

台原亞洲偶戲博物館：

從舞台到博物館，從博物館回到舞台

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二十年來，位於台北的台原亞洲偶戲博物館的任務一直是保存，保護和促進台灣及亞洲的傳統偶戲文化。博物館曾收集和保存超過一萬多個戲偶、舞台、劇本版畫、樂器等等。博物館同時也促進亞洲的偶戲團和學者之間的交流。博物館與表演者和音樂家保持緊密聯繫，對於理解收藏及其保存相當重要。博物館還通過教育計劃和表演與研討會在當地社區中發揮積極作用。另外，博物館透過自己的台原偶戲團啟發年輕一代的表演者以及在國內外推廣這一獨特的藝術。在這篇文章中作者將記錄亞洲私人偶戲博物館的發展歷程以及本館在 2000 年至 2019 年期間追求的目標。這文章也是一個反思的機會，因為該博物館在 2020 年關閉，收藏捐給台灣博物館，進入一個新發展的階段。

The Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum:

from the Stage to the Museum and Back

Robin Ruizendaal*

Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum

Prelude

To help you understand Asian puppet theatre, I will have to take you on a trip, possibly on the back of a truck or on a motorcycle, over winding roads. At dusk we arrive in a village, a stage is erected, there is live music, food, lights, incense burning, prayer and ritual, people gather and then it starts. On the stage, the legends, history and gods come alive through the puppets with an elegance that goes right back to the roots of its civilisation. The music is loud and beautiful and we are amazed by the colourful spectacle. Food and drinks are offered and we sit down to enjoy the spectacle. What happens next? After some time we realise the less magical element of

* This paper is a personal reflection on the development of the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum and the Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company. I have been director of the museum for the past twenty years and have been involved in the conservation and promotion of Taiwanese and other forms

the performance: it becomes repetitive and we cannot follow the seemingly endless dialogue in the local dialect. We find that the younger generation gathers in a shed nearby to watch *The Terminator* or some other action video. Pensioners continue to watch the puppet show. Young children are mimicking the movements on stage, but do not follow the show. Uneasily we check our watches. The mosquitoes really start to bite now and tomorrow we have to get up early, and so we leave for our (air-conditioned) hotel room, yet with the feeling of having experienced something unique. In this rapidly changing climate, the museum has a central role of collecting artefacts, creating close ties with performers in order to identify objects, aiding with conservation and finding ways to promote the beauty of this art. At the same time, this situation raises some pertinent questions: has the entertainment role of Asian puppet theatre become completely redundant and is its role in religious ritual the only remaining function? Are there new ways of presenting this art?

For twenty years, the mission of the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum in Taipei, Taiwan, has been the preservation, conservation and promotion of the (living) puppet theatre traditions of Asia. The museum currently collects and preserves theatre artefacts (over ten thousand puppets, stages, libretti, prints, instruments and related objects), while at the same time it arranges performances and cultural exchanges between Asian puppet theatre companies and scholars. This close connection with performers and musicians is essential in understanding the collection and its preservation. The museum also plays an active role in the local community by means of educational programmes and performance workshops. The museum has its own venue, the Nadou Theatre, as well as the Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company, the latter having performed in over fifty countries around the world. The museum has been building bridges between different regions and communities and plays an important

of Asian puppet theatre.

role in inspiring and promoting Asian theatrical traditions.

When operating a museum of the traditional living Asian arts in Asia one encounters many challenges. Globalisation and the distancing of many Asian societies from their cultural roots in the era of mass media have raised many questions about how to present traditional culture in a museum environment,¹ especially since many young Asians are often far removed from their own traditional culture. In this context, the traditional (puppet) theatre is not only rapidly losing its entertainment value but also its significance as a bearer of social and cultural values. The Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum is trying to preserve and promote the different Asian puppet theatre traditions by making them accessible to a modern Asian audience. Collection and preservation are part of its mission, but also the education of the younger generation and the promotion of this unique Asian heritage around the world. Here I chart how a private Asian puppet theatre museum developed and the goals we have been seeking to realise over the period from 2000 to 2019.² This is an opportune moment for reflection, since the museum is closed until 2021, when it will move to a completely new venue in the same area of old Taipei, Dadaocheng, which is historically important as a port and as a theatre and music district.

Asian Puppet Theatre

The term Asian puppet theatre may seem to suggest a certain unity that transcends the geographical boundaries of countries in the continent. However, Asian puppet theatre is amazingly varied and is divided into different genres: string, rod, glove and shadow puppets. Some types, such as Vietnamese water puppets, are so distinct that they defy

1. Robin Ruizendaal, 'Mass Media and Asian Puppet Theatre in the 20th Century', *International Puppet Theatre Conference Proceedings* (Taipei: Council for Cultural Planning and Development, 1999), 296–304.

2. My forthcoming article in the thematic issue 'Asia Collections outside Asia in the Spring of 2020. Questioning Artefacts, Cultures and Identities in the Museum' of the e-journal *Kunsttexte*, published by Humboldt University of Berlin, will be concerned with similar issues, and portions of this article will

categorisation. If we want to describe some of the unifying aspects of Asian puppet theatre then its long history and its close relationship to religious ritual are two key elements, another being the importance of music in almost every type of performance. For centuries, Asian puppet theatre has been music theatre aimed at entertaining the gods and the mortals. The gods often appear on stage, presenting blessings, exorcising evil, curing disease and even assisting at births.³ As such, puppet theatre represents a treasury of grassroots religious culture, history, ethics and pure entertainment in Asia.⁴



Fig. 1. *Sbaek thom* shadow theatre performance (Siem Reap, Cambodia, 2004).

Photo: Robin Ruizendaal

With the rise of new media, puppet theatre has rapidly moved to the fringes of entertainment, and all over Asia puppet theatre companies are disappearing. In many

appear there in a different form.

3. Justus Doolittle mentions the custom of inducing birth by having the marionette of the deity Linshui Furen (the 'Mother') walk over the belly of a woman having difficulty giving birth. See Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese: With Some Account of their Religious, Governmental, Educational, and Business Customs and Opinions*, Vol. I (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1867), 119.

4. Robin Ruizendaal and Wang Hanshun, *Asian Theatre Puppets: Creativity, Culture and Craftsmanship* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009); Eileen Blumenthal, *Puppetry and Puppets: An Illustrated World Survey* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).

countries, puppet theatre companies have become cultural icons representing local identity, but they perform mainly the same shows over and over again for an audience of tourists and local schoolchildren. Although there are fewer and fewer performances in traditional contexts, some can still be found in almost every country. While actors and actors' theatre performances have disappeared in the mists of time, puppets are often kept for many hundreds of years, reaching us with vivacity and immediacy, as if they were made yesterday. The beauty of the puppets and the exquisite craftsmanship represent some of the richest theatre cultures in the world.

Eternity and Mortality

Puppets never grow old. They are symbols of a shared local or sometimes national identity. The immortality of puppets relates closely to their origins in religious ritual and ancestral worship. The need to deal with concepts of death, disease and many other natural phenomena resulted in many different belief systems.⁵

Humanity has, since earliest times, visually represented these religious beliefs in paintings and statues. In all cultures there was (and is) the need for deities, ancestors and demons to actually manifest themselves, to comfort the faithful and expel evil. This impulse has taken on many forms: music, dance, mediums, trance, and rituals with masked people and of course also puppets.

5. Lee A. Kirkpatrick, 'Toward an Evolutionary Psychology of Religion and Personality', *Journal of*



Fig. 2. Ling Goh of the Kim Giak Low Choon the Teochew Puppetry Troupe handing over a statue of Chief Marshal Tian, the god of the theatre, to the organiser of the performance in order to be worshipped on a temporary altar (Penang, Malaysia, 2017).

Photo: Robin Ruizendaal

Puppets and masks, since they are unchanging, are logical vehicles for expressing eternal truths. Puppets also provide a distance between the operator and the awesome powers that they confront, often expelling evil spirits that can seriously harm people who are unprotected. We thus find that specific puppets (as well as masks) are consecrated and worshipped in the house of the puppeteer when not used in performance, an element that holds true across a wide range of Asian puppet theatre traditions. Even now the deities take to the stage and cleanse it with their presence and ritually bless the community. Every performance of traditional Asian puppet theatre is embedded in religious ritual from beginning to end, and in most cases the performance itself is an offering to the deities.⁶

Personality, 67.6 (1999): 921–952.

6. Robin Ruizendaal, *Marionette Theatre in Quanzhou* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 285–318.

An Innovative Approach to Museum Exhibitions, Conservation, Performance, Promotion and Education

An economic boom in Taiwan and the end of martial law in the 1980s also led to a renewed interest in its own culture and roots. Puppet theatre has always had an important status in Taiwan because of its many companies (over three hundred professional troupes), its puppet television station and puppet film industry.⁷ At the time, Taiwanese collectors of puppets started to collect puppets on a large scale from China (mainly from Fujian). Some of these collectors were inspired by puppet museums in the West, such as the former Kwok On Museum in Paris of Jacques Pimpaneau, which had one of the most extensive collections of Asian theatre artefacts in the world (now in the Museu do Oriente in Lisbon). Paul Lin (Lin Jingfu), a Taiwanese medical doctor and art collector, travelled the world to buy exclusive works of modern art for his collection. One day, in a museum in Japan, he came face to face with a beautiful nineteenth-century southern Chinese glove puppet. This confrontation with the puppet was a moment of awakening for him. Lin decided to focus all his collector's zeal on the puppet theatre of Taiwan, soon expanding his interest to the rest of Asia.

The collection grew steadily to over ten thousand puppet theatre artefacts from all over Asia. The emphasis was not on the quantity of the objects in the collection, but on finding representative examples and sets of puppets from every Asian tradition, with a distinct focus on East and Southeast Asia. The Taiyuan Arts and Culture Foundation, also founded by Lin, hired a number of specialists to take care of the collection and its conservation. This group would eventually become the museum's planning committee.

7. Robin Ruizendaal, 'Potehi in Taiwan: Chinese Roots and Taiwanese Innovation', in *Potehi: Glove Puppet Theatre in Southeast Asia and Taiwan*, ed. Kaori Fushiki and Robin Ruizendaal (Taipei: Taiyuan

In the 1990s the planning committee started to consider the function of a modern puppet theatre museum in an Asian/Chinese cultural context. The museum as planned was to be sponsored and built by the Taipei City government. Differences in visions for the museum's design and direction, as well as funding cuts due to political divisions within the government, led the Taiyuan Arts and Culture Foundation to cut ties with the municipal government, after having already donated over five thousand artefacts to the planned museum (now housed in the municipality's Puppetry Art Center of Taipei). The planning committee and the foundation, faced with a lack of funds for the future museum, made a swift decision to find a building in Dadaocheng, Taipei's old town, where the puppet theatre companies had once been based. A building was found and here the Tao-Thiu-Thia (Dadaocheng in the Taiwanese dialect) Puppet Centre (TTT Puppet Centre) was founded. From 2000 to 2005 this small space was an experimental centre, charged with finding answers to the following questions:

1. How to promote (traditional) puppet theatre inside Taiwan, where young people are mainly interested in televised entertainment and their game consoles?
2. How to design exhibitions that inspire the audience to get really involved in puppet theatre?
3. How to preserve over ten thousand puppets made of a wide range of materials?
4. How to promote Taiwanese and Asian puppet theatre around the world and preserve its heritage?

As already noted, rapid economic development, the rise of the internet and mass media culture have in many cases alienated youth from traditional culture. The museum is a foreign concept and the majority of museums in Taiwan were founded

after the 1980s. In order to broaden the attractiveness of the museum, it was imperative to use the theatrical elements of the collection.

The TTT Puppet Centre opened in January 2000, with an exorcism performed by master Lin Jinlian and many puppeteers in attendance, including Master Chen Xihuang and Xu Wang, as well as Long Yingtai, the head of the newly founded

Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Taipei City government. The fifty-square-metre space was filled with artefacts and numerous DIY installations. It was important to analyse what the audience wanted and to find a balance between academically sound presentations of puppet theatre culture while at the same time creating a lively and inspiring environment. The aim was to create exhibits that worked for three different levels of visitors: school groups, individual non-expert visitors and families, and experts or people with some background knowledge. The aim was that every group would have something new and interesting to find at the centre. The DIY element was essential, as trying the different puppets, such as water puppets, string puppets and so on, does create the magical feeling of operating a puppet, and a feeling of empowerment when bringing a puppet to life.⁸

Entrance to the centre was free and the salaries of four people were partly provided by the Taiyuan Foundation and generated by outreach school educational programmes. One of our first actions was to create a puppet theatre company that would integrate traditional and innovative techniques into its performances. The Taiyuan Puppet

8. This function of puppets is often used in a hospital context and is highly effective. See Kerry Reid-Sear, Trudy Dwyer, Lea Vieth, Lori Nancarrow and Bree Walker, 'Puppets in an Acute Paediatric Unit: Nurse's Experiences', *Collegian*, 24.5 (2017): 441–447. The Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company has conducted several hospital workshops with children in Taiwan and around the world. The beneficial effects are mentioned in Michael Babcock, 'A Healing Gift', *Children's Hospital Today*, 16 (2008): 44.

Theatre Company was founded in 2000, and its members were Chen Xihuang (now 89 years old), young puppeteers and modern theatre-trained actors and designers. The first two plays that were created, *Marco Polo* and *The Wedding of the Mice*, used traditional techniques and puppets, but with modern stage techniques and design. These productions proved to be a great success and each show has since been performed around the world. The company worked closely with the local puppet carver Lai Yongting, as well as costume makers and local composers and musicians, and Lai eventually became a member of the full-time staff. The aim was to create performances that contained the essence of the traditional performance, such as the size of the puppets, the language and music, while adding new elements. These elements included shortening the performance to a maximum of one hour, minimising dialogue, improving the light and sound quality of the performance, and providing projected translated surtitles. The latter would be adapted to the country where the production was performed, for instance for *Marco Polo* there are over twenty different language versions.

These text projections in Chinese and the local language were done for local as well as foreign audiences, since most young Taiwanese also have an incomplete understanding of Taiwanese Hokkien. Close cooperation with carvers, costume makers and performers was essential for the museum staff to achieve a better understanding of the collection. The performers and carvers were also actively involved in the process of identifying objects. As described below, the conservation department regularly consults with performers and costume makers on the use of different materials and production techniques.

The puppet company has continued to flourish and has performed in over fifty countries around the world, including in venues such as the Purcell Room, Southbank Centre and the Victoria & Albert Museum, both in London, the rainforests of Central

America, the Traditional Opera Theatre in Hanoi, Union Square in San Francisco, the Macau Arts Festival, the Asian Performing Arts Festival in Seoul, Casa Milà in Barcelona, the National Gallery in Cape Town, the countryside of Cambodia and, of course, the squares and theatres of Taipei. Several co-productions were created with other traditional Asian puppet theatre companies. *Monkey King* was performed with the Joe Louis Puppet Theatre Company from Bangkok, featuring five different Asian monkeys on stage. *Shadows of Love* was a production performed at the National Theatre in Taipei and a co-production between the Beijing Shadow Theatre Troupe and the Cengiz Ö zek Shadow Theatre from Istanbul. *La Boîte* was a cooperation with Les Zonzon of Lyon and performed in French and Taiwanese and presented around the world. All these productions helped to provide a fresh focus on the traditional arts, without compromising the original forms. Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company's productions use live music, which is part of the essence of traditional Asian puppet theatre, often combining different musical genres, such as Turkish, French and Thai music. All these activities were partly supported by several Taiwanese government organisations, including the Taipei City government, the ministries of culture, foreign affairs and others.

The five years of activity of the TTT Puppet Centre served as an incubation period for a larger and more professional museum, allowing the centre's staff to hone their skills with exhibitions, performances and workshops. In 2005 two buildings in Dadaocheng were donated to the foundation by Shi Jinhua to commemorate her husband, the physician Lin Liu-Hsin, father of the museum founder Paul Lin. The Lin Liu-Hsin Puppet Theatre Museum (renamed the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum in 2015) was founded in a four-storey building thought to be from the 1920s, while a puppet theatre was placed in an adjacent older building. Later, another office building and storage facility were added. The museum became a platform for Asian

puppet research, exchange, performance and preservation. The museum staff grew from four people in 2000 to fifteen full-time people in 2008.

Education and conservation departments were established, as well as the Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company. The museum aims to present exhibitions that illustrate the local environment, paying attention to both the ethnographic as well as the aesthetics of the exhibits. Every exhibition is designed for three levels of visitors: schoolchildren, families and individual visitors, experts and performers. The museum is a private museum and receives no structural support from the government, although it is recognised by both the Ministry of Culture and the Taipei City government. Funding comes partly from the Taiyuan Arts and Cultural Foundation as well as from corporate sponsors. Until 2018 over half of the budget was derived from performances, theatre rentals, exhibitions, museum entrance fees and tours, as well as occasional government-sponsored projects. And as with most museums, every year the museum has struggled to make ends meet.

The Collection

Although puppet performances were presented at Asian courts and were an important source of entertainment for the population in general, the collection and preservation of puppets were seemingly never deemed important. To the best of my knowledge, there is no mention of any puppet collector or related institution before 1900.⁹ Until this period, Asian puppets were mainly acquired by Western nations and collectors, and we thus find unique sets of ancient Asian puppets in Europe and the United States, such as the Raffles collection of *wayang kulit* shadow puppets in the British Museum

9. Some puppets were preserved in the imperial collection in Thailand and are now in the National Museum in Bangkok; see Natthaphat Chanthawit and Promporn Pramualratana, *Thai Puppets and Khon Masks* (Bangkok: River Books, 2006). A set of *hun krabog* puppet-making tools from a family that used to work in the palace is now in the collection of the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum.

and the collection of glove and string puppets and stages from Fujian of the Dutch sinologist J.J.M. de Groot (1854–1921) at the Ethnographic Museum in Leiden, as well as the previously mentioned collection of Jacques Pimpaneau. There were of course many others.

One of the first theatre museums in Asia was the Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum at Waseda University, Japan, founded in 1928. In the 1930s a group of Taiwanese alumni of Waseda University donated a beautifully carved puppet stage and glove puppets to the museum. The first collection of stages and puppet in the Japanese colony of Taiwan was in the 1930s, when the Taiwan Governor Museum (now the National Taiwan Museum) acquired the glove puppet stage and puppets of the puppeteer Tong Quan.



Fig. 8. Southern Fujian glove puppet in the museum collection.

Photo: R.R.

In the post-war period, the onslaught of mass media culture had more or less stabilised and most regional wars and conflicts came to an end, but the damage to puppet traditions had been done and many puppet theatre companies ceased to perform. The material heritage, too, was quickly degrading through neglect. After the

foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Soviet-style cultural politics meant that all religious activities were banned and puppet theatre companies were disbanded and puppeteers and musicians concentrated in large government-controlled companies. Since puppeteers had often donated their own collections of puppets and scripts to the state, all the precious artefacts in these collections were destroyed during the Great Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Puppets, scripts and stages were burned or discarded. Puppeteers were symbols of reactionary forces and mistreated as such.

But the 1980s, 1990s and early years of this century were essential in the collection of theatre puppets inside Asia. In many Asian countries, including China, collectors started to use new wealth to collect formerly neglected puppet theatre artefacts. Lin started to collect in the 1980s when he saw that many Asian countries and collectors were neglecting their puppet traditions. Having started relatively early, the museum contains many unique artefacts, a large number of which featured in the most complete book on Chinese puppet theatre by the eminent researcher Ye Mingsheng.¹⁰ Apart from the Chinese/Taiwanese collection, Lin also acquired a significant number of Indonesian *wayang kulit* shadow puppets and over five hundred Asian masks from Tibet to Indonesia. Although over five thousand artefacts of this collection were donated to the Taipei City government in the late 1990s (and could not be recovered), the museum managed to increase its collection to over ten thousand puppets. The collection now holds representative objects from most Asian countries, including Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

Puppets are preferably not bought from puppeteers directly in order to promote local conservation. If that is not feasible, or if companies cease to perform, the

10. Ye Mingsheng, *Zhongguo kui lei xi shi: Gudai, jin/xiandai juan* [History of Chinese Puppet Theatres: Antiquity to Modern Periods] (Beijing: Zhongguo xi ju chu ban she, 2016).

museum might also buy complete sets of puppets. Most Asian puppets and related objects are now acquired from auction houses around the world, as well as through connections with antique dealers, donations and various other sources. The number of objects and their availability are dwindling rapidly due to the increased interest in local Asian traditions in different Asian countries. The Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum also advises museums around the world and in Taiwan (including the National Taiwan Museum and Tainan Cultural Affairs Bureau) and helps them identify related objects.



Fig. 9. Second-floor exhibition room in the museum featuring local glove puppet theatre in Taipei.

Photo: R.R.

At present the website of the museum is under construction, while the monumental process of digitisation of the whole collection is under way. Eventually all objects will be visible online accompanied by extensive written information. In 2009 the museum published the illustrated book *Asian Theatre Puppets*, introducing the Asian puppet theatre heritage to a wider audience and emphasising the excellence and innovation of the artists who produce the puppets.¹¹ It was also an attempt to break through entrenched value systems of so-called high art as opposed to ethnographic art; there is still a long way before the amazing sculptures of many puppets are accepted as such

by fine art museums. It was therefore an unusual honour to be invited to present the exhibition *The Magic of Asian Theatre Puppets – Beauties, Heroes, Villains, Gods and Clowns* at the National Gallery in Cape Town in 2017.

Cooperation and Exchange

The Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum actively reaches out to (puppet theatre) museums, collectors and performers across the region and around the world. This results in cooperation in the fields of research, exhibitions, performances and publications. Recent examples are the ‘Southeast Asian Glove Puppet Theatre’ conference held in December 2015 and the ‘Dressed to Kill: Puppet Costumes in East and Southeast Asia’ conference in December 2017. These were combined with an exhibition and puppet festival, in which performers and researchers from different Asian traditions came together to study each other’s work and exchange information. This resulted in the publication of a bilingual book, *Potehi: Glove Puppet Theatre in Southeast Asia and Taiwan*, and continued exchanges between the companies.¹²

The museum organises exhibitions in other museums in Taiwan and around the world. Besides Cape Town, in the past decade an Asian shadow theatre exhibition was organised at the Arts and Sculpture Museum in Izmir, Turkey, in 2011, and a Chinese puppet theatre set up at the East-West Center in Honolulu. In 2019 the museum curated the exhibition *Made in China* at the Museu da Marioneta in Lisbon. It is currently preparing the exhibition *Formosa: Puppet Theatre from Taiwan* at TOPIC: Tolosa International Centre of Puppetry in Spain.¹³ Due to the limited space of the museum, we seldom host exhibitions from other museums, though there have been

11. Ruizendaal and Wang, *Asian Theatre Puppets*.

12. Fushiki and Ruizendaal, *Potehi*.

13. Robin Ruizendaal, *China, Collection of the Museu da Marioneta* (Lisbon: Museu da Marioneta, 2019). This is the first publication of the museum’s collection published in both English and Portuguese editions.

small exhibitions where artists from outside puppet theatre circles have been invited to exhibit works based on or inspired by the collection.

The Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum provides photographs and other materials to researchers around the world as well as for museum exhibitions and educational projects, maintaining close ties with puppet museums in the region. For instance, it advises museums under construction, such as the puppet theatre museum in Gudo, Java. International attention to local culture can often have a positive effect, as both the local government and population will start paying more attention to traditional puppet art. At the same time, it has an inspirational effect on local puppet companies and cultural workers.

Apart from accepting artefact donations, the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum also donates objects to other museums to bolster their collections of Asian puppets. Recent donations include the presentation of two unique Japanese masks to the Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University, Tokyo, and Chinese shadow puppets to the Musée Gadagne in Lyon and Museu da Marioneta in Lisbon. The museum also helps to trace sets of puppets for other museums. In recent years it managed to find sets of Guangdong rod puppets for the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Canada, and the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, USA. Academic exchanges are mainly conducted through lectures and publications by me as the museum director.

Conservation

Local, regional and international exchanges are important tasks for the conservation department, but the principal role is to undertake care, preservation and conservation tasks, as well as the facilitation of dynamic local and international exhibitions and

loan programmes.¹⁴ The museum in its original building before 2019 had three floors of completely climate-controlled spaces for storage. The department fosters continuous study, research and sensitivity to the interpretations, handling and preservation of the collection, and, led by the conservator Kim Siebert, works with several trained specialists, volunteers and interns drawn from the local and international community. An essential premise of the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum is close consultation with the living tradition of puppetry in Asia, that is the people who perform and create the puppets. Conservation of the puppets and related artefacts is thus guided by the identification of different types of knowledge and processes that contributed to their creation, interpretation and performance.

The main object of the conservation department is preventative conservation. This is defined by International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property as

all measures and actions aimed at avoiding and minimizing future deterioration or loss.

They are carried out within the context or on the surroundings of an item, but more often a group of items, whatever their age and condition. These measures and actions are indirect—they do not interfere with the materials and structures of the items. They do not modify their appearance. Examples of preventive conservation are appropriate measures and actions for registration, storage, handling, packing and transportation, security, environmental management (light, humidity, pollution and pest control), emergency planning, education of staff, public awareness, legal compliance.¹⁵

Intervention is thus avoided or minimised, and long-term preservation prioritised.

14. See also Rosie Cook, Kim Siebert, Kuo Chienfu and Ma Si-Yuan, 'Performing Puppet Conservation: Concepts of Expertise and Significance in the Conservation of Chinese Glove Puppet Costumes' in the present issue, which explains in detail the work of the conservation department.

15. International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, 'Preventive Conservation: Our Approach', <https://www.iccrom.org/section/preventive-conservation>.

Very little information is available on the conservation of puppet theatre artefacts.¹⁶ The wide range of physical materials, their sometimes fragile condition and the cultural diversity of the collection present particular considerations. Sacred functions in their communities of origin are a particular concern. The conservation department thus works closely with experts in the field drawn from across the globe. An example is cooperation with the textile expert Julia Brennan, founder of the company Caring for Textiles and a great source of knowledge and inspiration in the preservation of textiles in Southeast Asia and around the world (recently also with the preservation of clothing from the Rwandan genocide). Though her work at the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles in Bangkok, she met with Kim Siebert and through this contact a project developed together with the Queen Sirikit Museum and the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum for the preservation of puppet costumes.¹⁷ Cooperation with the conservation expert Rosie Cook and the conservation department staff resulted in some of the first papers on puppet conservation.¹⁸ There are also frequent exchanges with local experts and universities, for example the Department of Cultural Heritage Conservation of National Yunlin University of Science and Technology (Yuntech), the Department of Textiles and Clothing, Fu Jen University, and the Museum Studies departments of Taipei and Tainan Arts universities. Over the past ten years the museum conservation department has been working with interns from Taiwan and around the world. The conservation department also trains volunteers, who provide essential assistance.

16. Lisa Kronthal, 'Conservation of Chinese Shadow Puppets from the Anthropology Collection of the American Museum of Natural History', *Objects Specialty Group Postprints* 5 (1997): 32–51.

17. Julia Brennan, 'The Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles: Establishing a Preservation and Conservation Framework', in *The Conservation of Material Culture in Tropical Climates: Procedures of the 3rd APTCCARN Meeting* (University of Melbourne and Silapakorn University, 2012).

18. Rosie Cook et al., 'Performing Puppet Conservation' in the present issue; Rosie Cook and Kim Siebert, 'Crazed Puppets: New Materials in Taiwanese puppetry', Paper at the Shock of the New: Modern Materials, Media and Methods, AICCM Joint Objects and Electron SIG Symposium (Melbourne, 8–10 February 2017).

Fieldwork

I have been conducting fieldwork in many Asian countries since the early 1990s, and since 1998 under the auspices of first the planning committee and then the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum. The aim of fieldwork is not only to provide background information on the collection and exhibitions but also to create lasting links with local communities across Asia, as well as to assist puppet theatre companies and museums with the promotion of their art and the conservation of objects. One example is the commissioning of traditional Khmer shadow scripts on *pattra* leaves, a tradition that was thought to be lost after the Khmer Rouge period. These fieldwork visits are organised by the author in collaboration with local performers and experts.

The museum staff also undertakes short ethnographic fieldwork trips, sometimes participating in performance training or puppet making, in order to better their own expertise. The results of the fieldwork are translated into exhibitions, workshops and further exchanges.



Fig. 12. Author with members of a *tholpavakoothu* shadow puppet company; the late master Shri Krishnankutty Pulavar (*centre*) and his son Ramachandra Pulavar (*right*) (Kerala, 1999).

Photo: R.R.

During fieldwork, contemporary examples of puppets and other artefacts are collected for comparison with holdings, and film and photographic material is also acquired and edited, to be shared whenever possible with the performers.

Education

The Taipei City government arts education programme stipulates that all second-year elementary school students must visit a puppet museum and see a traditional performance. Over the past few years this has led to a huge influx of visitors (and income). Other education activities include classes for carving and performance for specialists from Taiwan and abroad. Museum experts regularly present lectures at different universities in Taiwan and at conferences around the world.

Another important educational programme is Touch Taiwan, which first ran from 2013 to 2015, and continues in different forms until the present. For this project, the museum and theatre company have worked with a number of Taiwanese aboriginal tribes. The project touches the core of Taiwan: its original stories. Taiyuan wrote the stories into a shadow play (inspired by Larry Reed of ShadowLight Productions in San Francisco) and then asked the elders to translate the story into the local tribal language (in total the company worked with over a dozen different tribes and languages). Together with the tribal members, the shadow puppets were constructed, and afterwards the play was rehearsed and performed for the community. During the rehearsals, children were often very playful and naughty, but on the night of the performance, once seated behind the screen and with the lights turned on, they gave excellent performances in the tribal language that made the elders cry with emotion. This was a very rewarding programme and is now part of the curriculum in several aboriginal schools. The programme has been adapted for use in Canada, where First

Nations artists participate, as well as being used in France and other parts of the world. The programme is also adapted for the theatre's own neighbourhood, the old city of Taipei, where we create stories in cooperation with the inhabitants and encourage social interaction and the communication of traditional knowledge.¹⁹

Conclusion

Over the past twenty years, it has been our experience that the climate for the promotion of the traditional arts has improved, even as globalisation and rapid economic development have acted as negative influences on traditional arts. However, the impetus to strengthen local identities (not least in Taiwan) has led governmental and non-governmental actors to realise that education in the local culture is essential. These are all hopeful developments, as puppet theatre is consistently one of the most representative examples of local culture. In this paper we asked whether the entertainment role of Asian puppet theatre has become completely redundant and its role in religious ritual remains its only function. Are there new ways of presenting this art? It is true that the religious function of puppet theatre is essential for its survival in modern Asia, and it is also true that its entertainment function has largely been replaced by television, film and the internet. This very painful transition of the puppet theatre to the fringes of Asian entertainment has almost concluded. Indeed, as the title of this paper suggests, although many puppets made their way from the stage to the museum, the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum and others like it continue to actively bring the puppet culture from the museum back to the stage, through education, promotion and the sharing of information.

19. Irene Chou and Robin Ruizendaal, eds, *Tai wan bu jian le! 2: bu luo de gu shi bu luo zi ji yan* [Touch Taiwan: Aborigine Stories, Performed by Aborigines] (Taipei: Taiyuan, 2013).



The museum is now again entering a new phase, moving in 2021 to nearby premises. The new venue will be the home of the collection and the museum will continue its function as a national and international platform for the promotion and preservation of the traditional arts. Exciting new initiatives abound. Currently the museum is assisting the young puppeteer Kuo Chienfu with the creation of a new glove theatre production. The museum provides him with the ancient text and libretti for the performance and assists in developing a production in the classical style with modern innovations. We hope this will prove another step in the movement from the museum back to the stage.

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