

我对布袋戏的感想 My Thoughts on Hand Puppet Theater



金溥深 Matthew Jin

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Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 is a traditional Chinese hand puppet theater performance that has captured the hearts of youths and elders alike. It is known by many names, including small basket puppetry and finger puppetry. The puppets are usually stored in a small basket for travel in between performances, hence its name. Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 originated in 17th century Quanzhou 泉州, part of Fujian 福建 province in China. Currently Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 is widely popular in Quanzhou 泉

州 and Zhangzhou 漳州 of Fujian 福建 province and Chaozhou 潮州 of Guangdong 广东 province, as well as Taiwan. Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 proved to be so popular in Taiwan that it has become an essential component of Taiwanese culture and identity.

The puppets used in Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 performances are made from wood and fabric. Wood is used to carve the head, hands, and any props that the puppet might utilize, while colorful decorated fabric is used to form the body and clothing, joining the wooden parts together to form a whole puppet. The puppets are designed to be controlled by one person via one hand. A skilled puppeteer can utilize three fingers to mimic body movements in the puppet, such as walking, sitting, and even fighting. The index finger controls the head of the puppet while the thumb and middle finger control each of the arms.

Music is an essential part of a traditional Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 performance. When Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 first emerged in Taiwan during the Qing 清 dynasty, “south pipe” 南管 style music performance was the norm associated with Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 performances. Chinese string instruments composed of the majority of troupes that performed under the “south pipe” 南管 norm. The music was soft and elegant to accompany the romantic plots that often dominated Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 performances at the time. Gradually, the audience started craving for folk stories of bravery and martial might over love stories. This new genre of Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 also demanded an appropriate genre of music, and the “north pipe” 北管 genre became the new norm. “North pipe” is characterized by its quick pace and intensity of its percussion instruments to mimic the chaos of combat scenes. This style of Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 solidified as the definitive hand puppet theater of Taiwan.

After watching examples of Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 performances, I am impressed with the strength and dexterity of the puppeteers in their execution of puppet movements. Often a puppeteer would control two puppets at once, with one on each hand. Their fingers are capable of movements involving unusual angles that one would not be able to mimic without years of practice. The fluidity and accuracy of their movement brings the puppets to life in a way that is unique and elegant. The Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 troupes also impressed me with their efficiency. Usually a troupe would consist of a small group of around 3-4 puppeteers, and they are able to put on a show of epic proportions considering the manpower involved. There would be a narrator that is able to recite not only the narration, but also the lines for every character in their respective voices. The narrator does not miss a beat throughout the entire performance that can last up to an hour. The same amount, if not more, stamina is required of the puppeteers as well. No matter how warm the weather, they dress up in black overalls so that their contour blends in with the black background and does not distract the audience from the real star of the show, the colorful puppets.

The Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 culture reminds me of the martial arts culture in many ways. There is a tradition that must be maintained and preserved through demonstrations of skill. Bu Dai Xi 布袋戏 is a miniature version of martial arts where full body movements are condensed into movements of merely three fingers.