

PERSPECTIVE

A Remembrance of Cantonese Opera from my Childhood (part 2)



Dr. Benny Ko is a native of Hong Kong. He is a retired radiologist and a long time residence of Indianapolis since the 1960's. Dr. Ko is a frequent traveler and a very passionate hiker. He also serves as the lead organizer of the IACA hiking club. Dr. Ko enjoys sharing his adventures to others!

Moving on to the 'characters' in this story, a number of well-known opera stars were neighbors in our quiet Happy Valley district; some were my physician-grandfather's patients. But above all else, grandmother was a respected patron of the art, known to them for her non-judgmental acceptance and kindness. After all, this was a group of 'low castes' defined by a stiflingly conservative Confucian society. Many indeed came from very humble beginnings and a uniquely thespian sub-culture prevailed no matter how rich or revered some of the successful members had become. For example, in matters of sex, in contrast to the mainstream society, the thespian mores would be considered progressive or indulgent even by today's standard. Older male actors often have taken much younger actress wives, serving as the latter's spouse and mentor. A well-known couple of such description was Ms Hung Sin Nui (红线女) and Mr. Ma Si Jung (馬師曾). Their liaison did not last long nor fare well, no surprise as they were more than twenty years apart in age. Ma, was not only a womanizer but also an opium smoker. Hung herself was known to have many extramarital affairs as well. Her last lover was a Shanghai movie actor that had come to Hong Kong when the Chinese Communists won the civil war. Hung was alleged to have chiseled off his entire life-saving. When the matter was called to the attention of the law and she about to be charged, Hung slipped across the border into China. The Chinese Communist propaganda machine touted the episode as "a patriotic artist returning to the embrace of the Great Socialist Motherland." Many old-timers in Hong Kong certainly remember it quite differently.

Homosexuality, both male and female, were not uncommon and accepted by fans and the society at large as long as the parties remain overtly discreet. The late Ms. Yum Gim Fei (任劍輝) and Ms. Bak Shui Sien (白雪仙) were just one such couple. They always played lovers on stage with Ms. Yum cross-dressed and assumed the male role. In real life, they were an inseparable pair for over fifty years. Immensely popular, they were also respected for their philanthropic generosity with their time and money. The support and guidance they gave to the younger professionals were crucial to bringing up the generations that came after.

Popular male actors often have flings with female groupies, many of them the lonely concubines or kept mistresses of rich men, femme fatales with too much money and time on hand. Occasionally, things would erupt into violence and one extremely popular actor of the 1930s and '40s, Sit Kok Sin (薛覺先), almost lost his sight to a lye attack ordered by a jealous husband, alleged some Kuomintang (國民黨) big wig. Attractive single actresses commonly would have well-heeled patrons. Rarely, such liaison would turn into love affair and even marriage, as in the case of Ms. Fong Yim Fun (芳艷芬), a top-tier actress retired at the height of her career after marrying a famous physician. It was clearly a fairy tale ending, in contrast to numerous murky ones that no one remembers.

Finally, a word on the money-attitude in the thespian circle, and indulge me on some generalization. During my early childhood, when Hong Kong was still recovering economically from the war, there was no social safety net to speak of. Whenever natural calamity struck, be it a devastating fire that swept through a wooden squatters' settlement, a typhoon that wiped out a whole fishing community or wave after wave of Mainland refugees arriving in search for food and freedom, sons and daughters of the Pear Garden (梨園子弟), an euphemism for the operatic profession, would more frequently than not, be the first to rise to the rescue.

One of them, the late Mr. Sun Ma Jai (新馬仔) was nicknamed "the Monarch of Charity." For the numerous fund-raising performances, he had so generously given for disaster relief, he was not crowned. But he was conferred the M.B.E. title by the Queen of England in 1978 for his good deeds. At the same time, many thespians were known to be ridiculously care-free and spend-thrift with their money, my grandmother knew of at least a dozen such fortunes-made, fortunes-lost stories among her friends of the stage. To this end, may be grandmother found in them her kindred spirits: generous to a fault, freedom-loving and brave enough to defy the constrictive society they found themselves living in.

I cannot close without offering a sincere apology to true Cantonese opera aficionados. Even though I have no destined-affinity (緣份) with Cantonese opera, it does not mean I do not realize its cultural significance nor fail to admire the depth of its artistry. Cantonese opera was first described in early Ming Dynasty. Along with other regional operatic genres across China, the preceding Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty might have played a very important role in their founding. Apparently, they went on to evolve into distinctive regional schools based on the local dialects and existing musicality.

At a time when regional dialects and cultures are frowned upon in China as being "anti-unity," to treasure and preserve Cantonese opera hence become even more urgent and paramount. Fight to keep it alive and let my grandmother and generations of ancestors like her rest in peace.



Ms. Yum Gim Fei (任劍輝) and Ms. Bak Shui Sien (白雪仙)



Ms. Hung Sin Nui (红线女) and Mr. Ma Si Jung (馬師曾)

GET to KNOW the MAN BEHIND INDIANA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL STARTUP

New IHS exhibit explores the life and legacy of Colonel Eli Lilly



Eli Lilly

Glick Indiana History Center, open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday.

The new exhibit will take visitors back in time to Colonel Eli Lilly's original laboratory on Pearl Street in Indianapolis. Visitors will learn how the Colonel's experiences helped shape his ideas on leadership, perseverance and philanthropy and how those ideas continue to influence today's multinational corporation.

This Bicentennial year, the Indiana Historical Society (IHS) is using its award-winning You Are There series to pull back the curtain on the man behind Indiana's most successful startup. IHS's newest exhibit, You Are There: Eli Lilly at the Beginning, opens Saturday, Oct. 1, at the Eugene and Marilyn

With hands-on activities and interactions with talented actors, guests also will get a feel for the Indianapolis wholesale district in the late 1800s. Inside the space, visitors will meet a special cast of characters, including an actor portraying Eli Lilly himself. Other characters will include the Colonel's son J.K. Lilly Sr., then a teenager helping in his father's business; Augustus Kiefer, a local wholesaler who encouraged the Colonel to open his own business; and Caroline Kruger, one of the company's first employees. In addition, visitors may cross paths with a local newspaper reporter interviewing the Colonel about his Civil War experiences.

In another section of the exhibit, visitors will learn about advances in the pharmaceutical industry and see artifacts on loan from Eli Lilly and Company. Guests also will see how the Colonel's legacy lives on in both the philanthropic and business communities in Indianapolis and around the world.

For more information about You Are There: Eli Lilly at the Beginning or other IHS offerings, call (317) 232-1882 or visit IHS online at www.indianahistory.org.



The Youth Dance Troupe

ENCOURAGEMENT

"Encouragement to others is something everyone can give. Somebody needs what you have to give. It may not be your money; it may be your time. It may be your listening ear. It may be your arms to encourage. It may be your smile to uplift." ~Joel Osteen



Dr. Patrick Lau was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to the U.S. after high school. He retired from the VA Northern Indiana Health Care System where he served as Chief Radiologist and moved to Florida with his wife in 2011. He was an active member & contributor of IACA and ICMA while in Indiana. Dr. Lau is also a scholar of art and literature and a prolific writer, he has been a dedicated columnist for Indy Asian American Times since 2010.

In today's world there exists immense anxiety and fear including horrendous crimes, corruptions, mass shootings, terrorism, massacre, genocides, high healthcare cost, natural catastrophes, global warming, economic insecurity, unemployment, underemployment, poverty, deprived children in hunger, persisting wars, conflicts, and so forth. Psychological stress, insecurity and financial pressure are taking a hideous toll on people's emotional well-being, morale and health. Consequently, depression and anxiety are common place among the populace around the world. Encouragement is crucially needed nowadays.

Encouragement is defined as the action of giving someone support, confidence, or hope. It expresses approval and instills courage. It also compliments, inspires, reassures and emboldens. Encouragement is, in fact, one of the most formidable and influential force in our lives. It can enhance our lives and strengthen our interpersonal relationships with others. Encouragement can counterpoise and prevail over negativity or adverse influences.

According to Suzanne Kobasa, PhD at University of Chicago, encouragement cultivates and promotes psychological hardness in people. Psychological hardness is defined as a personality characteristic that effectually safeguards stress and tension; and it allows them to function adequately while handling life's challenges in a way that creates meaning and purpose in life. Arthur Combs, PhD and Timothy Evan, PhD stated, "These individuals have a positive and realistic view of themselves, positive and realistic view of others, and openness to experience." Encouraged individuals do not feel threatened by making mistakes. They understand that mistakes are inevitably made in the process of learning; and they perceive that errors are, in some ways, opportunities for education, experience and development. Victoria Holt once said, "Never regret. If it's good, it's wonderful. If it's bad, it's experience." In addition, encouraged people are compassionate and empathetic for others.

Encouragement can inspire people, instill hope, enhance life, develop a positive attitude, foster self-esteem, and enrich relationships. In the act of

encouragement, we furnish people with a reason to pursue their aspirations and dreams. It keeps them going despite the adversity they encounter. Lao Tzu wrote, "People usually fail when they are on the verge of success. So give as much care to the end as to the beginning."

We can encourage people with our words; tendering cheerful words to the people who are discouraged, depressed or overwhelmed. We impart courage in people; expressing kind, encouraging words. Mother Teresa (St. Teresa) once said, "Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless." We can also encourage others by our actions; such as taking time to listen, sending an email or text to show our appreciation, physically helping others who need assistance, expressing a smile or a pat on the back. In fact, everyone needs encouragement some time or another, whether through a word of kindness, support, inspiration and appreciation, an act of service, or a considerate letter or email. Indubitably, encouragement can increase our determination and boost our morale and confidence.

In 2007, at the National Leadership Forum sponsored by American Studies Institute at Harding University, a group of high school students identified the root of problems facing today's youth and society was the lack of encouragement. They proposed to set aside an official day to encourage people as an initial movement of tackling discouragement and negativity, and improving the world to be a better place to live. The date of September 12 was selected, because it is a day for new beginnings following 9/11, in hopes of "balancing the discouraging feelings of 9/11". Later, President George W. Bush signed a declaration making September 12 the official National Day of Encouragement.

In the words of Confucius: "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall. 從來不跌倒不算光彩, 每次跌倒後能再站起來, 才是最大的榮耀。"

INDIANA FSSA LAUNCHES WEBSITE TO HELP FIND QUALITY CHILD CARE

The Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) today announced a major step forward in providing a new, online tool to assist families in finding child care and early education providers for their children throughout the state. ChildCareFinder.IN.gov, one of several online enhancements FSSA is making to help people find services in their area, will allow families to perform detailed searches to help them find child care to meet their needs.

Child Care Finder allows families to search licensed providers, registered ministries and exempt providers by numerous, important parameters, including location, type of provider, hours, licensing status and whether or not the provider participates in Paths to Quality, Indiana's voluntary quality rating and improvement system.

In addition, families can find inspection reports and any validated complaints or enforcement actions for each provider they search. Click here to find a short video providing detailed instructions on how to use the new site. Child Care Finder is also as easy to use from a smart phone or mobile device as it is from a desktop computer.

"Often families will rely solely on their friends' recommendations or other factors such as location when picking a caregiver for their children without being fully informed, because they haven't had or haven't been aware of tools and resources to help provide an in-depth search," said Nicole Norvell, Director of the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning. "We are hopeful that Child Care

Finder provides some confidence to Hoosier families by giving easier access to important information that will help them make a much more informed decision."

The Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL) oversees early child care, education and out-of-school-time programs. It is one of the six divisions of FSSA. Individuals with complaints against a child care may call 1-877-511-1144. Child Care Finder is one of several enhancements FSSA is making to its online tools to help people find services they need in their area. It is also easier now to find health care providers, FSSA offices specific to the needs of the user and their location. Like Child Care Finder, these new services also use geo-location services to assist users in finding offices, providers and resources closest to their current location.



CHINESE FESTIVAL - 2016

The city of Indianapolis hosted the seventh annual Indianapolis Chinese Festival downtown on September 24, at IUPUI's Wood Plaza. This festival is held annually during the month of Chinese Moon Festival, which is the second largest Chinese festival after Chinese New Year. The Moon festival in China is a celebration of the harvest with family and friends.

The Chinese Festival in Indianapolis is a collaboration between a number of local Chinese organizations, including the Confucius Institute in Indianapolis, American China Society of Indiana (ACSI), Eli Lilly Chinese Culture Network, Indiana Families for Adoption Community and Education (I-FACE), Indianapolis Chinese Community, Inc. (ICCCI), Indianapolis Chinese Performing Arts, Indy Asian American Times, and IUPUI Chinese School.



IAAT Booth