

Art and Culture Group:  
Acquainted with Asian Puppetries at the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theater Museum

A beautiful afternoon on May 16, 2019, I was attending an event that was planned and organized by Art and Culture Group of WTIC at the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theater Museum in Datong District, Taipei City. I was warmly welcomed by some WTIC's members and the museum director, Dr. Robin Ruizendaal. Mr. Ruizendaal, the director of the museum, came from Holland and is a scholar of Chinese language and traditional arts.

While waiting for other WTIC's members to come, a short and warm conversation immediately flowed when Mr. Ruizendaal found out that I come from Indonesia. He then mentioned about *Wayang Potehi*. As an anthropologist from University of Indonesia, I am familiar with the word *Wayang Potehi*. It is a cultural fact that has shown how Chinese communities have not only settled on many parts of the Indonesian islands but they have also shared and infused their culture and traditions with those of the local population. *Wayang Potehi* features characters and stories from Chinese legends. The word *Potehi* itself is derived from the word '*pou*', meaning fabric, '*te*', meaning sackcloth, and '*hi*', meaning puppet; thus *potehi* literally means a doll made of sackcloth. *Wayang Potehi* came to the Indonesian Archipelago between the 16th and 19th centuries along with the arrival of Chinese traders and migrants from Southern China.

What a precious moment for WTIC members that we had a chance to listen to Mr. Ruizendaal's speech on Asian puppet history and about its performance. He began his speech by explaining the beginning of his interest in Asian puppets performance. For him, studying Asian puppets means studying Asia as a whole because he has to learn languages so that he can easily understand ancient texts about history and stories related to it and learn how to perform puppet shows; and more importantly can understand the society and culture in which the puppet art develops. I agree with him. His explanation flowed very straightforwardly by presenting several slides about puppet art from Asia and around the world. We were very enthusiastic in listening to Mr. Ruizendaal's explanation as he delivered it in a compact and yet interesting way. In between his explanations, he gave us some opportunities to ask some questions.

In particular he elaborated at length about the important role of puppetry in Taiwan. The most popular type of puppetry in Taiwan is budaixi (布袋戲). Budaixi experienced its greatest development in Taiwan and has become a national art form. Puppet performances were held as important part in society, including weddings and various religious observances. Mr. Ruizendaal showed how the puppet is got its own place in the hearts of the people of Taiwan to date. Taiwanese politicians and government also use puppets to convey ideas and disseminate various policies so that they are easily accepted by the people of Taiwan.

We then watched a puppet show performed by a puppeteer master. He moved his five fingers nimbly to control the head and hands of the puppets so that the puppets displayed seemed very lively to follow the storyline. The sound of recorded music instruments made this performance more vibrant. This performance takes place on a beautifully carved stage. Mr. Ruizendaal explained that the top part of the stage was specially ordered in Bali, Indonesia; a well-known place for its beautiful culture, tourism and

wood carving handicrafts as well. Our visit to the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theater Museum then followed with an opportunity to see puppets collection from Asia and around the world.

The Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Museum is one of a handful of museums that is dedicated as a museum, theater and conservation site for ancient puppet collections. The role of the museum in promoting and preserving Asian puppets cannot be separated by the role of Paul C. F. Lin, a Taiwanese who love to promote Taiwanese culture. Most of the museum's collection was Mr. Lin's extensive private collection. The museum has over ten thousand Asian puppetry artifacts and holds exhibitions both locally and abroad. The facility has four floors dedicated to puppetry, and features four styles of puppets – glove, marionette, rod, and shadow. In addition to Taiwanese puppets, the collection includes puppets, puppet props, costumes, and stages from across Asia. The museum not only schedules puppetry exhibitions from time to time but also offers courses on hand puppet carving and making, demonstration by puppetry masters, parent-child puppetry theatre, and the promotion of techniques on traditional puppet theatre, allowing the general public to further acquaint themselves with the culture of puppet theatre.

It was a memorable afternoon filled with a bundle of interesting, impressive moment and educational experience to visit the museum and see puppet shows with Art and Culture Group of WTIC. All in all, a big applause and thank you note to Susan Sue and Teresa Zhang who organized this wonderful event. Also big thanks to Salra Hsiao, Sophia Chiang, Diana Liu and Lisette Lu for providing the photos.

By Yosefina Anggraini  
Indonesia Economic and Trade Office in Taipei  
PhD candidate in Anthropology, University of Indonesia



Wayang Potehi performance in Indonesia (photo credit: Yosefina A)

















A series of budaixi puppets on display at the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum



得春堂  
Dechun Hall

漢代至唐代傳統服飾的演進  
From Han to Tang Dynasty in Traditional  
Chinese Clothing

漢代至唐代傳統服飾的演進  
From Han to Tang Dynasty in Traditional  
Chinese Clothing

滿年燕子  
Nest's T-shirt





