

CPC 105TH ANNIVERSARY

Red Crag resonates with young audiences

Six decades on, new adaptation celebrates power of communist faith in enjoyable, immersive play

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At Tongji University's auditorium, thunderous applause erupted as the cast of *Hongyan*, or *Red Crag*, took their final bows. Many students gave the cast a standing ovation, cheering and applauding, with some wiping away tears of emotion.

From June 11 to 13, the stage adaptation of *Red Crag* was performed at Tongji University in Shanghai. Directed by Wu Yuze of the China Railway Art Troupe, it drew a strong response that reflects a broader trend: more than six decades after the publication of the classic revolutionary novel, the stage version is finding renewed resonance among younger audiences.

The production has attracted increased attention this year as China marks the 105th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China.

Based on the 1961 novel of the same name, the play depicts Communist revolutionaries imprisoned in Chongqing in the years leading up to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Scenes such as Jiang Jie embroidering a national flag in prison, Little Radish Head, a child prisoner, secretly passing messages behind bars, and Xu Yunfeng, an underground Communist Party member, facing execution with composure, have long been part of China's cultural memory.

For Wu, the new adaptation places faith at the heart of the story.

"People today face many uncertainties," Wu said. "Whether it is personal values, beliefs, or confidence in the future, many are searching for inner spiritual strength to support themselves."

To reach younger audiences, the creative team — whose average age is around 30 — updated elements of the staging while remaining faithful to the original story.

"Many audiences tend to associate 'red classics' with a fixed set of expectations," Wu said. "We wanted to challenge that by creating something more engaging — a play audiences can truly enjoy and immerse themselves in."

The adaptation highlights espionage and suspense elements. Lighting design, multimedia effects and tighter scene transitions are also used to heighten dramatic tension throughout the performance.

"The novel revolves around underground Communist operatives," Wu said. "Our goal is to make sure that



Top: Students take part in an immersive political education session following a performance of the play *Red Crag* at the auditorium of Tongji University in Shanghai on June 11. Produced by the China Railway Art Troupe, the production was staged five times in the city from June 11 to 13. **Left:** Actors perform the play *Red Crag* at Tongji University in Shanghai. **Right:** Actors prepare backstage before a performance of *Red Crag*. PHOTOS BY WANG XIANG / XINHUA

every scene moves the story forward and keeps audiences eager to find out what happens next."

For actress Wang Wei, who plays Jiang Jie, preparation meant extensive field research in Sichuan and Chongqing.

She traveled to Zigong, the hometown of Jiang Zhujun — the real-life inspiration for Jiang Jie — where she visited memorial halls, studied archival materials, and toured the school that the revolutionary once attended.

Over nearly six months, cast members also visited sites such as Zhazidong and Baigongguan prisons in Chongqing, studied the script repeatedly and worked through historical documents together.

Wang said the field research helped her move beyond a symbolic interpretation of the role.

"Jiang Jie is not only a fearless revolutionary. She is also a wife and a mother," she said. "It is precisely because they were ordinary people who still made extraordinary choices that they became heroes."

Wang recalled a scene in which Jiang Jie watches guards tear up a photograph of her child.

Though she initially forces herself to look away, having prepared for death as a revolutionary, the sight of the torn photograph awakens her maternal instinct. Before walking to the execution ground, she quietly gathers the fragments and holds

them tightly in her hand, carrying the image with her into her final moments.

"I also have children, so I completely understand that feeling as a mother," Wang said. "For her, that kind of longing and sorrow can be even more painful than physical torture."

Playing Jiang Jie has also changed Wang beyond the stage, leaving her more grounded and confident. "When I face difficulties in life or work, I often think about how they would have handled similar situations," she said.

For actor Cao Wei, who portrays Xu Yunfeng, the challenge lies in expressing calm in the face of death.

One line from the play has stayed with him: "Death is such a powerful threat to a revolutionary."

"His calm comes from his deep belief that victory will come," Cao said. "Although Chongqing had not yet been liberated, he could already see the dawn of victory."

The role has also reshaped how he sees his profession.

"There was one moment when I suddenly realized I am not only an actor," he said. "Through theater, we are passing on the spirit of the revolutionaries to new audiences."

He said audience reactions often reinforce that sense of connection. In Chongqing and Chengdu, viewers frequently remain seated after

performances. Some bow; others wave silently before leaving.

"You can see it in their eyes — they truly relate to these characters and what they represent," Cao said.

The play has also left an impression on younger members of the cast.

Among them is Wu's daughter, who plays Little Radish Head. Wu said she knew little about the historical background before joining the production. After taking part in the play, however, she began asking when she could join the Communist Party, and when she could bring flowers, candy and toys to the character she portrays.

"To her, Communist Party members are the bravest, smartest and strongest people," Wu said.

For Wu, moments like this reflect how widely the production has resonated. "At first, we were simply setting out to create a good play," he said. "But over time, we realized it can work like a spark, quietly influencing young people."

Premiered in Beijing last June and performed at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee in late September, the production has since toured cities including Chengdu in Sichuan, Changsha in Hunan and Nanchang in Jiangxi, and will continue touring universities and railway bureaus across the country.

"We hope audiences can find something they truly believe in," Wu said. "Above all, we intend to showcase the ideals, resilience and unwavering faith embodied by the revolutionary heroes. Once you hold fast to this revolutionary belief, life feels more meaningful."

CPC volunteers find different ways to shape China's grassroots future

By MENG WENJIE
and CHEN HUAN

At the age of 21, Li Tinghui visited the Xizang autonomous region for the first time. The moment he stepped off the train, the plateau left an impression that never faded.

"I just knew I would come back here to work one day," he recalled.

That thought soon became reality. Now 30, Li has spent seven years in Nagchu, a city known for its vast landscapes and for being one of the highest-altitude urban areas in China. Life here is defined by just two seasons: a brief summer when down jackets are still necessary, and a long, harsh winter.

Li is from Hebei province. In 2019, he joined the "Go West" program, a volunteer initiative that sends university graduates to China's less developed western regions. When his service period ended, he chose to stay.

Life at more than 4,500 meters above sea level is never easy. Vegetation is scarce, and heating in some areas still relies on burning yak dung.

The thin air has taken a toll on Li's health, causing chronic altitude sickness and an enlarged heart. Yet he has never considered leaving.

"In university, I felt like I was living in an ivory tower," he said. "Only

here did I feel grounded and truly connected to people."

Over the years, Li has worked on urban planning, public services, ecological restoration and other grassroots tasks. With his colleagues, he has helped replace pit latrines with flush toilets and contributed to greening projects by planting rapeseed flowers and pine trees across the city.

He has also helped organize community skills competitions covering 29 categories, from handicrafts to technical repair work. Winning entries have been showcased at national exhibitions, and some participants — with local government support — have gone on to start their own businesses and increase their incomes.

"I hope that in my day-to-day work, I can do each small task well so that local people truly benefit," Li said.

Beyond his official duties, he has long been active in public welfare, raising donations for school supplies, sanitary products for girls and warm clothing for families in need.

His efforts have also extended to disaster relief. After a 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck Dingri county in 2025, he rushed to the site with supplies, helping set up tents and prepare meals amid aftershocks and damaged homes.



Left: Fan Jiang promotes local agricultural products and intangible cultural heritage during a livestreaming event in Baodi district, Tianjin, in January. **Right:** Li Tinghui delivers new clothes for children to a family in need in Nagchu, Xizang autonomous region, in December 2025. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"I used to find *The Communist Manifesto* difficult to fully grasp," said Li, who has been a CPC member for four years. "But in Xizang, through real work, I came to understand what it means to serve the people."

While Li's work is rooted on the snowy plateau, 37-year-old Fan Jiang, a CPC member for 15 years and a member of the All-China Youth Federation, has taken a different path: building the digital rural economy.

In 2019, Fan began using social media to support rural development in his hometown in Shanxi province. He discovered that Shanxi had rich traditional medicinal resources, though only a small share had been developed.

Together with his team, Fan spent six months creating more than 40 food- and medicine-based products, including drinks, pills and sachets, which were later launched at the 2021 Central China Investment and Trade Exposition.



inheritor demonstrated traditional bow-making.

"When products are combined with local character and storytelling, they gain new life," he said.

Fan then launched a training program for livestream hosts to support young people returning to their hometowns to start businesses. He also helped build a rural livestreaming alliance with 285 hosts and a combined following of over 440 million, featuring more than 3,000 products from counties across the country.

"We are not training influencers, but a new generation of digital farmers rooted in rural areas," he said. "What matters most is seeing farmers benefit after each session, and young people returning home through our program. That tangible impact means a lot to me."

Although Li and Fan work in different fields, both have chosen paths defined by close engagement with local communities. Success is measured not by personal recognition, but by whether their work changes ordinary lives.

"I may have given up a comfortable life, but I have gained the genuine trust of the people. That is what happiness has come to mean for me," Li said.

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