

A Taiwanese Puppeteer and His Theatre

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Puppet theatre in China exists in several well-known varieties including marionettes, shadowplays, and hand (or glove) puppets. The Chinese shadowplay has been described by Georg Jacob (1933) and others.¹ The history of the marionette theatre has been studied by Suen Kae-dih (1953) and others.² The hand puppet theatre has been depicted in several publications and its history in China and Taiwan described by Leu Suh-shanq (1961: 411-424) and others.³ However, very little has been said about the puppeteers themselves. In the following pages, I will present a brief discussion of the background and training of a Taiwanese puppeteer, his troupe of performers, the operation of his traveling theatre, and his puppets. I hope thereby to encourage others to further study the personal backgrounds of puppeteers as well as to delve further into the art of the very delightful Chinese puppet theatre.

The histories of the Chinese shadowplay and marionette theatres go back to at least the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and possibly even earlier, however, the hand puppet theatre in China has a much shorter history. According to Leu (1961: 412), the Chinese hand puppet originated in Chyuan-jou 泉州 City (Fukien Province) somewhat more than three hundred years ago. He relates the following story (which I paraphrase) to explain its origin:

In Chyuan-jou there was a student named Liang Bing-lin 梁炳麟 who, altho intelligent, continually failed the civil service examinations. Finally, he despondently returned home with his boyhood friend Liou 劉 who had also failed the examinations. One

* This essay is dedicated to the memory of my friend Mr. Tsay Maw-tarng 蔡懋棠

day he asked Liou to go with him to the Sylph-Lord Temple at Nine Carp Lake 九鯉湖仙公廟 to have their dreams interpreted. Liou was skeptical but Liang insisted upon his going along since the deity of that temple was renown for its ability to predict the future. Therefore, after selecting an auspicious day, fasting and purifying themselves, they went to the temple and slept there for three nights. During their stay, Liang had a dream in which he saw a white-haired old man who held his hand and said, "I am aware of your sincerity and therefore will give you a five-word phrase. Someday you will know what it means." Then he wrote with a brush on Liang's hand: "*Success and fame reside in the midst of your palm*" (*gong-ming gwei jaang-jong* 功名歸掌中).

With renewed confidence, Liang and Liou again took the examinations. This time Liou passed but Liang again failed. Liang, wishing he were dead, returned home, complained that what he had seen in his dream was nonsense, gave up his faith in the deities, and lost all hope of success.

Next door to his house was a man who taught marionette theatre. Liang watched whenever he had free time. He saw how complicated it was to operate the marionette strings and realized it would take him years to learn the art. One day, as he watched, he had an inspiration. He held a marionette in his palm and tried to make it move. After practicing a long time, he improved his skill so that the figure's movements were more lively and natural than the string-controlled marionettes.

Liang then wrote a play about life among the official classes in which he was able to display his own talent in prose and verse while at the same time satirizing the examination system. His fame spread and within a few years he was known all over. Then he finally understood the meaning of the oracle in his dream. This is why one of the names of the hand puppet theatre is "theatre in the midst of the palm" (*jaang-jong shih* 掌中戲).

There are two other names for the hand puppet theatre: "cloth sack theatre" (*buh-day shih* 布袋戲) and "small basket [theatre]" (*sheau long* 小籠). Leu (1961: 411-412) gives three possible explanations for the former name: 1. Except for the head, hands, and feet the puppets are entirely made of cloth in the shape of a square sack. 2. The puppets used to be packed in cloth sacks for transport. 3. During a performance, the puppets are tossed into a hammock-net or sack after use. Leu says the latter name comes from the old practice of packing puppet theatre apparatus in small baskets to be borne by one man in contrast

with the human theatre where costumes were packed in large baskets borne by two men. My Taiwanese informant (Mr. Luh, see below) says that the term *jaang-jong shih* is used by Mandarin speakers while *buh-day shih* is most common among Taiwanese speakers. The term *sheau-long* is commonly used by Taiwanese puppeteers when talking among themselves.

Whatever the origins of the hand puppet theatre and its names may be, this form of theatre has been extremely popular and easily draws large crowds. Altho there were some puppet troupes that performed only at permanent theatres in towns, most troupes were mobile and performed at various locations in towns and villages. Like the local (human) theatre troupes, the puppet troupes usually performed on the occasion of some special event, particularly a religious event (Doolittle, 1865: II.298; Gamble, 1954: 17, 334-335; Jordan, 1972: 131).⁴ The performance would be for the enjoyment of both the deity being celebrated and the local residents.

But such theatrical performances are not mere entertainment, especially among the rural people, the urban poor, and illiterates. Theatricals and storytellers, as entertaining as they might be, were (and in many cases still are) important purveyors of cultural values, morals, history, literature, and many aspects of non-formal education. They were, and still are, used for many kinds of "educational" and propaganda purposes.⁵ As I will note later, Christian evangelists have also used the puppet theatre to advance their activities in Taiwan.

S. Obratsov, the Russian master puppeteer, visited the People's Republic of China in April 1955 to attend the "All Chinese Festival of Puppet and Shadow Theatres" held in Peking. Performances were given by puppeteers from all over the country. His report (1961) describes flourishing puppet theatre activity supported by the P.R.C. government. He describes shadowplays, rod puppets, marionettes, wire puppets, and hand puppets. The repertoire includes old themes and plays, contemporary themes, and plays borrowed from foreign theatres (especially from the U.S.S.R.).⁶ The puppet theatre is still thriving in the P.R.C. Like other art forms, it is aimed at educating the masses and therefore its repertoire is oriented toward promoting the new ideology of China.⁷ However, I am not aware of any recent reports comparable to that of Obratsov's.

The hand puppet theatre is still very active in Taiwan. It is still seen at many religious events and has even become a popular addition to television fare. The theatre is on the wane, however, since there are few, if any, permanent theatres left and I was told that the number of troupes has decreased over the past generation.⁸ Marionette perfor-

mances are rare in Taiwan and seem to be performed only after the occurrence of some bad event in order to exorcise evil spirits.⁹ Shadow-plays are even rarer still¹⁰—I have never seen one in Taiwan.

Turning now to the puppeteers themselves, we find nothing about them in the published sources beyond their skill as performers. Besides the silence on the personal lives of the puppeteers, I found a somewhat paradoxical problem associated with their profession: In Chinese ideal and actual social rankings, puppeteers and other theatre people are ranked very low—very close to the bottom of the social heap. For example, during the imperial period actors were expressly forbidden to participate in the civil service examinations (Dolby, 1976: 69). For Taiwan, in particular, I found very specific information concerning the status of theatre people. In his extensive study of Taiwanese customs, Kataoka (1921: 181–185) divides the population into eighteen “classes” on the basis of occupation. Within this ranking system, actors in the live theatre as well as puppeteers of all types are in class eleven—even lower than prostitutes, who are in class ten. Musicians (who, as will be noted below, accompany puppet performers) are ranked still lower—in class thirteen.

Since the puppeteers’ ideal social status was so low, I wondered why someone would become a puppeteer and what sort of family, educational, and economic background would bring a person into this profession (most puppeteers are male altho occasionally a woman will manipulate female puppets). To answer such questions, one should interview many puppeteers and then compile a “composite biography.” Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to carry out such a project and was limited to interviews with a single puppeteer. Altho I certainly cannot claim that this man’s career is typical of puppeteers in general, I do hope my work will be accepted as a starting point and will encourage others to pursue the subject further.

In the summer of 1975, I had the opportunity to spend many pleasant hours over a period of several weeks with Mr. Luh Chyi-shyr 盧奇石, the Taiwanese (Min-nan) proprietor and chief puppeteer of the Gwo-feng-ger Theatre Troupe 國豐閣劇團, headquartered in a small town in Tainan County in southern Taiwan. Mr. Luh generously submitted to my numerous questions concerning his theatre troupe and his own background, both in formal interviews and in informal discussion. He eagerly explained and demonstrated his skill as a puppeteer (besides his regular performances), and graciously answered my inquiries concerning his own background, altho he thought it strange that I would have any interest in him beyond his immediate skill as a performer.¹¹

Mr. Luh was born in Guan-miaw District (in Tainan County, about ten kilometers from his present home in Yeong-kang District) in

1937. He is the second child (and second son) in a family of five sons and two daughters. Altho his father was a farmer, he was evidently not poor, as will be noted below. His elder brother graduated from high school, which at that time was under Japanese administration. At eight years old, our Mr. Luh began elementary school from which he graduated at fourteen—thus ending his formal schooling.

At fifteen years old, he was apprenticed to a puppeteer—this was his father's younger brother, Mr. Luh Chorng-yih 盧崇義, then about forty years old. Our Mr. Luh and four other apprentices (all non-family) all lived together with his uncle—somewhat like an extended family.

His training period lasted four years. During that time, he practiced long hours learning the hand movements necessary for manipulating the puppets. He also learned many stories (upon which puppet plays were based): Some from books, some told by the master puppeteer, and others that he made up himself. Mr. Luh stated that about half of the stories were on "historical" themes and half on "contemporary" themes.

The younger Mr. Luh and the other four apprentices traveled with the puppet master all over Taiwan giving performances. Besides the puppet operators, the troupe also included four musicians: two playing the *laa-ba* 喇叭 (a popular name for the *suoo-nah* 哨呐, a split-reed horn similar to the oboe; its eight holes are fingered somewhat like the recorder), one playing drums and *kuay-baan* 快板 (a hollow wood resonating block struck with slender sticks—for keeping time and for sound effects such as footsteps or horse's hooves), and one playing the brass gong (*luo* 鑼). These musicians accompanied the troupe to every performance, since their music had to coordinate with each individual story and therefore musicians could not be hired locally. The elder Luh did not have a vehicle of his own and had to hire transportation to carry his performers, the musicians, the puppets, the musical instruments, and the background scenery and props for the stage.

They did not carry a portable stage (as the younger Luh now does). Those who engaged them to perform provided the stage.¹² Since the playing area of the puppet stages was fairly standard in size and design, there was no problem of adaption to unexpected performing conditions. Some temples had stages of their own, or they could always be hired locally (Cohen, 1976: 97, n. 23, 112, 119). However, at that time many puppet performances were given in permanent theatres that also had living quarters for the performers. Mr. Luh's troupe would perform at a theatre for at least ten, and at most thirty, days (averaging about twenty days). There would be a two and one-half hour performance in the afternoon and another of the same duration in the evening. Mr. Luh said

each performance drew seven to eight hundred spectators. Sometimes part of the troupe would give one or two day performances elsewhere in the area.

The fee for an engagement was paid to the master puppeteer. He then paid the other members of his troupe fixed salaries no matter how many times they performed.

At the age of nineteen, the younger Mr. Luh gave his first puppet performance in which he spoke the puppets' voices. In a puppet performance, the master puppeteer manipulates most of the puppets and speaks *all* the roles (For this reason, Mr. Luh drinks very little alcohol because he says it changes the quality of his voice). The apprentices manipulate additional puppets when either their number or the action requires it, but they do not speak. In the elder Luh's troupe, two apprentices assisted him in manipulating the puppets while the others prepared puppets for use and attended to backstage tasks.

The younger Mr. Luh's debut was successful and he then organized his own puppet troupe. His father gave him money to purchase equipment. At first, the new puppeteer was dependent upon friends in order to obtain engagements, but as his skill and his reputation grew he eventually developed a successful troupe.

Mr. Luh's Gwo-feng-ger Theatre Troupe flourished and he now has five apprentices of his own. None of his apprentices are members of his own family (his sons are still quite young and only one is interested in puppetry). If a young man wishes to become an apprentice, he must bring his parents to meet Mr. Luh who then explains all the conditions of training, living, salary, and so forth. An apprentice will live with Mr. Luh; he will receive room and board and a small salary. Occasionally an apprentice may be "loaned out" to assist another puppeteer.

In Taiwan there are various traditions or "schools" of puppet theatre which are distinguished according to performance standards and patterns set by the master puppeteers. Distinctions are not made on a geographical basis (this contrasts with the theatre in the mainland of China which is much larger geographically and is also divided linguistically and culturally).

Mr. Luh's troupe averages about twenty performing days per month, which, in these days of declining interest in the puppet theatre (because of competition from movies and television), is considered *very* good. He usually has five or six people in the troupe during a performance: The puppeteer (Mr. Luh), one or two apprentices, and three musicians. Following his uncle's practice, Mr. Luh pays his apprentices and musicians fixed monthly salaries; however, some puppeteers pay according to the number of performances.

Mr. Luh was reluctant to discuss the fees he receives for his performances but said they are not fixed. However, from other data (Cohen, 1976: 112, 118, 119) the price of engaging a puppet troupe seems to be about NT \$1,000 to \$1,200. This is much less expensive than engaging a live theatrical troupe at NT \$3,500 to \$7,500 (Cohen, 1976: 103, 118, n. 85, 122, 131; Diamond, 1969: 69). In order to increase his income, Mr. Luh engages in some additional occupations. When performing, he uses his Datsun pick-up truck to transport his performers and paraphernalia (including the stage), but on off-days he hires out the truck for hauling. Adjacent to his house, he has opened a hair-dressing shop which is run by his eldest daughter. Evidently Mr. Luh's family has prospered: They own their own house and the truck. The house is small but clean and very well kept. They have a color television, washing machine, and radio-phonograph, not to mention all the expensive sound equipment Mr. Luh uses in his puppet performances.¹³

At the age of twenty (the year after he established his own troupe), Mr. Luh married a woman from Guan-miaw District (the same place he was born). They now have five children, three older daughters and two younger sons. The eldest daughter is twenty years old. She graduated from sixth grade, attends night school, and runs the hair-dressing shop owned by the Luh's. The second and third daughters both work in factories. The elder son is in the second year of junior middle school (eighth grade) and the younger son is in fourth grade. The younger son wants to become a puppeteer like his father, but the elder son is not interested.

There are few permanent puppet theatres remaining in Taiwan. Nowadays, most puppet performances take place outdoors on collapsible stages that may either belong to the puppet troupe doing the performance or may be hired from a local supplier. The performing area of the stage is of standard size and construction, however, each troupe carries its own favorite variety of backdrops.

Most performances take place in conjunction with religious events at temples, however, Mr. Luh has also performed at marriages, the building of a new house, the birthday of an old person, and at a child's one-year old celebration. Whoever invites the puppet troupe to perform can select a specific play or a type of story, e.g., contemporary or traditional. If nothing is specified the puppeteer is free to select the play.

When the Japanese occupied Taiwan (1895-1945) they outlawed Taiwanese style puppet plays ("Formosa Puppets," 1939; Leu, 1961: 416, especially after the Marco Polo Bridge incident near Peking on July 7, 1937) and allowed only Japanese style puppet theatre in order to cultivate an orientation toward Japanese culture. The puppets wore Japa-

nese clothing but the heads and hats of the puppets remained as before. In 1941, the Japanese began "reforming" the puppet theatre with the introduction of new plays and techniques and the licensing of selected troupes (Leu, 1961: 418-420). Mr. Luh said that when Japanese people were in the audience they performed Japanese stories but whenever Japanese were not present they performed Taiwanese plays. With the return of Chinese rule in 1945, they no longer performed Japanese stories.

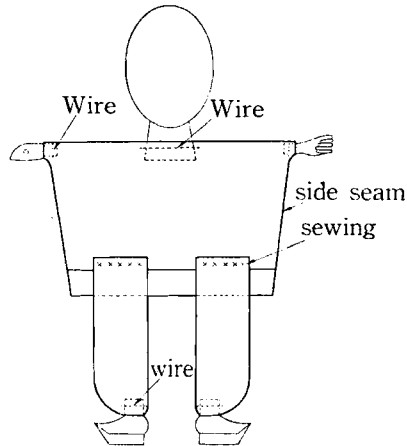
A puppet troupe must now obtain a license to operate from the Department of Education (Jiaw-yuh Buh 教育部) of the Taiwan Provincial Government—this license, which specifies all primary members of the troupe, must be renewed every year. When applying for a license, Mr. Luh must submit an application, a list of troupe members, and perform a play.

I would now like to present a few details concerning the puppets, the stage, the musicians, the plays, and the patron deity of the puppet theatre.

The puppets consist of a wooden head, wood (or plastic) hands and feet (puppets in other countries seldom have feet), and a cloth body. Various suits of clothing can be put on the puppet, as well as objects affixed to the hands, such as a sword, fan, cane, etc. The puppets are usually made to order. The heads (with eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and neck) are hand-carved from wood and covered with a thick layer of paint; hair and beard are made of nylon imbedded in the head. The size, shape, features, and hair vary according to the character to be portrayed, however, in general there is a very strong resemblance to the facial make-up and masks used in the live theatre (Jou, 1953: vol. 3, plates 1-6). The average head is about eighteen centimeters tall (from the base of the neck to the peak of the head) but can range from about thirteen to twenty-two centimeters. There are about six specialists in Taiwan who make these puppet heads; Mr. Luh purchases from a man in Tounan Township (in Yunlin County). The heads are rather expensive—starting from about NT \$600 for the least complex. Hands and feet (usually shoes with very thick soles) were formerly carved from wood and painted, but nowadays they are cast from plastic. Hands are usually in the form of a clenched fist (with a hole piercing the fist to allow for the insertion of a sword or other prop), altho some hands are open and some can also be independently moved by means of an inside wire. The feet reach only to the bottom edge of the costume but do not stick out.

The puppet body is made of heavy sackcloth in the shape of a slightly tapered, open-bottom sack. The head is affixed with a wire tightly wound around an internal cuff at the base of the neck; or the neck can be pierced and the body sewn on thru the wood. Hands are

attached with wires wound around internal cuffs at the wrists. The legs are made separately from two layers of cloth and the feet/shoes attached like the hands. The legs are then stuffed with scrap cloth until they are quite stiff, the interior layer sewn up at the top, and the exterior layer sewn to the front edge of the body with the feet turned sideways. See the "Puppet Body Construction" diagram.



Puppet Body Construction
(not to scale)

Puppet clothing is generally made of very colorful silk stiffened with backings or linings of heavier cloth. All are in the form of a long dress with split sides and often a split back—none of the puppets wear trousers on their legs. The front and back parts of the dress are the same length, and the neck is closed by either a tie string or a clip fastener. The costume is never modern but rather resembles the stylized traditional modes of the live theatre. Much attention is given to detail and the costumes are profusely decorated with tassels, sequins, shiny embroidery, tiny mirrors, and so forth. Mr. Luh and his wife make some of the costumes themselves, while others are purchased from the head-carver or from special tailor/embroiderers. A puppet dress will cost from NT \$250 and up, a hat from NT \$200 and up. When a puppet is fully constructed and clothed, it will be about 48 centimeters tall (from the bottom of the costume to the top of the head), and about 32 centimeters from fingertip to fingertip. For illustrations of Taiwanese puppets see Helstien, 1976: plates 156–165; Pimpaneau, 1976: 54; Shyi, 1974: 29.

The puppets are manipulated by inserting the index finger into the hollow neck, the thumb in one arm, and the remaining three (sic) fingers in the other arm. The puppeteer moves the feet by flicking them with

the fingers of his other hand.

Puppets that fit over the arm, with the puppeteer's hand operating the mouth, are not used. Horses, beasts, dragons, and sometimes human figures such as skeletons are usually made of stiff paper with movable extremities which can be moved by means of attached rods or handles. Sometimes a long stuffed dragon is shaken by a rod. Masks the size of a human face are also used to represent monsters.

The portable stage used by Mr. Luh resembles those commonly used in puppet performances by other troupes. It is constructed of wooden posts and planks, and bamboo poles. The front is colorfully painted to resemble the courtyard of a traditional building and bears the name of the troupe. The proscenium is a rectangular cut-out about eighty centimeters high with a fifteen centimeter wide playboard about 2.4 meters long; there are usually end pieces (tormentors) extending back slightly more than the width of the playboard (floodlights can be attached on top or at the sides for night performances). Some puppet stages have the proscenium projecting outward like a shelf with the ends of the playboard defined by small verticle columns.¹⁴ The backdrop is a colorfully decorated cloth with a semi-transparent strip of large weave at about mid-height to enable the puppeteer to watch the puppets above the level of the playboard. Props, such as chairs, can be set out on the playboard, on which the puppets can also walk, sit, or ride a horse with movable legs. Since the backdrop does not go much above the puppeteer's head, puppets can also appear over the top of the backdrop during scenes of intense action, such as in a fight or a chase.

A microphone is set up just behind the semi-transparent strip in the backdrop for the puppeteer to speak all the parts. As far as I know, the Taiwanese puppeteers do not use a swazzle or similar device to alter their voices, as has been reported from China (Obraztsov, 1961: 20-21; Philpott, 1969: 252-253). The puppets speak only to each other, never to the audience, nor to a human intermediary, altho the puppeteer can act as a narrator (Obraztsov, 1961: 20-21). The puppeteer remains hidden behind the backdrop at all times. The puppets will converse, argue, fight with their hands or with weapons. There are interludes of music as well as moments of intense action with the puppets racing across the stage or along the top of the backdrop.

Altho the proscenium is of fairly standard dimensions, the front side of the stage varies in size. Mr. Luh's stage front is about 4.9 meters wide by 2.8 meters tall. The stage floor is usually set on trestles about ninety to one hundred centimeters high which puts the playing area in full view of everyone in even a large audience. The backstage area varies considerably, depending upon the number of puppeteers, mu-

sicians, the quantity of properties, and so forth. Mr. Luh's backstage is about four meters long and 2.5 meters deep. Crowded upon it will be Mr. Luh, an apprentice, three musicians and their instruments, three trunks filled with puppets, puppets hanging in a net under the playboard and more puppets hanging over a rope behind the puppeteer waiting to be used, and amplifying equipment.

Three male musicians accompany Mr. Luh. One plays the *laa-ba* and the *ell-hwu* 二胡 (one of a family of high-pitched two-stringed instruments with a long thin neck and small resonating box; played with a hair bow placed between the strings), the second plays the *ell-hwu*, cymbals, and two gongs, the third man plays drums and *kuay-baan*. The last also plays a phonograph when it is necessary to have orchestral music. I have seen other puppet troupes with additional musicians who produce live sound effects and also use tape recorders and phonographs to play Chinese as well as rock-and-roll music. Mrs. Luh formerly sang female roles in some of the puppet performances but she no longer does so. The puppeteer's voice and the music are amplified to the maximum capacity of his audio system (he uses the largest speakers available in Taiwan)—they can easily be heard for more than three hundred meters.

A complete puppet performance lasts about two and one-half hours. The plays are comprised of ten to fifteen scenes and all scenes are performed (contrast this with the selective performances frequent in "Peking opera"). The scenes are at most about twenty minutes long including the musical interludes between them. The troupe's repertoire of plays includes traditional stories (which are not necessarily "kiddie plays") as well as "contemporary" themes. Some of the plays are very simple and are meant to appeal to children, while the satirical dialogue and humor of others is directed toward adults. In general, themes such as filial piety, loyalty, honesty, moderation, expulsion of evil and vice, patriotism, and anti-communism (this last was especially common during the anti-communist campaigns after 1945) are commonly woven into the plays (Leu, 1961: 418, 420-421; cf. the themes of puppet plays in the People's Republic of China, Obratsov, 1961: 46-49). Mr. Luh learned some of the plays from his own teacher and some he composed himself.¹⁵ He also uses some plays written, or re-written, by the Department of Education. Mr. Luh's own compositions are meticulously written out in notebooks—each character's speeches are recorded in full along with notations for stage directions and musical interludes. I do not know how much he actually ad-libs or deviates from his scripts but there seems to be much opportunity to do so (Leu, 1961: 415-416). Some of the plays distributed by the Department of Education are in the form of booklets that include the complete text of the play as well as part of the musical

score. Others are merely a single sheet giving the plot and development for each scene of the play—apparently the puppeteer is expected to compose of ad-lib the actual dialogue himself. The structure and content of Taiwanese puppet plays requires much more study and cannot be dealt with here.

The audience attracted to a puppet performance will vary with the time of day. During the daylight hours the audience will largely be made up of children and some old people, but in the evening hours adults of all ages will come in large numbers to watch the performances. Many people also come to pay respects to the deity for whom the play is being performed—a red paper sign announcing the pertinent religious event is always attached to the stagefront.

Mr. Luh refers to the patron deity of his puppet theatre as Tzuu-shy Shi-Chyn 祖師西秦. He said this deity was originally a general during the Chyn Dynasty (255–207 B.C.E.) who invented the puppet theatre to entertain his troops. This deity is undoubtedly the same as Shi-Chyn wang-yeh 西秦王爺, a patron deity of the theatre who is identified with the Tang Dynasty emperor Shyuan-tzong 玄宗 (r. 713–755) (Lin, 1962: 100; Liou, 1960: 47; Schipper, 1966: 82; Werle, 1973: 78–79). Although Mr. Luh does not keep an image of his patron deity in his house, other puppeteers do. On the deity's ritual day, the twenty-fourth day of the sixth lunar month, the deity's name is written on a sheet of paper and pertinent rites are performed in front of Mr. Luh's house.¹⁶

I cannot generalize from this description of a single puppeteer and his theatre. Apparently a combination of economic circumstances and the opportunity to become an apprentice to his uncle led Mr. Luh into the puppet theatre. Because of my limited data, I cannot comment on the backgrounds of the non-Luh apprentices. Mr. Luh has apparently prospered as a puppeteer but the future of the Taiwanese puppet theatre is very uncertain. I hope others will pursue this topic.

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As was noted above, the great appeal of the puppet theatre was used by a Christian group in southern Taiwan to further its evangelical activities.¹⁷ About 1963, a group of Taiwanese (Min-nan) seminary students at the Tainan Theological College (Presbyterian) began to use puppets in an attempt to advance their evangelical work among the people of Tainan City. They regarded the puppet theatre as useful for their purpose for three reasons: 1. the puppet theatre is very popular and always draws a large crowd (as native Taiwanese, they were all aware of the theatre's appeal), 2. the audience can both hear and see the message,

3. the message can be transmitted without overt preaching.

Since none of the young evangelists had any previous experience as puppeteers, they began by enlisting the aid of a professional puppeteer to instruct them in the basic techniques of manipulating the puppets. They also had special puppets made for their use. Each puppet character was made to be an immediately identifiable personality or "moral" type. For example, a "good man" had a modern haircut and a bright cheerful face, while a "bad man" also had a modern haircut (although rather long and full) but had a beard and fierce eyes; a "good girl" had a pretty face and her hair in braids. The policeman puppet wore a police hat that was actually part of the head rather than a separate article of clothing.

At first the puppets were dressed in "western" style clothing, however, this was soon abandoned because the puppeteer's hand could not be hidden behind the puppet's trousers. Therefore the puppets' clothing reverted to slightly modified traditional costume—the long dress made of brightly colored cloth with elaborate embroidery.¹⁸

The theatre troupe consisted of four men: the chief puppeteer (who spoke all the voices), an assistant puppeteer, a musician, and a general assistant whose tasks included performing music and operating a phonograph and tape recorder.

The young evangelists also composed their own plays which were directed toward two different audiences. Those directed toward non-Christians had their emphasis on ethics and "social education," and contained a minimum of Christian doctrine. Those directed toward Christians dealt with problems confronting Taiwanese Christians in their relationships with others, for example, problems of Christians marrying non-Christians. Some of the plays were developed on the themes of "love thine enemy" or the prodigal son, or were stories adapted from the Chinese translations of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and L. N. Tolstoy's "Waiting for the Judgement from God."¹⁹ None of the plays, however, were about Jesus, apparently because this would make them too doctrinal.

Since the puppeteers did not perform for money, they were not required to obtain a license from the government. Still, the police always inspected the scripts of their plays (in search of politically subversive material) and they always informed the police before they performed outside the church or college grounds. They often performed at various places in Tainan City during the Christmas season.

Their puppeteering activities ended in 1969 in spite of satisfactory results. The young evangelists found it took too much of their time and effort to write the plays, memorize the lines, prepare the puppets,

and practice and carry out the performances. There was also another problem, and this takes us back to where we began. The young seminarians found themselves the objects of severe criticism from their own parents because, as puppeteers, they were engaging in a very low class activity—"We are spending so much money to send you to college and yet you're becoming a puppeteer!"

That was the end of their evangelical puppeteering. Their activities foundered because the evangelists could not sustain the level of effort needed to carry out the performances and because they could not escape the stigma of engaging in a demeaning occupation (Doolittle, 1865: II. 298).

NOTES

1. See also Liu, 1967; Sung, 1971; Pimpaneau, 1976; Leu, 1961: 425-460. For an extensive bibliography of European language publications see Crothers, 1971: I.152-155; with some addenda in Yuan, 1958: 421.

2. See also Liu, 1967; Leu, 1961: 461-471; Jou, 1953: 124-140; Huang, 1972; Pimpaneau, 1976. For the Korean puppet theatre see Cho, 1979: 7-12.

3. See also Pimpaneau, 1976; Helstien, 1976: 110-111 and plates 154-165; Baird, 1965: 134; *Puppentheater der Welt*, 1965: plates 220 and 223.

4. See also Cohen, 1976: 97, n. 23, 103, n. 41, 112, 118, n. 85, 119, 122, 128, n. 113, 131, 138, 141, 145, 149.

5. Tsai, 1979: 39-40. For an example of puppet theatre used for anti-foreign and anti-Christian propaganda see Cameron, 1970: 374.

6. See also Wen, 1972, for photographs of contemporary rod puppets in the P.R.C.; Werle, 1973, for rod puppet performances in Hong Kong.

7. Helstien, 1976: 8, 111; Obratsov, 1961: 46-49; Wen, 1972; Simmen, 1975: 92.

8. Leu, 1961: 422-423, lists 204 licensed puppet troupes in Taiwan in May 1961.

9. Huang, 1972: 29, notes that there were less than ten marionette troupes in Taiwan in 1972; see also Diamond, 1969: 93; Pimpaneau, 1976; Werle, 1973: 80. Mr. Luh stated that there were many marionette troupes in Taiwan before the Kuomintang government arrived in 1945.

10. Sung, 1971; Pimpaneau, 1976: 53, says there was only one shadowplay theatre left in Taiwan in 1976.

11. I am very grateful to Mr. Luh, his family, his apprentices, and his assistants for their generous cooperation and hospitality.

12. Usually a temple would commission the puppet performance (or live theatrical), paying for it with some of the funds collected for carrying out the associated ritual event. These funds were accumulated from donations or from subscriptions levied on all families in the pertinent geographical area (Cohen, 1976; Ahern, 1973: 5-6; Gamble, 1954: 334; Gamble, 1963: 123, 137-138, 165-166, 283-284, 292). A wealthy individual might even donate all the money for a puppet show (Cohen, 1976: 112).

13. I have no way of determining Mr. Luh's income, altho he might be said to be in the lower middle-class level. Starting in about 1973, Taiwan began experiencing rapid inflation. According to the *Taiwan jia-w-huey gong-baw* 臺灣教會公報, August 10,

1975, page 5, the average annual per-capita income in Taiwan in 1973 was NT \$19,571 (US \$515), while in 1974 it was NT \$26,499 (US \$697)—an increase of 35.4% over 1973.

14. See Diamond, 1969: 70, for a photograph of a puppet stage. There is a fine old one-operator size puppet stage preserved in the Lukang Folk Culture Museum (Changhua County). It has three windows on an upper level where the puppets can also appear (Lukang Min-swu Wen-wuh Goan juan-jih, 1975: inside front cover, plate 2). For portable one-man puppet stages see Baird, 1965: 134 and Cameron, 1970: 374.

15. Obraztsov, 1961: 24, notes that most Chinese puppeteers are illiterate or only semi-literate.

16. A purification ritual, "cleaning the mat shed" (*jinq perng* 淨棚), is reported to take place before rod puppet and marionette performances (Werle, 1973: 79-80; Huang, 1972: 34) but I have not observed this for hand puppet performances in Taiwan.

17. On the use of puppets in evangelism and education see Myers, 1966; Reynolds, 1972; Ransome, 1931: 27-29.

18. I am very grateful to Reverend Shiau Chyi-tyan 蕭棋田, one of the former puppeteers, who, using some of the original puppets, performed a short play for me on August 22, 1975. I am also grateful to President Shiau Ching-fen 蕭清芬 of the Tainan Theological College for helping me collect this material and for introducing me to Reverend Shiau. For some remarks on these evangelical activities and a photograph of one of the puppeteers with two puppets see *Presbyterian New Forms of Missions 1969*, 1969.

19. I cannot verify a story with this title among Tolstoy's writings (Reverend Shiau told me the title of the story in English). I suspect the title is the result of multiple translations or paraphrases, i.e., an English translation of a Chinese translation of another language version or of the original Russian language story. Perhaps the original story is Tolstoy's "God Sees the Truth but Waits."

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