unesco
University Network
Member

International Theatre Institute
World Organization for the Performing Arts

Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts

ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts

SHANGHAI STRATEGIC DIALOGUE 2026

BETWEEN WORLDS, BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Exploring What Can Emerge Between Different Ways of Knowing

29–30 October 2026
Shanghai, China

Convened by
ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts
International Theatre Institute (ITI)

Supported by
Shanghai Theatre Academy

In connection with
2026 Silk Road Traditional Performing Arts Week

SHANGHAI THEATRE ACADEMY
-1945-

A NEW CHAPTER

WHERE KNOWLEDGE LIVES

Exploring What Can Emerge Between Different Ways of Knowing

The performing arts have never belonged to a single way of knowing.

Knowledge lives in universities and research, but also in artistic practice: in the body of the performer, in professional and independent training, in theatres and laboratories, in communities and traditions, and in what one generation passes to another.

Some knowledge is documented and articulated; some is embodied or inherited. Some is established through research; some is discovered through practice and encounter. And some remains dispersed, unnamed, or not yet recognised as knowledge at all.

For a Network rooted in higher education, this invites us to look beyond familiar boundaries—not to move away from higher education, but to open it more fully to the different places and ways in which knowledge is created, practised and transmitted.

Higher education institutions are one essential part of this landscape. Alongside them are different forms of education and training, professional and independent artistic practice, theatres and cultural institutions, communities, traditions, and forms of transmission that may exist outside established academic structures.

These worlds do not need to become the same. Their differences matter. The possibility of the ITI/UNESCO Network lies in bringing them into relation: formal and non-formal education, institutional and independent practice, research and creation, written and embodied knowledge, inherited traditions and emerging forms.

Through ITI, the Network is connected not only across institutions and countries, but to a living international field of artistic practice. This gives it the possibility to create encounters that might not otherwise happen—and, through them, to open a space between different ways of knowing, learning and creating.

The space between is not an empty space.

Nor is it simply a bridge from one side to another. It is a space in which different forms of knowledge can encounter one another without needing to become the same. Established assumptions may be questioned; practice may become inquiry; knowledge that has remained unseen may begin to appear; and something not yet known or formed may begin to emerge.

Perhaps this is one of the Network's most important roles: not to define what knowledge should be, nor simply to connect what already exists, but to create and sustain the conditions in which different forms of knowledge, education and artistic practice can enter into meaningful relation.

A NEW CHAPTER

WHERE KNOWLEDGE LIVES

Exploring What Can Emerge Between Different Ways of Knowing

As the Network enters its second decade, the question is therefore no longer simply how we connect, but what these connections allow us to discover, understand and create.

What knowledge remains unseen?

What can emerge between different ways of knowing?

What might become possible when different forms of education, artistic practice and cultural experience meet?

The Shanghai Strategic Dialogue is an opportunity to explore these questions together.

We begin not with predetermined projects or ready-made answers, but with what each participant brings: knowledge, practice, experience, questions, uncertainties and possibilities.

Over these two days, we will look at what is changing around us, what future artists may need, and which questions require perspectives that no single institution, discipline or cultural context can provide alone.

Some encounters may remain conversations. Others may develop into research, artistic experimentation, new approaches to education, professional exchange or collaborative initiatives. What matters is to recognise where an international Network can make a meaningful difference—and what deserves to be carried further.

A living Network grows through this movement of knowledge and experience: members bring what they know and what they question; new constellations take shape; and what is discovered returns to education, artistic practice and the wider international community.

The first decade brought us together.

The second invites us to discover what can emerge between us.

Chen Zhongwen
Director General, International Theatre Institute (ITI)
Coordinator, UNITWIN Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts (ITI/UNESCO Network)

A NEW CHAPTER

WHERE FUTURE THEATRE STANDS

Exploring What Can Emerge Between Different Ways of Knowing

"Between Worlds, Beyond Boundaries", this is more than just words, but where theatre stands today. Theatre has always emerged at the intersections between worlds, between the theatre and its neighbourhood, tradition and the contemporary, language and the body, and at the interface between people and technology. Boundaries create order, yet they also generate tension. Theatre has the power to linger at the boundary, to move back and forth, and to cross it. As one of the founding members of ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts and the co-organiser of this event, Shanghai Theatre Academy is ready to open up still further, to new voices and new collaborations.

The Network's first decade brought us together. As we enter its second decade, we must ask together: what can grow between us? Digital and intelligent technologies are redrawing the boundaries of theatre. In response, Shanghai Theatre Academy has proposed and developed the "Future Theatre Studies", addressing this shift across three dimensions - form, industry, and ecology: opening up new forms while staying true to its essence, reshaping the industry without losing the human core, and nurturing an ecology that keeps difference alive. Technology can transform theatre, but it cannot replace human creativity, emotion and judgement.

Boundaries are not walls. They are doors. Shanghai is where we begin, not where we end. May this dialogue help us see each other, and build bridges of mutual learning between civilisations across regions and traditions.

Xie Wei
Chairman, Shanghai Theatre Academy

THE LANDSCAPE AROUND US

WHAT IS CHANGING?

The ways artists learn, create, research and work are changing — and with them, some of our assumptions about knowledge itself.

01	**ARTISTIC RESEARCH**	Practice is increasingly understood not only as the application of knowledge, but as a way of producing knowledge.
02	**ARTIST & EDUCATION**	Changing artistic and professional realities invite us to reconsider what future artists need, where and how they learn, and how education remains connected to artistic life.
03	**LIVING KNOWLEDGE & TRANSMISSION**	Embodied, oral, inherited and community-based practices remind us that knowledge can be carried and transmitted in ways that formal systems do not always recognise.
04	**TECHNOLOGY & AI**	New technologies are transforming creation and learning while reopening fundamental questions about body, presence, authorship, memory and human creativity.
05	**INTERNATIONAL ENCOUNTER**	Different cultures do not necessarily name, organise or understand knowledge in the same way. Encounter can reveal both difference and unexpected correspondence.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR SHANGHAI

01

What will future artists need to know?

02

What knowledge are we not yet seeing — or not yet recognising?

03

What can emerge when different ways of knowing meet?

FROM CONNECTION TO CONTRIBUTION

A LIVING NETWORK

→ DISCOVER
→ CONNECT
→ EXPLORE
→ DEVELOP
→ SHARE

We do not need to know everything before we begin.
We can begin by seeing what is already among us.

Each member carries knowledge, practices, questions, experience and relationships. When these become visible to one another, connections can emerge. When there is genuine shared interest, connections can become collaboration.

This is not a fixed formula.
It is a way of imagining how a living Network can move from encounter towards action.

WHAT DO YOU CARRY?

For Shanghai, each participant is invited to bring something real:

- A question worth exploring
- A practice worth making visible
- A challenge that may need other perspectives
- A field for international inquiry
- A possibility that may grow through collaboration

We begin with what already exists.
We make it visible to one another.
And we see what becomes possible.

29 OCTOBER 2026

DAY ONE — WHAT WE CARRY

Knowledge · Practice · Difference · Encounter

Discovery: what is changing around us, what knowledge is already present in the room, and which questions may deserve international attention.
Dialogue Facilitator · **Dr Levan Khetaguri** | Senior Advisor for Performing Arts Education and Network Development, ITI

TIME	PROGRAMME
09:00–09:30	**ARRIVAL & COFFEE**
09:30–10:00	**OPENING — Ten Years, and a New Beginning** Welcome Address — Huang Changyong, President, Shanghai Theatre Academy Opening Address — Chen Zhongwen, Director General, International Theatre Institute (ITI); Coordinator, ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts Artistic Reflection — Lemi Ponifasio, Artist and Director
10:00–11:10	**THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE — What Is Changing Around Us?** 4 short provocations: 1) Education & the Changing Artist; 2) Artistic Research & Ways of Knowing; 3) Living Knowledge, Tradition & Transmission; 4) Technology, AI & Human Presence. Followed by a plenary reflection on emerging questions, connections and shared challenges.
11:10–11:30	*COFFEE*
11:30–12:45	**WHERE KNOWLEDGE LIVES — What Do We Carry Into This Room?** Each participant brings one example of knowledge, practice or experience that deserves to be seen, understood or shared internationally. Together, these form a collective map of what is already present in the Network.
12:45–14:00	*LUNCH*
14:00–15:20	**THREE CONVERSATION ROOMS** 1. Knowledge & Transmission — What Are We Carrying Forward? 2. Artist & Future — What Are We Preparing Artists For? 3. Beyond Exchange — What Can Emerge Through International Collaboration? Each room returns with one discovery, one question worth continuing and one possibility for international collaboration.
15:20–15:40	*COFFEE*
15:40–16:40	**WHAT ARE WE BEGINNING TO SEE?** A collective reading of the day: recurring concerns, unexpected connections and questions that genuinely need an international Network.
16:40–17:30	**FROM CONNECTION TO CONTRIBUTION** How might connection become contribution, exchange become collaboration and networking lead to shared development while members retain their autonomy? Central question: What should this Network help us discover, develop and make possible in its second decade?
17:30–17:45	**CLOSING REFLECTION**
Evening	**ARTISTIC ENCOUNTER — 2026 Silk Road Traditional Performing Arts Week** An encounter with living practice, transmission and embodied knowledge.

30 OCTOBER 2026

DAY TWO — WHAT WE MAY CREATE TOGETHER

Possibility · Connection · Collaboration · Direction

Testing the Network against real questions: what can an international Network add, where might genuine collaboration emerge, and how can meaningful initiatives move forward?
Dialogue Facilitator · **Dr Levan Khetaguri** | Senior Advisor for Performing Arts Education and Network Development, ITI

TIME	PROGRAMME
09:00–09:25	**WHAT STAYED WITH US?** Participants return to the questions, discoveries and possibilities that remained with them from Day One.
09:25–09:50	**FROM CONNECTION TO CONTRIBUTION — What Can the Network Help Us Discover and Develop?** A short strategic provocation asks how connection can become contribution and exchange become collaboration, while members retain their autonomy.
09:50–10:30	**DIALOGUE CASE 1** **Theatre in the Digital-Intelligent Era: A Promising Future — Exploration and Practice of "Studies of Future Theater"** Nie Wei — Vice President, Professor, Shanghai Theatre Academy Theatre should not be led by technology, but act as a value compass and a source of theory for digital and intelligent artistic creation. With research on a "full-chain model of arts production", we address the key questions of human-machine co-creation, intelligent aesthetics, and artistic ethics.
10:30–10:50	*COFFEE*
10:50–11:30	**DIALOGUE CASE 2** **Creating For, With and By People: International Socio-Artistic Platform** Jean-Henri Drèze — Educator, Honorary Member of ITI, Vice President of Belgium Wallonia Centre of ITI An emerging initiative to recognise and connect diverse performing arts practices created for, with and by people, while respecting their cultural differences and autonomy. Exploring possibilities for international research, cooperation and knowledge transmission.
11:30–12:30	**TWO CASES, ONE NETWORK** The cases are placed beside one another — not for approval, but to explore what an international Network can add to very different questions. **DISCOVER → CONNECT → EXPLORE → DEVELOP → SHARE**
12:30–13:30	*LUNCH*
13:30–14:30	**KNOWLEDGE IN TRANSFORMATION — Visit to the Laboratory for Digital-Intelligent Culture and Arts Innovation at STA** Demonstration, interaction and reflection on how technology is changing creation, learning and the conditions in which knowledge is produced.
14:30–14:45	*COFFEE / TRANSITION*
14:45–16:00	**FROM QUESTIONS TO POSSIBILITIES — The Constellation Session** Participants gather around questions to which they genuinely feel they can contribute: What exactly is the question? Why international collaboration? What can we contribute? Who else might be involved? What is the smallest meaningful next step?
16:00–16:40	**HOW A LIVING NETWORK MOVES** A light working approach for what may continue beyond Shanghai. A question, practice or possibility may find new connections, develop through further exploration and receive coordination where needed. What is learned can then return to the wider Network.
16:40–17:25	**FROM SHANGHAI FORWARD** Emerging constellations share the questions they wish to pursue, interested contributors and possible first steps. Together, we identify what is ready to continue, what requires further exploration, and how initial follow-up may be coordinated.
17:25–18:00	**WHAT WE CARRY FORWARD — Closing Circle** We arrived asking, "What do I carry into this room?" We close by asking, "What do I carry forward from this room?" Director General closing.

DIALOGUE CASE 1

Theatre in the Digital-Intelligent Era: A Promising Future

Exploration and Practice of "Studies of Future Theater"

Proposed by Shanghai Theatre Academy

"How to get along with thinking machines? How to ensure security when algorithm is part of decision making? How to tackle ethical challenges by technologies through adaptive governance? How to realize AI for all when the divide keeps widening?" At the 2026 World AI Conference and High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance, the Chinese government posed these four pivotal questions, highlighting critical challenges confronting humanity in the era of AI and charting a course for global AI governance.

In 2024, Shanghai Theatre Academy (STA) pioneered the academic concept of "Studies of Future Theatre." The following year, its Laboratory for Digital-Intelligent Culture and Arts Innovation was designated as a Philosophy and Social Science Laboratory under the Ministry of Education, marking a significant milestone in STA's contribution to interdisciplinary humanities innovation. In active response to the four pivotal questions, STA has been trying to answer with case studies and through unremitting explorations. Rather than predicting what the theatre will become, it provides systematic interpretation of ongoing transformations, striving to ensure that algorithms serve artistic creation and that human agency remains central amid technological advances.

First, human-machine co-creation in performing art. The immersive XR drama *Daiyu Buries the Flowers* was named one of the Top 10 Demonstration Cases for Digital Innovation by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism. *The Recluse Dongpo* premiered at the UNESCO headquarters and received the Golden Rooster Award for Best Artistic Exploration in XR. Meanwhile, robot-themed dramas *City of Big Dumb Objects* and *Silicon Attendants*, alongside the experimental opera *Farewell, My Robot* reframe the philosophical question "Must performers be human?" as a visible proposition for audiences open for discussions. Crucially, human–machine co-performance does not mean substitution; rather, it allows humans to re-examine themselves.

Second, reliable, evidence-based empirical data. The Wind Tunnel, China's first AI theatre pilot and test platform, is fully accessible to the performance market as a dedicated facility for verifying and incubating digital-intelligent artistic concepts. It captures authentic audience responses via electroencephalography, eye-tracking, and micro-expression recording. On average, 10 theatrical productions undergo evaluation monthly, involving approximately 300 viewers. With all core technologies are independently developed, the Wind Tunnel delivers valid performance assessments and credible pilot outcomes, establishing a verifiable linkage between artistic intuition and audience feedback. Every intervention of algorithms in live artistic contexts is observable, auditable, and subject to systematic scrutiny.

Third, advancing governance for digital-intelligent arts and literature. As the top-ranked art university nationwide in terms of the number of key national research projects undertaken, STA hosts the Secretariat of the Chinese National Committee for Terminology in Theatre and plays a pivotal role in establishing China's independent academic discourse in theatre studies. Dozens of its policy-oriented research reports have been formally adopted by national cultural authorities, facilitating substantive academic contributions to industry governance through evidence-based advisory services. At the 2026 World Dialogue on Art and Technology, the *STA Insights on "Studies of Future Theatre"* was officially released, which calls for embracing digital intelligence transformation, deepening theoretical exploration, focusing on industrial transformation, upholding humanistic values, developing digital-intelligent ethics, and strengthening global cooperation. Ethical discussions were transformed into an academic proposition and institutional supply.

Fourth, strengthening the foundational infrastructure for public services. STA has been continuing to develop a standardized performance-specific dataset exceeding 100 terabytes, which has been designated as one of the National Data Administration's inaugural cohort of pilot initiatives. The group standard T/SAIAS 069—2026, led by STA, was officially released at the 2026 World AI Conference. Its "Pilot Project for Intelligent Theatre Creation" was included in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's list of "AI + Culture and Tourism" pilot application. Moreover, the collaborative platform for performance design was included in the "*AI + Culture and Tourism" Application Ecosystem Map. Morning Flowers (Zhao Hua)* was included in the 2026 "Micro-drama +" Action Plan of the National Radio and Television Administration. Notably, STA's internally developed data specifications have been recognized by the industry as a public product.

Chinese theatre practitioners are still working on their answers to the four pivotal questions. While theatrical forms may evolve, business models may change, and ecosystem may be reconfigured, the humanistic nature of theatre has remained unchanged. We extend a sincere invitation to international partners to jointly create a global collaborative network for the Studies of Future Theatre. Let's embrace technology in theatrical practice, stay connected to the people through theatrical creation and performance, and foster heart-to-heart exchanges between civilizations.

CASE STUDY 2 · EMERGING INITIATIVE

Creating For, With and By People

International Socio-Artistic Platform

Proposed by Jean-Henri Drèze
Educator, Honorary Member of ITI, Vice President of Belgium Wallonia Centre of ITI

Across the world, diverse performing arts practices develop creative processes for, with and by people. These include community theatre, Theatre for Development, Applied Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, socially engaged practices, and many local, Indigenous and community-based forms with their own names and traditions.

Emerging from different histories and cultures, these practices do not constitute a single movement. Yet they share important concerns: participation in artistic creation, lived experience, co-creation, relationships between artists and communities, and the connection between artistic quality and human or collective development.

In these practices, people are not only audiences or recipients of artistic work. They may become participants, performers, storytellers and co-authors of their own experiences.

The proposed International Socio-Artistic Platform seeks to recognise, understand and connect these existing practices without imposing a single definition or model, while respecting their cultural differences and autonomy.

Its guiding principle is:

Not to globalise a definition, but to discover, understand and connect a global reality.

The initiative proposes three interconnected directions:

OBSERVE — Identify and map practices across different cultures, including their names, methods, contexts and documented effects.

CONNECT — Bring together artists, researchers, educators, higher education institutions and practitioners through encounters, case studies, comparative research and international cooperation.

TRANSMIT — Develop opportunities for research, knowledge sharing, training, mobility and international laboratories.

The proposal invites the ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts to explore how artistic creation, community experience and academic research can contribute to one another, opening new possibilities for education, cooperation and human development.

FOR COLLECTIVE REFLECTION

How can we connect these diverse practices internationally without reducing their differences or imposing a universal model?

A BEGINNING, NOT A CONCLUSION

FROM SHANGHAI FORWARD

Shanghai is a beginning, not a conclusion.

Over these two days, different forms of knowledge, artistic practice and experience come into conversation. Some encounters may lead to new questions, others to research, artistic experimentation, education or professional collaboration.

Not every encounter needs to become a project. What matters is recognising where genuine interest and shared purpose can carry a possibility further.

Through the Network, these emerging connections can continue to develop, involve others and return what is learned to education, artistic practice and the wider international community.

What begins in Shanghai may take many forms. Its value lies in what we discover, develop and make possible together.

The first decade created the connections. The next begins with what we make possible through them.

Shanghai Strategic Dialogue 2026

PARTICIPATION

Participants are listed in alphabetical order by country/region.

	Name	Country	Institution / Title / Position
1	**Jean-Henri Drèze**	Belgium	Educator, Honorary Member of ITI, Vice President of Belgium Wallonia Centre of ITI
2	**Asen Terziev**	Bulgaria	National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts; Head of Theatre Studies Department and Head of "Education Quality Control Centre"
3	**Hamadou Mande**	Burkina Faso	Jean-Pierre Guingané Higher College of Theatre; Pedagogic Director and Professor
4	**Taiwo Afolabi**	Canada	University of Regina; Full Professor and Executive Strategic Advisor
5	**Chen Zhongwen**	China	Director General, International Theatre Institute (ITI) Coordinator, UNITWIN Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts (ITI/UNESCO Network)
6	**Xie Wei**	China	Shanghai Theatre Academy; Chairman
7	**Huang Changyong**	China	Shanghai Theatre Academy; President
8	**Nie Wei**	China	Shanghai Theatre Academy; Vice President
9	**Gong Baorong**	China	Shanghai Theatre Academy; Director of International Theatre Studies Centre
10	**Iuri Mgebrishvili**	Georgia	Arts Research Institute of Georgia; Director
11	**Levan Khetaguri**	Georgia	ITI Senior Advisor for Performing Arts Education and Network Development
12	**Janice Poon**	Hong Kong, China	The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts; Discipline Leader of Playwriting and Dramaturgy major programmes
13	**Vidyanidhee Vanarase**	India	International Association for Performing Arts and Research IAPAR Pune; Founder and Director
14	**Claudio De Maglio**	Italy	Associazione Civica Accademia d'Arte Drammatica Nico Pepe; President and Director
15	**Hiroyuki Takahashi**	Japan	Toho Gakuen College of Drama & Music; Professor
16	**Peter Goessner**	Japan	Toho Gakuen College of Drama & Music; Professor
17	**Rami Haddad**	Jordan	University of Jordan; Professor, Former Dean of School of Arts and Design
18	**Boldkhuu Boldbaatar**	Mongolia	Mongolian National University of Arts and Culture; Lecturer of Theatre Arts School
19	**Abdelkader Gonegai**	Morocco	University of Hassan II of Casablanca; Director of the Master's Degree in "Cultural and Artistic Engineering"
20	**Latefa Ahrrare**	Morocco	Institut Supérieur d'Art Dramatique et d'Animation Culturelle ISADAC; Director
21	**Zineb Noui**	Morocco	National Higher School of Arts and Crafts, Hassan II University of Casablanca; Professor of Organizational Management
22	**Alsiyabi Said**	Oman	Sultan Qaboos University; Professor of Theatre Department
23	**Wovi Wong Villanueva**	Philippines	University of Makati; Director of Center of Culture and the Arts
24	**Radosław Stępień**	Poland	Grotowski Institute; Representative of Grotowski Institute; Lecturer of AST National Academy of Theatre Arts
25	**Diana Nechit**	Romania	'Lucian Blaga' University of Sibiu; Head of the Drama and Theatre Studies Department
26	**Lemi Ponifasio**	Samoa/New Zealand	ITI World Theatre Ambassador in Residence
27	**Alida Bevk**	Slovenia	University of Ljubljana, Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television; Vice-Dean for Artistic and Research Projects
28	**Piyawat Thamkulangkool**	Thailand	Chulalongkorn University; Chairperson of Department of Dramatic Arts
29	**Jason Hale**	Turkey	Bilkent University; Chair of Theatre Department
30	**Paul Spicer**	UAE	Academy of Performing Arts, University of the Arts, Sharjah; Programme Leader for Musical Theatre

The final participant list is subject to actual attendance at the event.

A LIGHT STRUCTURE FOR COLLABORATION

HOW A LIVING NETWORK MOVES

Ideas can emerge anywhere in the Network. Not every possibility needs to become a project, and not every collaboration requires the same structure.

FROM IDEAS TO COLLABORATION

NETWORK MEMBERS — Bring and Engage

Members bring knowledge, questions, artistic practices, experience and possibilities. They participate where there is genuine shared interest and something meaningful to contribute.

SHARED EXPLORATION — Connect and Discover

Members with common interests explore questions, exchange perspectives and identify possibilities for collaboration.

INITIATIVE / COLLABORATION COORDINATOR — Develop and Carry Forward

When a shared possibility develops into a concrete initiative, an initiative coordinator brings interested contributors together and helps carry the work forward.

DEVELOPMENT AND SHARING OF OUTCOMES

NETWORK COORDINATION AND SUPPORT

NETWORK COORDINATOR — Chen Zhongwen

Formally recognised by UNESCO as Network Coordinator, Chen Zhongwen provides overall leadership, strategic direction and international coordination for the ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts, fostering collaboration among members and supporting the Network's autonomous and sustainable development.

SENIOR ADVISOR — Dr Levan Khetaguri

Senior Advisor for Performing Arts Education and Network Development, International Theatre Institute (ITI). Contributes to international cooperation in performing arts education, institutional partnerships and collaborative initiatives, while actively supporting the Network's continued development.

PROPOSED NETWORK COORDINATION OFFICE — Global Coordination and Development

A dedicated Network Coordination Office and team are proposed, operating under the leadership of the Network Coordinator to serve members worldwide, facilitate international cooperation, strengthen connections, support collaborative initiatives and encourage the sharing of knowledge, experience and outcomes.

The location and institutional arrangements of the Office will be determined through further consultations with interested member institutions and partners.

INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INSTITUTE (ITI) — Institutional Connection and Support

The Network maintains a close institutional relationship with ITI. Through its international connections and professional resources, ITI provides institutional support and facilitates exchanges and collaboration between the Network and the wider international performing arts community.

This proposed mechanism aims to strengthen the Network's own capacity for coordination and collaboration, rather than create an additional administrative layer. Member institutions retain their autonomy, while individual initiatives are developed and carried forward by participating members.

UNESCO UNITWIN Programme and the ITI/UNESCO Network

unesco
University Network
Member

International Theatre Institute
World Organization for the Performing Arts

Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts

1992

UNESCO launches the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme

2015

The Network's first General Assembly, at Shanghai Theatre Academy

2016

UNESCO and ITI sign the Network agreement, formally establishing the Network.

2026

The Shanghai Strategic Dialogue opens the second decade

The ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts brings together higher education institutions committed to advancing learning, research, creation and knowledge in the performing arts.

Rooted in higher education, the Network also recognises that artistic knowledge is created and transmitted in many places and in many forms: through research and teaching, artistic practice and professional experience, embodied and inherited knowledge, different forms of training, cultural traditions, communities and evolving modes of creation.

Through its connection with the wider International Theatre Institute, the Network has a distinctive opportunity to bring higher education into meaningful relation with the dynamic field of professional artistic practice — connecting institutions, scholars and students with artists, theatres, festivals, ITI Centres, cultural organisations and different communities of practice.

The Network does not seek to make these different forms of knowledge or education the same. It creates opportunities for them to encounter one another, to learn from one another across different backgrounds and practices, and to open new questions, collaborations and ways of understanding.

Through international exchange, collaborative inquiry and shared initiatives, the Network seeks to strengthen performing arts education and knowledge across regions and cultures, expand access and participation, and contribute to the sustainable, peaceful and creative development promoted by ITI and UNESCO.

The Network is a place for connection, where different ways of knowing, learning and creating meet, and new possibilities can be explored.

www.iti-unesco-network.org

International Theatre Institute ITI

Founded in 1948 at the initiative of UNESCO and leading figures in the performing arts, the International Theatre Institute (ITI) is a worldwide organisation for the performing arts, dedicated to international exchange, artistic collaboration, education and the promotion of cultural diversity.

Through its Centres, Cooperating Members, Committees, Networks and partner organisations across the world, ITI connects artists, educators, researchers, cultural institutions and performing arts communities across countries, cultures and disciplines. Its work encompasses theatre, dance, music theatre and related performing arts practices, creating opportunities for artistic exchange, professional collaboration, learning and dialogue.

ITI works to strengthen the role of the performing arts in society and to foster mutual understanding through culture. It encourages the mobility and exchange of artists and ideas, supports diverse forms of artistic expression and transmission, and creates international spaces in which different practices, experiences and cultural perspectives can meet.

Education has been integral to ITI's mission from its beginnings. Through the ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts and the wider ITI community, higher education can enter into dialogue with professional artistic practice, independent initiatives, cultural institutions and diverse traditions of learning and transmission.

ITI maintains a long-standing partnership with UNESCO and is the initiator of World Theatre Day (27 March) and International Dance Day (29 April), celebrated internationally each year by the performing arts community.

www.iti-worldwide.org

Shanghai Theatre Academy STA

Shanghai Theatre Academy (STA), founded in 1945, is one of China's leading institutions for higher education in the performing arts.

Its educational and artistic fields include theatre, traditional Chinese opera, dance, film and television, creative studies and related disciplines, with programmes ranging from vocational education to bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies.

Across its campuses, STA combines teaching, artistic creation, research and professional training. Its academic structure includes Acting, Directing, Dramatic Literature, Stage Design, Chinese Opera, Dance, Film, Creative Studies, New Media, Humanities and Social Sciences, Continuing Education and affiliated vocational schools.

Over its history, STA has educated generations of artists, educators, researchers and cultural professionals and has developed extensive national and international relationships across theatre, film, new media, dance and related fields.

As a supporting institution for the Shanghai Strategic Dialogue 2026 and a founding member of the ITI/UNESCO Network, STA provides a particularly meaningful setting in which to reflect on the relationship between education, artistic practice, research, tradition and emerging forms of knowledge.

Shanghai Theatre Academy

unesco
University Network
Member

International Theatre Institute
World Organization for the Performing Arts

Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts

Connecting education, research and artistic practice across cultures.

SHANGHAI STRATEGIC DIALOGUE 2026 | CREDITS

STRATEGIC DIRECTION, PROGRAMME CONCEPTION & DEVELOPMENT

Chen Zhongwen
Director General, ITI; Coordinator, UNITWIN Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts (ITI/UNESCO Network)

Dr Levan Khetaguri
Senior Advisor for Performing Arts Education and Network Development, ITI; Dialogue Facilitator

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP & STRATEGIC SUPPORT

Xie Wei
Chairman, Shanghai Theatre Academy

Huang Changyong
President, Shanghai Theatre Academy

Nie Wei
Vice President, Shanghai Theatre Academy

ARTISTIC VISION & CONTRIBUTION

Lemi Ponifasio
World Theatre Ambassador in Residence, ITI

Project Coordination & Organisation
Tang Yiming · Myriam Mansouri — ITI General Secretariat
Xu Yi · Wen Tao · Lan Tao — Shanghai Theatre Academy

Visual Design & Layout
Nancy Chen Simin — ITI General Secretariat

Convened by
ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts
International Theatre Institute (ITI)

Supported by
Shanghai Theatre Academy

Organised within STA by
International Cooperation Office, STA
Laboratory for Digital-Intelligent Culture and Arts Innovation, STA
Shanghai Base for Literary and Art Criticism

In connection with
2026 Silk Road Traditional Performing Arts Week

ITIUNESCONetwork
www.iti-unesco-network.org

SHANGHAI THEATRE ACADEMY ~1945~