

Exploring the Dissemination and Development of Culture: The Protection and Inheritance of Glove Puppetry

Cuiran Lin

International Department of Beijing No.8 Middle School, Beijing, China
Corresponding author: ashleymf@pku.org.cn

Abstract:

As a traditional folk art form originating from Fujian Province, China, and included in the *Intangible Cultural Heritage List*, glove puppetry has a profound historical background and rich and unique cultural connotations. With the promotion of globalization and the information age, its scope of dissemination has spread to Taiwan and even to Southeast Asia, gradually attracting widespread international attention. However, such traditional art is facing many challenges in today's society, such as cultural shock, talent loss, and adaptability. To better deal with these problems, this study will focus on the historical evolution and development of glove puppetry, its current status, and solutions, aiming to provide theoretical support and case references for its sustainable development in the context of globalization and continuously create a relatively good ecological environment for glove puppetry. The specific methods include reviewing historical documents, reading relevant field survey data, and analyzing the implementation and impact of solution strategies. The research results show that glove puppetry has undergone large and small dissemination transformations in the course of historical evolution, but in today's information society, it still faces problems such as insufficient traditional protection, talent loss, and poor cultural adaptability. To meet these challenges, the study mentioned solutions that have already been implemented. The research concluded that the continued development of glove puppetry depends on the protection and inheritance of traditional art forms. These findings have created a good cultural ecology for the survival and development of glove puppetry in modern society and provided valuable references and practical direction.

Keywords: Glove puppetry; communication subject; inheritance strategy; innovative development.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the historical evolution and development of glove puppetry, an intangible cultural heritage art originating from Fujian Province, China, as well as its current status and related solutions in today's society. Glove puppetry has experienced hundreds of years of development in China, and has evolved from a local drama into a traditional art form with wide influence and dissemination value. As the value of puppetry is constantly explored, it has not only gained new life in Taiwan but has also gradually moved towards a larger world stage; This research is very meaningful for its protection and inheritance, as well as innovation and transformation in modern society. This study mainly focuses on the historical evolution of glove puppetry, regional dissemination, current problems faced by machines, and optimization strategies. The literature analysis method was used to search and read relevant materials and documents. The advantage of this method is that it can well sort out the long development context and survival status of glove puppetry, identify the

existing problems and their causes, and thus extend the corresponding solutions to facilitate the research. The ultimate goal of this study is to reveal the development path and cultural value of the traditional culture of glove puppetry in the information-based globalized society through a relatively comprehensive analysis and to analyze and list practical solutions to the current challenges. To achieve the goal, a detailed literature review and case analysis were conducted to provide scientific theoretical support and case references for the protection and dissemination of glove puppetry and to promote its sustainable development and international dissemination in modern society.

2. The Development and Evolution of Glove Puppetry

2.1 The History and Origins of Glove Puppetry

Glove puppetry, commonly known as "palm puppetry", is one of the ancient Chinese puppetry genres. According to historical records, it "originated in the Jin Dynasty, flour-

ished in the Song Dynasty, and reached its peak in the Ming Dynasty” and has a history of over a thousand years [1].

Glove puppetry was widely spread during the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty, and even spread to Southeast Asia and Taiwan, where it had a profound impact on local culture. As early as the Jin Dynasty, the “*Records of Lost Things*” called puppetry “a hundred kinds of entertainment in the palm of your hand”, and the Dunhuang murals preserved from the Tang and Five Dynasties also depicted this kind of entertainment. In the Song Dynasty, the folk art of puppetry began to flourish and was mostly popular in the southern Fujian region [2]. During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, there were a large number of documents recording the development of glove puppetry. As the Central Plains culture spread southward, glove puppetry was first introduced to Fujian from Quanzhou. It was particularly popular during the Ming and Qing dynasties, especially in Zhangzhou [3]. There are two theories about the origin of the name “Glove puppetry”. One is that the puppets are shaped like glove bags, and the other is that the performers put the props into the glove bags. During the Republic of China period, Fujian established more than 100 glove puppet show troupes of various sizes and widely distributed, and some of them performed abroad.

Fujian glove puppetry is now divided into two schools, the northern and southern schools, due to differences in performance techniques, music, and singing styles. The northern school, represented by Yang Sheng of Zhangzhou, is good at martial arts scenes and mainly manipulates the puppets with the left hand; the southern school, represented by the “Jin Yongcheng” Li family troupe of Quanzhou, is good at literary and emotional scenes and mainly manipulates the puppets with the right hand [3]. Fujian glove puppetry was introduced to Taiwan in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, where it took root and developed into an industry with modern characteristics. With the continuous development of glove puppetry and the continuous integration of culture, the boundaries between the North and the South have gradually become less clear. However, facing the rapidly developing modern film and television industry, the current development status is worrying. The best-developed glove puppetry is the Pili puppet show developed in Taiwan. To adapt to the screen, it added lighting, scenery, explosions, and other effects, which won the love of young people and gradually formed a unique Taiwanese puppet show feature [2].

2.2 Artistic Characteristics of Puppetry

As glove puppetry is an intangible folk art with a long history, it is usually known for its exquisite and ingenious puppet modeling and unique operating techniques.

The puppet head of glove puppetry is one of the factors that bring visual shock to the audience. The puppet head makes the character’s characteristics distinct, and the sophisticated mechanism hidden inside makes the glove puppet’s expression delicate and the character image deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Another factor is the skill displayed by puppeteers, who use their fingers to directly manipulate the movements of puppets, with a brisk, swift, and powerful rhythm; at the same time, the lifelike postures of the puppets can also convey the inner thoughts of different characters. Some master puppeteers can even use their hands to play two or more characters with very different personalities at the same time, multitasking and shocking the audience. Of course, traditional music and singing are also indispensable in the performance. The orchestra members of the troupe will use traditional Chinese folk instruments to add layers to the emotional changes of the drama and create an atmosphere. The repertoire of glove puppetry is mostly based on ancient historical stories myths and legends, and there are a large number of scripts preserved. The plots are compact and full of dramatic conflicts. The costumes made of Zhangzhou embroidery also convey a good visual effect, and the stage setting strives to truly restore the classic scenes. These elements together shape the unique artistic charm of glove puppetry.

2.3 The Artistic Value of Glove Puppetry

As an art form that has existed in Chinese history for nearly a thousand years, glove puppetry not only has historical value but has also developed rapidly due to its unique geographical location and historical and cultural heritage. Especially during the Tang and Song dynasties, the prefect of Zhangzhou, Zhu Xi, announced to “advise against the ban on puppet shows”, restricting puppet show performances in cities and villages to prevent people from making money in the name of blessing and avoiding disasters [1]. The glove puppetry is exquisitely shaped, the performance techniques are superb, and the connotations are rich. It is an art form with distinctive characteristics in the history of Chinese drama and puppetry. Comprehensive research on its history and current situation and promotion of its development can not only enrich and improve the history of Chinese puppetry and the history of Chinese drama but also promote the development and research of the history of world puppetry. As early as 1960, Zhangzhou puppet performance master Yang Sheng and others brought glove puppetry abroad and participated in the Second International Puppetry Festival, winning the gold medal for performance and bringing honor to the motherland. Since then, the reputation of puppetry has spread abroad [1]. After the reform and opening up, the

Zhangzhou Glove Puppetry Heritage and Protection Center has visited nearly 50 countries and regions for friendly performances and has been highly praised by foreign audiences, experts, scholars, and news media as “world-class art” [1]. In 2006, Zhangzhou glove puppetry, as a leader in the field, successfully became one of the first batches of national intangible cultural heritage in China. In 2012, it was also successfully selected for the *UNESCO List of Best Practices for Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding* [4].

3. The Current Status of Puppetry

3.1 Impact of Modernization

As a kind of intangible cultural heritage with local characteristics, glove puppetry is also an important part of local entertainment. However, with the rapid development of the information age, the emergence of television and video websites has completely subverted the traditional performance form of glove puppetry. Traditional skills such as glove puppetry are all facing the test of the times.

The production cost of traditional glove puppetry is high, requiring a lot of manpower, material resources, and time, which is a huge difference from the current mainstream media that is easy to produce. Due to the simple texture of the puppets in traditional glove puppetry, it is difficult to meet the modern audience’s demand for diversity and innovation. Traditional art has not been combined with modern technology, and publicity is not in place. As a result, glove puppetry has begun to decline and has retreated to the edge of the performance market [5]. As people’s entertainment methods have become more diverse, the pace of life and values of contemporary young people have also undergone drastic changes. Young people are less willing to choose jobs that require long-term hard training, have slow results, and pay little. This situation has caused the inheritance of glove puppetry to encounter a bottleneck [6].

3.2 Limitations of the Audience

Since glove puppetry is a product of the times, it inevitably incorporates certain characteristics of the old society. For example, glove puppetry repertoires often use plots from classic novels, and the characters’ behaviors and attitudes are conservative. Such repertoires that completely depict life in ancient times no longer attract young people who like innovative culture, and even seem old-fashioned [7]. The performance of glove puppetry often requires a specific place and time, but modern society is fast-paced and demanding. People think that this form of performance that conforms to the slow pace of life and requires going to the scene to experience it is inconvenient and a

waste of time. Therefore, young people who are bound by social pressure do not like to watch it. Most of the elderly who lead a leisurely life are interested in watching it, which has also led to the gradual aging of the audience of glove puppetry. In addition, as a local art form of the Minnan region, glove puppetry has strong local characteristics. For example, the local Minnan dialect is used in the singing and recitation of glove puppetry, and even interesting Minnan slang and colloquialisms are used. This is very popular with Minnan-speaking audiences because the Minnan-speaking audience group can fully mobilize their personal knowledge background and combine it with the cultural environment to understand these language designs, which is something that non-Minnan-speaking audiences cannot achieve [7]. Language is also one of the main means for people to understand drama. Due to language barriers and cultural differences, non-Hokkien audiences cannot fully understand the connotation of glove puppetry, causing them to lose interest in this intangible cultural heritage, which has a certain impact on the publicity and promotion of glove puppetry.

3.3 Decrease and Aging of Inheritance Talents

As a traditional art form, glove puppetry requires long-term accumulation and stage practice. This long-term accumulation is called “childhood skills”, which means that the skills are improved through continuous practice starting from the childhood of the inheritor [6]. The finger and palm techniques of glove puppetry are complex and the movements are fast, which requires a high level of basic skills from the performers. In addition to the need for the performers to have basic skills, the inheritors of glove puppetry still need to pass on the skills through two simple methods. The traditional method of glove puppetry mainly relies on the long-standing family and troupe-style education, which is traditional and simple [8]. However, due to the lack of efficient and flexible management mechanisms and the loss of core skills and talents, the current glove puppet industry is in a dilemma of talent shortage. Some inheritors choose to leave this field in pursuit of a better quality of life and career development. In this case, family heirs may be unwilling to take over, and troupe-style heirs often change careers due to livelihood issues, which not only wastes the efforts and time of their predecessors but also leads to a talent gap in the glove puppet industry [8]. As the existing actors grow older and young actors are unable to take on the heavy responsibility, the inheritance of glove puppet art will face severe challenges.

4. Countermeasures

4.1 Talents Innovation in Talent Training

To cope with the difficulties in the inheritance of glove puppetry, the government has taken a variety of measures to protect this traditional art. To solve the problem of the talent gap, the Fujian Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Agency and several theater troupes jointly launched the “Fujian Puppetry Successor Talent Training Program” [1]. Since the implementation of this project, hundreds of new puppetry talents have been successfully cultivated, making the industry team younger and effectively alleviating the inheritance crisis. This move organically integrates teaching, education, performance, and training, promotes puppetry in schools, classrooms, and communities, and explores innovative models of collective inheritance. In 2005, puppet theater troupes and colleges established a special puppet theater society, and there are professional staff to provide guidance. In addition, the Zhangzhou Puppetry Heritage and Protection Center holds free performances for the public, especially young people, every year to gradually stimulate their love for and enthusiasm for puppet theater. Some schools, such as Xiang’an Primary School, also offer professional puppet interest courses to provide a better learning environment for students who are interested in this field, while also providing a large number of top talents for the troupe [1].

4.2 Innovation that Keeps Pace with the Times

Mr. You Tianxiang wrote in “*The Modern Rebirth of a Thousand-Year-Old Drama: On the Protection and Inheritance of Puppetry*”: “Chinese traditional culture has always been seeking change in stability in its history of advancement. Glove puppetry is also facing the problem of transformation and development in the new era. While inheriting excellent traditional culture and preserving unique local charm, it has also made some innovations and changes” [7]. Today, the social industrial structure and values have undergone tremendous changes. Society pursues perfection and efficiency. As an intangible traditional culture that needs to survive and be passed on in this society, the inheritors of glove puppetry must make certain changes. First, the inheritors of traditional puppet head carving try to use technology to assist in the fine processing of rough pieces produced in mass production, thus reducing the burden on the inheritors of the craft [1]. The puppet head carvers of Taiwan’s improved glove puppetry choose to use 3D printing technology, which is more technological and has a high fault tolerance rate, to assist in the production of more refined and beautiful puppet heads that conform to the current aesthetic trend. After

the main body of the innovative performance, the effect of the background music also needs to be improved. To ensure the quality and cost of the troupe’s performance, the background music is changed to the accompaniment audio recorded by the orchestra in the recording studio, which only needs to be played during each performance [1]. This approach can reduce the troupe’s personnel expenses for participating in activities outside, enhance the stability of background music, and effectively deal with the loss of orchestra personnel [1]. To eliminate the language barrier, the glove puppetry troupe decided to delete the relevant singing and recitation and replace them with easy-to-understand pantomime to enhance the visual effect and arouse the interest of most non-Minnan speaking audiences. More and more glove puppetry troupes have begun to use new mainstream media such as WeChat public accounts, Bilibili, Weibo, and YouTube to promote and popularize the performance, and have adopted new era characteristics to attract more audiences [1].

4.3 Film and Television Industrialization and Communication Marketing ---Pili Puppet Show

Traditional glove puppetry also tried to make glove puppetry movies in the early years. However, since it was not filmed in the advanced information age, although there were many achievements, the scope of dissemination was still small [9]. Pili glove puppetry is a relatively successful representative in Taiwan, which actively promoted the process of glove puppetry film and television adaptation [7]. Since the traditional glove puppetry from Fujian was introduced to Taiwan, Taiwan has been exploring the feasibility of glove puppetry film and television adaptation and has continuously improved the size and appearance of the glove puppets to cater to the screen viewing experience. Finally, in 2004, the Pili Puppet Show became famous on the screen and became a popular memory of a generation of Taiwanese. At that time, more than 1,300 video and audio rental stores in Taiwan had special counters for the show, and its rental rate ranked first among all TV series. The Pili Puppet Show IP had at least 1 million people renting and watching each episode regularly [10]. In 2017, Pili Puppetry created the corporate image of Pili International Multimedia to expand the scale of the mainland paid video market [10]. Starting with the related series “*Pili Destiny: Immortal Demon Battle II: Devil Fate*”, Pili cooperated with the three major video websites Douyu, Bilibili, and Youku to launch a bilingual paid viewing model for the Pili series [10]. In 2019, “*Pili Heroes Chronicles: The Sword of the Anomaly*” successfully jumped onto Netflix, the world’s largest video streaming platform, and was broadcast in both Minnan

dialect and Mandarin. Pili puppetry began to enter the international stage [10]. The film and television industry of Pili Puppetry has been very successful. One reason is that it has integrated innovation and tradition in terms of content. For the sake of screen presentation, Pili Puppetry has appropriately added many elements to traditional puppetry. It has made detailed divisions of labor in script-writing, narration, puppet making, puppet manipulation, music, photography, animation, etc., and has used modern popular trend products AI technology, and 3D modeling technology to optimize the shooting content. One is to use new media platforms in marketing in a reasonable way to enhance communication. Constantly innovate communication media and improve the quality of broadcast images, from outdoor stage plays to indoor stage plays, and then broadcast them on television, VCD, DVD, movies, the Internet, and other media [10]. At the same time, have a systematic new media marketing model, that is, social platform marketing and large-scale television media marketing, to give full play to the advantages of new media. In mainland China and Taiwan, Pili Puppet Show has established a fan club and QQ group to create a social platform for audiences, so that people who like puppet shows have their channels for communication. So far, the Pili Puppet Show has accumulated a large number of sticky fans through the above two marketing methods.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study show that the traditional art of glove puppetry, which has a long history, is constantly evolving and transforming to adapt to the preferences of different times. However, in the rapidly modernizing society, glove puppetry still faces many challenges such as cultural shock, talent loss, small scope of dissemination, and limited audience. To better cope with these challenges, the study mentioned the systematic talent innovation plan that has been implemented, the progress of the glove puppetry film and television industry, and the parallel promotion using multiple communication media in the new era. The study further concluded that the sustainable development of glove puppetry in modern society is inseparable from the government's protection and inheritance strategy for traditional skills. At the same time, glove puppetry also needs to improve its cultural adaptability, keep pace with the times, continuously optimize its survival ecology through effective innovation and promotion, and enhance its national and even global influence. This study

provides a lot of valuable references for future research in this direction, which mainly affects the protection strategy of glove puppetry and its dissemination and innovation path, aiming to maintain a stable glove puppetry ecology and promote the strategic optimization and long-term sustainable development of this traditional art form. Future research on glove puppetry should focus on how to integrate modern art forms based on retaining its core artistic characteristics and spirit, to attract new audience groups and make it easier to spread in different cultural backgrounds.

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