

布袋戏心得 Reflections on Hand Puppet Theater



(在课上我们可以实地操纵布袋戏偶, 很有意思。 It is fun to manipulate the puppets in class.)

张思思 Jes Stayton

82-440: Chinese Folk Performance Traditions 中国民间演艺传统

Before taking this class, I had never heard of Taiwanese puppet theater, so almost everything we learned was new to me. I learned a lot about the mechanical details of putting on a Budaixi 布袋戏 performance, as well as the role of Budaixi 布袋戏 in Taiwanese history, culture, and identity. I was very impressed by the

amount of skill and hard work that goes into a single performance. The ways in which puppet theater has developed and changed over the years in response to various forces is also particularly interesting to me, as well as the importance they still hold as part of Taiwanese cultural identity and popular culture.

First of all, I am very impressed by the skill that goes into making Taiwanese puppet theater possible. In all the performances I watched, the puppets' movements were incredibly lifelike; in many cases the puppeteer even managed to convey the personality and mood of the character he or she was portraying. Making the puppets' dance, fight and smoke cigars in a lifelike manner requires a lot of talent and years of hard work. Creating the puppets themselves, the stage and the props used in a performance also requires craftsmanship and dedication. All of the props and stages I saw were finely made, with ornate details like wood carvings or paintings. The puppets also had magnificently embroidered costumes made of a variety of materials and minutely painted faces, some which could even be manipulated by the puppeteers. It clearly took years of training to get to the kind of skill required to make a puppet or a prop for budaixi 布袋戏 performances, or to perform with the puppets.

Secondly, the degree to which budaixi 布袋戏 are part of Taiwanese popular culture in the modern day surprises and interests me. In America, we do not have many cultural traditions in part because we are a relatively young country. However, even the closest analogue we have to pili budaixi 霹雳布袋戏 TV shows, cartoons (Japanese or American), is widely considered to be only for children. Even though the community of adults who watch cartoons is growing, they are still a minority among college students. Thus, the idea of an entire channel of dramas featuring puppets being popular with college students is very novel to me. I also find it very interesting that some Taiwanese politicians have

used puppet theater in campaigns to get re-elected; clearly budaixi 布袋戏 is an important part of Taiwanese culture and identity in a way that traditional culture is not in the United States. Also I just cannot imagine puppets in a re-election campaign.

Finally, traditional puppet theater is clearly an important part of Taiwanese national identity. Although popularity has decreased with the rise of other forms of entertainment, several groups for preserving budaixi 布袋戏 have been formed, budaixi 布袋戏 has been added to the curriculum in some schools, and many parents bring children to see performances as part of Chinese culture. I did not really know about puppet theater before this class, so the degree to which budaixi 布袋戏 is intertwined with culture and identity is fascinating to me. Very few American forms of entertainment are as connected to national identity.

I really enjoyed learning about Taiwanese puppet theater, especially the details of how it changed over time and in reaction to various events. The history of budaixi 布袋戏 and its place in Taiwanese identity and popular culture is truly fascinating.