reactive, not showing his cards too early. Zhang observed the emotions and body language of the defendant. Then in court, Zhang became dramatically proactive. With the authority granted by the law, and based on the facts and evidence he had collected, Zhang presented the proof systematically and in an orderly fashion. He made

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³ Of course, it would be good to have pictures of this training process with the procurators, but we were not permitted to photograph the sessions.
a clear and impressive speech when reading the indictment, looking into the defendant’s eyes. Zhang had defeated the defendant by allowing him to be proactive, listening to him, and then resuming his own proactive approach in the courtroom.

The carefully considered balance between proactive and reactive performances displayed by Procurator Zhang was the result of his experiences during simulated debate competitions and the social performance training with the STA team led by Professor Wu Honglin. In the early stages of the training, a number of young procurators presented feeble court statements and arguments. They spoke softly, showed signs of frustration when things didn’t go as planned, and failed to communicate their thoughts with an appropriate expression of those thoughts—both in what they said and how they said it. When offering opinions, they looked unsure. The STA team was able to help them to perform as procurators with greater confidence.

The training STA provides usually starts with basic skills like breathing, voice work, and managing verbal expression. We help the trainees to coordinate their speaking with gestures and movements. Next, we show them videotapes of the performances of outstanding public prosecutors in court. We analyze these successful performances and ask the trainees to imitate first and then find their own style and rhythm. In these ways we help them strengthen their inner psychological state and outer expressive skills. We prove to them that while facts and evidence are critical, the prosecutor’s presentation of the case in court, by means of both logical reasoning and a strong, assertive style, are crucial for a prosecutor to succeed.

**Social Performance Training in Business**

By and large, the monologue is still prevalent in politics and law. But where the market is fully developed and competition is severe, those who perform only with monologues can no longer thrive; they are lucky even to survive. At the core of the dialogical method in business is a focus on the needs of both the market and its customers. This involves reassuring customers that their demands will be met, and improving customer service. Let me give an example of social performance training in hotel management.

Nowadays meeting basic functional needs does not satisfy consumers in the dining and hotel industries. More sophisticated travelers expect hotels to meet their personal and aesthetic needs too. Customers’ online comments describing their individual experiences are becoming the basis for generating bookings. Ji Dongming, one of general managers of the state-owned Hengshan Hotel Corporation in Shanghai, is committed to using the theories and methods of social performance studies to improve his staff’s dialogue and service skills. Ji came to this decision after reading Sun’s book, *Social Performance Studies* (2009), and meeting with Sun and his team. In many hotel and industry training forums, and also in his conversation with the author, Ji reiterates his idea: “The guests are the audience, the staff members are the actors, and the manager is the scriptwriter and the director. The visible figures and fittings of the hotel are the props. Retrofitting a hotel is like replacing the stage and scenography: the key lies in providing service like a theatre” (Ji 2010).

In April 2010, when he was the manager of the hotel Moller Villa, Ji invited the STA team to train the managers and other employees of the hotel, a training process that lasted for three years and included three parts. The first part was the basic training of the employees in verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Then, they were trained to tell stories more appealingly, stories that many of the guests came expressly to hear.

The fairytale castle–like villa was originally built in the 1920s by a British businessman, Eric Moller. Before the 1949 defeat of the Kuomintang (Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party), the Villa was used as the party’s Youth Officers’ Headquarters, headed by Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang’s son and successor. In 1949 the Communist Party made the Villa into the headquarters of the Shanghai Committee of the Communist Youth League. In 2001, the Hengshan Corporation took over the property and renovated it into a high-end hotel. The elegant castle
had witnessed the history of modern Shanghai. Dining customers and overnight guests came to the Villa expecting not only fine cuisine and high-quality service, but also eager to learn about Moller, the building, and the history and culture of Shanghai. Telling the stories of Moller Villa when they served the customers food and drink, the employees transformed themselves from ordinary hotel staff into quasitheatrical performers. Just as Daniel H. Pink writes in *A Whole New Mind*, “In the information era, those who can tell a story organize all the pieces of information organically leading individuals and organizations forward; these storytellers can express information with affection. They will win this era” ([2005] 2006:6).

In the third part of the training, employees learned how to apply Augusto Boal’s forum theatre techniques when dealing with difficult situations at work. In the daily operation of the hotel, employees do not always serve happy customers who are interested to learn about the hotel’s history. They often face picky guests who are difficult to deal with. The trainers guided them in simulated situations in which STA acting teachers portrayed various types of difficult guests, such as the “rich and rude” type, and the “bullying others by flaunting one’s powerful connections” type. They rehearsed some prepared lines in the early part of the performance and then improvised to learn how to cope with changing situations.

The competition in the hotel industry is intense in Shanghai, as it is all over China, and enriching the customer’s hotel experience has become a key component of success. In 2013, Ji Dongming took over the Hotel Equatorial and once again incorporated the concepts of social performance training into the management of the hotel. Ji believes that social performance training for professionals should not just focus on extrinsic expression and interaction with guests, but should also focus on the individual workers’ inner feelings and their relations with one another. This requires the hotel to create a good management method and working environment, encouraging the staff to appreciate each other’s work and social roles. Ji gives his staff training in music, arts, and drama to enhance their senses of beauty and creative expression. This enrichment program has helped employees improve their abilities to observe, listen, feel, and communicate with other. At work, instead of waiting for a customer to make a request, they are now more sensitive to customer needs and can often address them even before a request is made. This kind of proactive service often exceeds customers’ expectations.

**Rasaboxes in Shanghai**

Two postgraduate students of STA’s SPS program, Gan Chenguang and Liu Yongsheng, used “rasa dance training” at the Shanghai Merry-Rendezvous Hotel. The two had studied the rasaboxes exercises devised by Richard Schechner, using videotapes of Schechner’s workshops and his writings, and had developed their own training for the employees. Gan and Liu choreographed two series of dance movements to generate two positive emotions, happy (*sringara*) and brave (*vira*). Each emotion is physicalized using a 4/8 count guided by musical accompaniment. Having mastered the two sets of emotional dance movements, the hotel workers practice them every day before their routine work. From outside to inside, they use physical movement to initiate genuine emotional experiences that will allow them to serve guests more pleasantly. Similar approaches to employee performance exercises have become increasingly common in recent years among Chinese sales and insurance companies, as well as in restaurants and beauty salons. During daily morning briefings, group leaders direct team members in exercises that will help them achieve both individual and team goals, spelling out their goals and action plans.

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4. Rasaboxes is an exercise in the direct expression of emotions. Schechner first devised rasaboxes in the 1990s. Since then it has been further developed by Schechner and others, including especially Paula Murray Cole, Michele Minnick, Rachel Bowditch, Ulla Neuerberg, and Marcia Moraes. Rasaboxes combines theories from the *Natyasastra*, a Sanskrit treatise on theatre, with ideas from Antonin Artaud and other modern Western performance practitioners. See Schechner’s “Rasaesthetics” (Schechner 2001); this essay was translated into Chinese and published in *Xi Ju Yi Shu* [Theatre Arts] (Schechner 2002).
loudly through singing, dancing, applauding, and other animated activities to raise morale and focus team energy.

**Social Performance Training in Business Speech**

With the rise of the internet economy an increasing number of freelance entrepreneurs have emerged in China. Under fierce market competition, they must lock in on particular demands of the market, find their own niches, and highlight the unique selling points for their products or for themselves. Through a variety of business speeches and/or road shows, they promote themselves and their products to investors and clients. Driven by this demand, business speech training under the guidance of social performance studies is booming—with distinct Chinese characteristics.

Business speech is different from political or academic speech. Most of the time political and academic speeches are monologues, which the audience may not want to listen to, or understand, but endures out of respect for, or fear of, the authorities. For business speeches, however, people have the right to listen or not listen. The audience will leave if they are not interested. In order to convince the audience to accept their ideas or buy their products or services, business speakers must engage the audience in a dialogue—a lecture-like monologue will not work. The speaker needs to avoid the field-specific terminology, tamp down personal ego, understand the culture of the audience, know what they’re interested in, and use that information to entice and excite them. The ambitious entrepreneur must ask herself: “What kind of problem can I solve? What kind of needs can I meet? How is my speech related to this audience near me now? What can I offer them that will benefit them?” The speech must be organized around the real problems and needs of the audience, be delivered in a language that can be understood by the audience, and capture people’s attention so that they are persuaded to buy what the entrepreneur is selling. Business speech, therefore, although appearing proactive on its surface, is in fact a reactive expression and performance. The demand of the market and the desires of the audience are the initial factors, making the audience the proactive force. The speaker must explain vividly how she can satisfy the needs of the audience, realizing and resolving the audience’s problems. The speaker must be both sincere and persuasive.

The case illustrating this kind of action is that of another STA graduate student in SPS, Wang Ting. Wang owns a cultural communication company called Chi Jing Ke [People Who Ride the Whale]. The main business of the company is to produce short commercial films that brand specific enterprises. The company also provides social performance training for entrepreneurs. In September 2014, Wang Ting met IT entrepreneur Kang Zhengning, who, at around age 30, had a company that owned certain core technologies of surveillance cameras used in urban security systems. For three years, Kang had been looking for investors—he wanted outside funds to make his enterprise bigger and stronger. A trained engineer, Kang was good at dealing with technology but not good at communicating with people. Despite his many investment presentations, he could not close a deal. Wang Ting found that Kang always focused on the wrong points in his speeches. For example, Kang spent seven minutes of a standard eight-minute presentation discussing smart urban construction, the internet, and the use of cameras, and only one minute talking about what he could do, what problems he could solve. This is a common problem in talks by Chinese technical people: they deliver technology-heavy monologues, overlooking the needs and desires of their audiences.

After finding the cause of Kang’s problem, Wang Ting tailored a presentation and training package for Kang. He advised Kang to make a three-minute video clip focusing on the problems his company was trying to solve and the methods his company used to solve those problems—for example, using the internet to promote a strategy for alleviating the increasingly serious shortage of parking spaces in Shanghai. Wang Ting asked Kang to compose a new speech and rehearse it many times. Kang, taking Wang’s advice, used language understandable to ordinary people and PowerPoint slides with sound to explain the potential eco-
nomic and social benefits offered by his system. After this training, Kang soon attracted the interest of investors and even of the government of the Jing’an District of Shanghai. Kang won the title of “top 10 pioneering entrepreneurs of 2014” in a competition organized by the Shanghai Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau and the Shanghai Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment Promotion Association, and before long he attracted investments totaling four million US dollars.

The first thing Jerry Weissman, a well-known American business speech trainer, teaches in his training program is that the speaker must first get the story right: “If the story itself is a mess, no matter how beautiful the speaker’s voice, how eloquent he is, how active the body language, the speech will be in vain. On the contrary, a clear and concise story can help him keep his mind clear; and be calm and confident” (2012:11). This is exactly what Wang Ting discovered in his training sessions.

Cultural Transformation via Performance Studies

Training people how to speak publicly and make effective presentations is not new in many countries. Yet it did not start in China until recently, in the wake of the growing market economy and a more open society. Social performance studies training in China is a lot more than just acquiring certain skills. It is a cultural transformation, which is much more difficult and much more rewarding than mere skill training. While most training programs are empirical, the STA SPS team develops practical training programs along with theoretical explanations aimed at people working across a broad range of professions. Scripted versus improvised, monologue versus dialogue, and proactive versus reactive are among the more important conceptual dualisms we have explored. We also try to apply the Chinese Taoist theory of yin and yang in our study and practice. Proactive is yang, hard and strong; reactive is yin, soft and flexible. Balancing the two is the ideal state. The same can be said to all social performers who want to enjoy the culture of dialogue.

References


