

“Objects, memory and cultural identity in (re)construction”

「文物、記憶與文化認同的建構」國際學術研討會

Taiwan Historica, Nantou & Feng-chia University, Taichung, Taiwan

27-28-29 June, 2008

Puppets and cultural identity in Taiwan

Jean-Luc Penso

Puppet Master, Theatre du Petit Miroir, Paris

Abstract

Puppets arrived in Taiwan with the first Chinese immigrants from Fujian province. Since then, puppets occupies a major place in the island's religious (exorcism, entertaining of the gods) and cultural life. According to a recent survey, they have become one of the main symbol of “Taiwaneseness” in the collective consciousness of Taiwan.

However, this recognition as an important symbol is not exempt from contradiction. For example, puppet shows nowadays draw very small audience, if any, although they are very successful abroad. The TV famous puppets, the Pili, are weakly related to traditional puppeting. Though a cult oriented object at its beginning, puppet has gradually drifted towards the status of a cultural object, emblematic of Taiwanese culture. Major actors and reasons behind this shift include the efforts and personality of old masters such as Li Tien Lu, foreigners's interest for this popular art, as well as the renaissance of Taiwanese popular arts since the 1980s.

As a French puppeteer who did his apprenticeship for a big part in Taiwan and as a collector of puppets, I will endeavor to highlight, in an original and critical fashion, the role of identity marker that these objects took in Taiwan under the influence of the opposites forces of localization and globalization.