

SHIFTING AUTHENTICITY: CULTURAL DISPLAY OF TRADITIONAL HAND PUPPETRY IN TAIWAN

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Abstract

In the 1980s, when live performance of hand puppetry became less and less popular in Taiwan, it was gradually regarded as a precious cultural heritage and was labeled as “classic” or “traditional” by Taiwanese intellectuals. Interweaving with the notion of heritage and inheritance as well as the efforts of Taiwanese intellectuals and government, puppeteer masters of I Wan Jan, a famous troupe in Northern Taiwan, accordingly, adjusted their performance and teaching methods. This paper examines the transformation of traditional hand puppetry under the circumstance. The author claims that it is a shifting authenticity for cultural display from three aspects: First, a created performance for international occasions. Second, a shifting relationship between masters and students. Third, an on-purpose documenting method for inheritance and preservation.

First, in order to demonstrate delicate and fancy techniques of traditional hand puppetry in cultural display occasions worldwide, a special play Marriage by Coincidence was thus created. This specially designed 30-minutes silent play, as a consequence, has become a representative performance and heritage of Taiwanese traditional hand puppetry in the face of that it only revealed part of the tradition. In addition, ever since the puppeteer masters discontinued their regular commercial performance and devoted themselves in teaching at student clubs and in the government regulated inheritance program, the traditional master-apprentice relationship has been shifted to a new teacher-student relationship. Third, when it comes to documenting the performance and the techniques for making puppets and props, puppeteer masters have been required to repeat their movements and steps over and over again to make a perfect documentation out of its normal condition.

Keywords: authenticity, cultural display, heritage and preservation, hand puppetry, Taiwan