

# YOUTH

Five years ago, he was a bank clerk in a suit, patiently serving clients, with performance targets he was required to achieve every month in mind. Today, he is one of the most in-demand young comedians in the country who has reinvented himself, playing different amusing roles, to make his audience laugh.

Liu Zhenxiang, better known by his stage name, Liu Dasuo, was probably among the busiest comedians during Spring Festival earlier this year as he was invited to stage five original skits for different TV stations, including Hunan Satellite TV and Dragon TV.

The 31-year-old shot to fame last year with the hit reality TV program *Super Sketch Show*, which gathers comedians to create original comedies and compete as soloists or in groups for the final.

He collaborated with actor Sun Tianyu on several skits that resonated with young netizens. For instance, one of their works revealed "spiritual changes" in a procrastinator who is distracted by the overwhelming information on such social media platforms as Sina Weibo and Douyin from completing his tasks. It portrays the young man in a nuanced and humorous manner.

Many of the viewers comment that the situation presented is so common in their daily lives that they feel like they are being watched by the duo.

Liu's sketch shows often carry out hilarious examination on a certain phenomenon that young people are likely to be interested in, such as people's extreme weight-loss methods and groupies' craze for idols.

"Liu has the ability to turn a rough idea into brilliant punchlines and write down spellbinding stories," Sun says.

"By collaborating with him, I have gradually understood what it means to be someone's partner. We share mutual trust and appreciation, and support each other."

Liu and Sun together got the prize for the second-best comic duo on the TV show.

## First attempt

Many viewers regard Liu as someone who is not formally trained as an actor-scriptwriter but has succeeded in establishing himself in the performing arts industry. Yet he himself knows that he has been accumulating a wealth of experience in the field since he was young.

His first try at scriptwriting can be traced to his middle school years when he adapted the historical anecdote "Hongmen banquet" included in his Chinese textbook into a stage play. The story is about how Liu Bang, who would later become the founder of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), escapes a banquet where his enemies plot to assassinate him.

Liu Zhenxiang widely used buzzwords and catchy phrases in the adapted version and performed the work with his classmates at a competition for junior middle school students in Shenyang, Liaoning province.

The play amused the audience as well as the judges, and they won the competition. That experience gave Liu Zhenxiang a sweet taste of the life of an entertainer who is good at making an audience laugh.

"I was proud of being able to make people happy," he recalls.

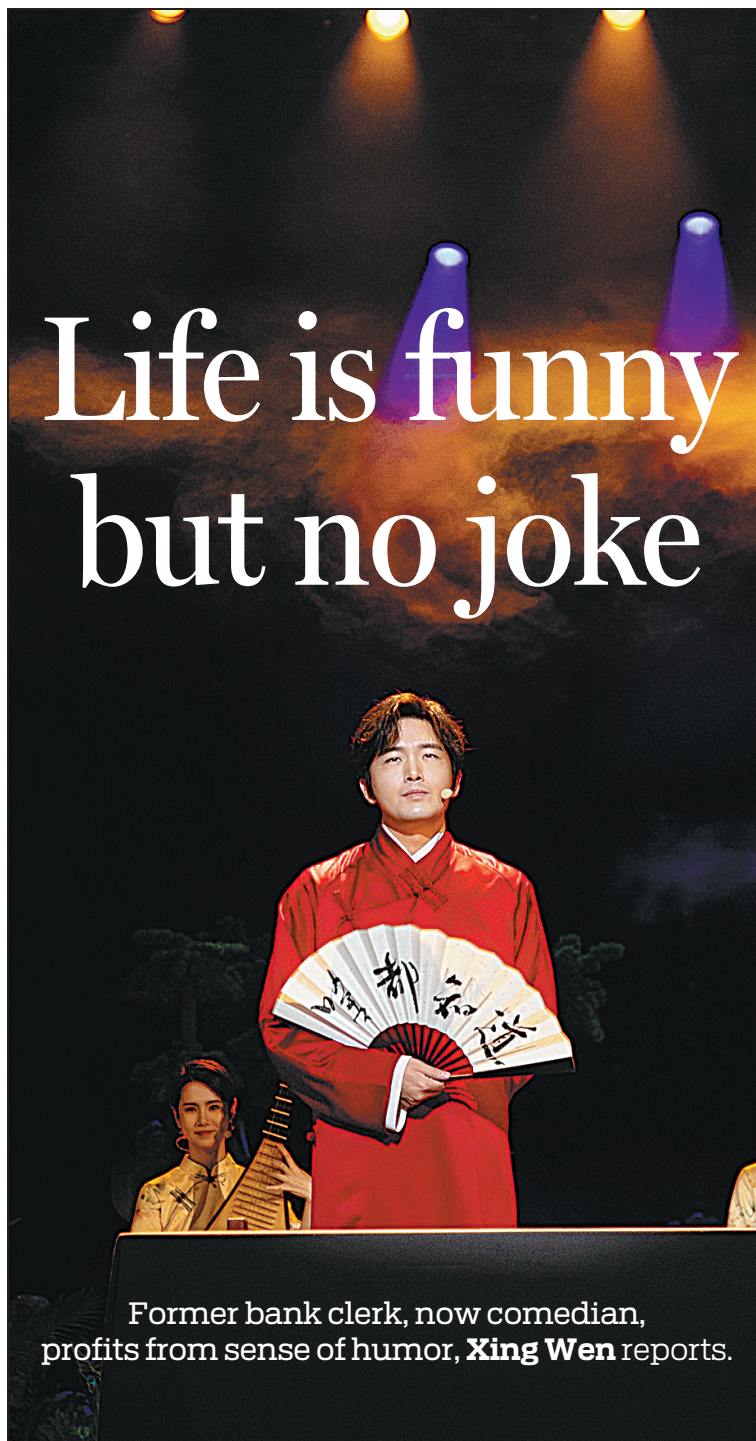
Liu Zhenxiang was always one of the most active students in his class who organized entertainment activities at recess and prepared theatrical performances for school events.

After he entered Liaoning University in 2010 where he studied economics, he set up a play club there. Its members often performed original comedies written by Liu Zhenxiang and adapted the sketches in a hit comedy TV show, titled *Love Smile*.

"I gradually formed my own acting style by practicing the stage craft," he says.

Four years later, he planned to visit Hengdian World Studios, the country's largest film-and-television shooting base in Zhejiang province, to spread his wings in the performing arts industry.

However, a friend reminded him that he should first earn a living before testing the waters in entertainment.



Former bank clerk, now comedian, profits from sense of humor, *Xing Wen* reports.



Liu Zhenxiang manages to see the funny side in certain situations. His performance on *Super Sketch Show* sees him shine in the national spotlight. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Then Liu Zhenxiang decided to find a stable job as an account manager in a local bank after graduation. The pressure of work at the bank meant he could hardly find time for acting or scriptwriting.

"Another year went by amid the dreary, tiring work," he recalls. "And one day I told myself that I must make some changes."

## A tough journey to success

Shortly afterward, he applied to volunteer with a local theatrical troupe in Shenyang. There, he worked out a script that enabled the troupe to enter the Young Theater Artist's Competition, a part of the annual Wuzhen Theater Festival, in 2016.

He started to be known by more people in the performing arts industry and also got opportunities to write comedies for TV shows, which he found inspiring.

Then, the bank clerk by day started to write comedy scripts at night. He also managed to draw nourishment for his scripts from his daytime work.

"In the bank, I had to deal with people from all walks of life and of different personalities, which helped me to portray characters in a more believable way in my scripts," he says.



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**Liu Zhenxiang**, a comedian who once worked as a bank clerk

Liu Zhenxiang adds that bank is a place where human nature can sometimes be exposed thoroughly, where the wrath, sadness or embarrassment of someone who tries to fix a financial situation can be observed and where the psychological roots of people's different consumption styles can be probed.

In 2017, an online variety show, titled *Brain Boom*, that requires participants to conjure up clever, humorous answers to questions, went to look for cast members in Shenyang. Liu Zhenxiang grasped the chance to make his way to the stage. He quit his stable job and moved to Beijing.

Although he delivered a stellar performance in the program, as well as in some other variety shows, he still found it hard to pursue an acting career.

"Most of the time when I tried to win a part in a film or drama, I wouldn't be offered an opportunity for audition," he says.

During his nadir, he had no work to do and even struggled to make a living. Just at the time he thought of giving up his pursuit of an acting career, he was offered an opportunity to take part in *Super Sketch Show*.

"It's a show in which my comedy scripts can be performed in an unprecedentedly subtle, dramatic and captivating way. With its visually stunning staging, special audiovisual effects and vigorous participants, mainly consisting of professional actors and actresses, the show's sketches are comical," he says.

He describes the chance as a long-awaited one. And that explains why such a blend of emotions fermented inside him that he burst into tears at the talent show's award ceremony held last year when he was turning 30. It marked the beginning of his thriving career.

Looking forward, he says he hopes to write, direct and star in a film or TV drama before reaching the age of 40, the next significant milestone in his life.

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