



The man with gift of the gab

Taiwan's most talked-about talk show host tells **Gan Tian** what makes him tick

What is the difference between talk shows in Taiwan and on the mainland? Kevin Tsai, crowned best talk show host six times at the Taiwan Television Golden Bell Awards, has the answers.

When Show Luo and Jay Chou (Taiwan performers) appear on a TV show, it makes for interesting repartee, but when Sun Honglei or Wang Xueqi (mainland actors) appear, they launch into a serious talk about their acting skills, like teachers addressing a class full of students, he says.

"Chou probably knows he can't get serious with us because we are bound to make fun of him. But if I am facing Sun Honglei or Wang Xueqi, I will listen to them quietly," Tsai says.

Tsai's talk show, *Kangxi Arrives*, that he co-hosts with actress Dee Hsu (Xiao S), has been airing on Chung Tien Television since 2004. It is watched by enthusiastic audiences not only on the island but also the mainland, who catch it online.

In the past six years, the show has attracted many A-list celebrities, such as Jolin Tsai, Jay Chou, Vic Chou, Jacky Cheung and Huang Xiaoming, who share their personal stories with Tsai and Hsu.

"Andy Lau has shown up on our program five or six times," Tsai says proudly.

While Tsai is known for his witty exchanges with his guests, Hsu plays a dumb doll, with a nasty streak. Their sharply different styles are a big hit, earning Tsai the moniker "the nerd" and Hsu, "the witch".

In one episode, Hsu asks Tsai what he thinks of her deliberately terrible catwalk, and Tsai says with a forced smile: "I think you did pretty well."

Hearing this, Hsu coos: "That is what comes from having a solid education."

Graduating from the School of Theater, Film and Television at the University of California, Los Angeles, with a master's degree in TV production in 1990, Tsai was once director of Voice of Taipei Radio Station, and chief editor of GQ Taiwan.

He attributes his success as a talk show host to his ability to dig out good stories.

"I listen to all stories carefully, with full attention, irrespective of whether it is one about a cell phone being dropped into the toilet bowl, or about someone finally resolving misunderstandings with his father after many years," he says.

Some talk show hosts simply throw their prepared questions at an entertainer, without really paying any attention to their answers, but Tsai says he never does that.

"I pay full attention to their answers and when I find something interesting, I follow my instincts to ask questions other than those on my list. That's how I get more interesting stories."

After six years, however, some people believe *Kangxi Arrives* is losing its appeal, but Tsai denies it vigorously and says the program is near perfect.

"It neither bites audiences nor bores them," he says.

Though he is often invited to the mainland to host shows, he has never thought of bringing a show like *Kangxi Arrives*.

He quotes a popular Chinese saying to explain this: The orange trees to the south of Huaihe River bear sweet fruits, but these become sour if planted in the north.

Tsai says he hopes mainland celebrities will loosen up so he can do a show like *Kangxi Arrives* in the mainland.

He also wants to come up with his own show. "The Chinese attach much importance to success, so we have interviewed a lot of successful people (on *Kangxi Arrives*), but I want to interview people who fail."

Many people think a talk show host can get away with asking anything he wants, but Tsai says this is not true.

"You have to place yourself in the audience's shoes. You have to ask the questions they want to ask," he says.

In his new book, *Kevin Tsai's Way of Speaking (Caikangyong de Shuohuazhidao)*, he shares the secrets of effective communication with his fans.

This is Tsai's fourth book in the mainland, after *Some Day, Baby (Youyitian A, Baobao)*, *Wandering in LA (LA Liulangji)*, and *These Things Those Boys Teach Me (Naxie Nanhai Jiaowodeshi)*.

"In real life you can never speak the way a talk show host does," he advises.

A TV host gets only an hour or two to get under the skin of the person on his show, but in real life, people will only open up to those who are sincere, and that takes months if not years, he says.



Dee Hsu (Xiao S) and Kevin Tsai have become well-known for the talk show, *Kangxi Arrives*, which they have co-hosted since 2004.

CHINA PHOTO PRESS

'Chalk God' has an overnight brush with celebrity

By XU LIN
CHINA DAILY

Hou Zhengfeng had no idea that posting his art works online would make him an overnight celebrity.

The 36-year-old, a freelance interior decorator in Henan province, is now popularly known as the "Chalk God".

He posted his 3D chalk works in mid October on Tianya.cn, a popular domestic forum, and his work was soon all over the Internet.

Netizens compared him to the dream designer in the Hollywood hit film *Inception*, as his lifelike works are a visual puzzle.

"I never expected to become famous like this," he says.

Hou's pavement chalk pictures feature "steps" going underground; Terracotta Warriors emerging from the pavement; and the sacred lotus seat for Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy.

Some of his works are close to people's daily lives, such as the four small plots of land with vegetables sprouting from a marble floor, which represents the craze for the "stealing vegetables" game on social networking sites.

Meanwhile, a fake certificate agency with a service telephone number, epitomizes the rampant fake certificate business in China.

"I try to pay close attention to people's livelihoods in my works," Hou says.

He started working on 3D chalk pictures at the end of 2008, after reading an online post about 3D crayon pictures on the streets in Denmark. He was so impressed, he decided to draw some of his own.

Though he loved drawing as a kid, he did not get a chance to study art until he was 18. This laid a foundation for his admission to university as an interior decoration major. But he rarely drew after graduation.

"I dusted the cobwebs off my drawing skills after not having drawn anything for about 10 years," he says.

Using his knowledge of perspective and foreshortening he applied it to drawing on the ground. The only difference, he says, is that people are always on the same plane as the picture.



Hou Zhengfeng makes a chalk picture on the floor of his home about the "stealing vegetables" game on social networking sites.

He now draws in his spare time and creates a dozen works every two years, though some are not finished.

Whenever he produces a new work he will upload it to his blog. He posted all his works recently, expecting just a few hundred replies.

Chalk, charcoal pencils, string, and occasionally his son's oil painting sticks to add color, are all he needs for his paintings.

"I choose chalk because it is portable and cheap," he says.

At first, he just drew to kill time on outings with his 8-year-old son, Hou Maoxin. Weather permitting, he would go out on weekends to create the artworks with him.

Sometimes, he would first draw an outline and let his son do the rest of the work.

A variety of flat surfaces have become his canvas, such as roads, public squares and pavements in the park.

He says few people watch him when he chalks, as they don't know what he is doing. When the work is finished,



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

One of Hou Zhengfeng's 3D chalk pictures features Terracotta Warriors emerging from the pavement.

he finds primary school students often get the picture more quickly than adults because they see the world with a fresher perspective.

"If it's just for fun, people can learn it (quite easily). But it takes time and energy to be a real master of drawing," he says.

While he says he's not bothered too much about fame,

he does say the biggest difference since he got noticed is that his mobile phone battery needs recharging more often as people call him to inquire about the 3D pictures.

"There are many controversies about Web celebrities. I am very glad that most netizens praise me rather than criticize me," he says.