



**Shanghai Qingpu Prison is the earliest prison in China to practice drama for rehabilitation, after it established the “ISUN Performance and Art Group” in 2011. More than 150 inmates from 76 countries have joined the group and participated in over 80 art productions, involving drama, dance and music.**

**Wang Shengluo, director of the Qingpu prison’s drama therapy project, guides the performers of ISUN Performance and Art Group during rehearsal. — Ti Gong**

“This is exactly the effect that the project aims to achieve for art group members and even all prisoners,” Wang said.

Huang said that the most memorable part of the stage play is about fighting and being imprisoned. He watched it backstage and recalled his past life, which could be described as absurd and impulsive, as with the characters in the play. He also started to reflect on the harm he did to his victims and their families.

The story of the play also agitates a performer surnamed Rong, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison for fraud. He is the protagonist of the last scene in “The Dreamland.” Whenever he sees a mother with gray hair in the play, looking forward to her son’s release, he feels pain because his mother is also waiting for him to return home.

“The police officers told me that the performers needed to experience and understand the character’s thoughts so that the audience could be moved,” Rong said.

Criminals can only rehabilitate themselves after experiencing hardship. Inmates constantly experience the pain

that crime brings to them during rehearsals, performances, and watching the play, which is their ascetic practices, Wang said.

Wang added that the results on the art group members is obvious. The rate of severe violation of discipline among them is only 0.76 percent, far lower than the same figure among other inmates.

The performance brought tears to many in the audience, including the Chinese performing artist Song Huaiqiang.

“These actors are portraying themselves. It is commendable that a person is willing to expose their deepest emotions,” he said.

At the end of the performance, the audience responded with thunderous applause.

“The sound of applause can cleanse their sense of failure and abandonment,” Wang said. “They are labeled by themselves as ‘successful’ again.”

It can be very hard for them to stand onstage because of their sense of shame and inferiority.

Zhang Xiaoye, a lecturer at East China University of Political Science and Law, shared her failed experience of a drama



**The original stage play “The Dreamland,” which was created by Shanghai Qingpu Prison over five years, premiered inside the high walls recently. — Ti Gong**

therapy project in a Chinese prison during her speech in 2020. She said that most inmates were unwilling to stand onstage because they are afraid

of being pointed at and laughed at by other people.

In the Qingpu prison, a positive loop for the project has formed. Thousands of successful performances have attracted more inmates to pay attention and make efforts to support it.

To communicate with foreign law-breakers during rehearsals and performances, Huang, an absolute beginner, taught himself English for seven years. Now, he can have daily conversations in English with them, which surprised many other policemen in the prison.

Huang said some foreign prisoners of the art group are also learning Chinese by themselves and are looking forward to being interpreters in their countries after being released.

“Compared to other inmates, more art group members have obtained diplomas during their imprisonment,” Wang said.

“Most inmates will return to society. We would like to see them rehabilitate in hope, realizing that their future will be good,” said Li Qiang, the warden of the Qingpu prison.