

On the Historical Changes and Inheritance Development of Zhangzhou Puppet Head Carving Art

Ningjie Hong^{1*}

¹ Krirk University, Bangkok, Thailand

Email Address

1796516485@qq.com (Ningjie Hong)

*Correspondence: 1796516485@qq.com

Received: 28 September 2022; Accepted: 12 October 2022; Published: 17 December 2022

Abstract:

The art of puppet head carving is a historical wonder of Zhangzhou and is part of the national intangible cultural heritage. The craft, which has been made in workshops for thousands of years and passed down from generation to generation, is now facing a difficult situation of inheritance. To explore the historical changes and development of the Zhangzhou puppet show, to expect the inheritance of national intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords:

Puppet Head Carving, Zhangzhou, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Historical Changes

1. Introduction

Zhangzhou puppet shows carry memories of growing up in southern Fujian, but in recent decades, cloth bag puppet shows performed in this way with puppets as raw materials have gradually been neglected. Due to the increasingly diversified form of a new era of entertainment, the impact of traditional folk art has been continuous. Coupled with the continuous death of wood carving predecessors, coupled with the reluctance of future generations to engage in the wood carving industry, there are vacancies for wood carving artists in the new era. The tradition of carving is stagnant, without reform and development to echo today's new era, making the development and inheritance of puppet head carving difficult. [1] This paper summarizes the current situation of the development of Zhangzhou puppet head carving through the review of historical literature and combines the development trend of the new era to explore the development of Zhangzhou puppet head carving culture into the road of transformation

2. Historical Changes in the Art of Puppet Head Carving in Zhangzhou

The art and culture of puppet head carving have a long history and have been handed down in southern Fujian, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. The art of puppet head carving was first introduced to Zhangzhou from Quanzhou. After the founding of

New China, the earliest aesthetic images of puppet head carvings were represented by Xu Niansong's carvings of Sheng and Dan, the puppet heads, showing the ancient scholar with raised eyebrows, drunken eyes, smiles on wide foreheads, and scholarly woman with willow eyebrows, phoenix eyes, cherry mouth, and high sideburns.

2.1. Artistic features of the Zhangzhou puppet head carving of the Han dynasty

This legend describes the lines of a string puppet from Zhangzhou at the time, and various historical documents do not give an exhaustive portrayal of the puppets of this period, but it is clear from this that the puppets were carved vividly. [2]

2.2. Artistic features of Zhangzhou puppet head carving in the Tang dynasty

The earliest carving culture in Zhangzhou dates back to the Tang dynasty, influenced by the legacy of the ancient styles of the Central Plains. Represented by the statue of Amitabha at Nanshan Temple in Zhangzhou, it has a full-bodied face, simple folds in costume, and skilled carving techniques, reflecting a graceful and elegant aesthetic. Its rugged carving style presents a confident demeanor.[3]

2.3. The artistic characteristics of Zhangzhou puppet head carving in the Song and Yuan dynasties

During this period of the Song dynasty, puppet carving developed into the Wu style, with distinctive puppet carving characters. New puppet carvings were formed as a result of the combination of puppet carving techniques that spread to Chaozhou and local painted sculptures. The puppets of this period are very different in shape and have a variety of styles. [4] In the same period, the Tie Zhi puppet appeared in Zhao'an County, Zhangzhou, as its name suggests, with an olive-shaped face and a long nose. In contrast to the cloth-bag puppet head, the face would be relatively short with a slightly rounded chin, which is quite comical.

2.4. Artistic features of Zhangzhou puppet head carving in the Ming dynasty

By the end of the Ming and early Qing dynasties, workshops specializing in carving puppet heads had appeared in Zhangzhou. Compared to the previous dynasties, the local chronicles of the Ming and Qing dynasties do not provide any further descriptions or carvings of puppet heads from this period. In the Ming Dynasty, the "Zhangzhou Prefecture" records that "from the tenth day of the first month to the sixteenth night of the first month, the shrine uses Roshan to place puppets to move around, which is called 'Buying'".[5] At that time, the Ming government introduced a strict policy of sea prohibition: no inch of the board was allowed to enter the sea. Yuegang in Longhai was then on a par with the port of Guangzhou, and the puppet head carvings were thus introduced to Guangdong by sea. Later the puppet head carving in Lingnan was also one of the branches of Zhangzhou Prefecture.

2.5. Artistic features of Zhangzhou puppet head carving in the Qing dynasty

During the Qing Dynasty, the art of puppet head carving gradually developed into an industry. The Xu family's shop "Western Kingdom" in the town of Shima, Longhai, Zhangzhou, and the Xu family's shop "Chengchengshi" in Wangzai Street, Zhangzhou, is representative of this, although the Xu family changed their shop name one after another over the generations. [6] Puppet head carvings from this period incorporate the characters of local opera and are divided into five features forms: the Sang, the Dan, the Pure, and the Ugly. There are not only traditional theatrical figures

but also a variety of shapes such as gods and goddesses, demons and monsters, all of which are very different and vivid.

2.6. The artistic characteristics of Zhangzhou puppet head carving from the Republic of China to the present

During the Republican era, the Xu family has been the representative inheritor of the Zhangzhou puppet head carving. The puppets of Xu Zhuchu, a descendant of the Xu family, are commonly known as the 'Northern School Puppets', and the carving techniques come from the style of northern Chinese opera, with the emphasis on carving the expressions of the puppet head to set off the inner character of the puppet, emphasizing 'writing the gods with the type'.

2.7. Historical Features of Zhangzhou Puppet Head Carving

Since the founding of New China, Zhangzhou puppet head carving skills have formed local characteristics, with the style carved by the descendants of the Xu family as the representative of the Zhangzhou puppet head. The impression of the puppet head in the Han Dynasty is relatively vague; the Tang Dynasty wood carving style followed the national aesthetic style, showing the characteristics of a plump body; In Song and Yuan Dynasties, family carving style began to emerge, and puppet carving became more localized. In the Ming Dynasty, puppet head carving was widely spread, not limited to the southern Fujian region; The puppet head carving workshops in Zhangzhou in the Qing Dynasty were represented by two major families, with peculiar shapes and various types.

3. The Dilemma of the Development of the Art of Puppet Head Carving in Zhangzhou

3.1. The current development of the art of puppet head carving in Zhangzhou

3.1.1. The tedious process of making a puppet head

It takes two to three days to make a complete puppet, with seven processes: selecting the material, making the billet, carving the billet, mounting the paper, painting the base, painting the face, and matching the lines. Each of the steps listed is tedious, time-consuming, and labor-intensive. If you do not go through these steps, you will not be able to produce a life-like carving of a puppet head. [7] Most modern young people are reluctant to devote themselves to learning the art of puppet head carving, resulting in a culture on the verge of exhaustion.

3.1.2. Limitations of the Puppet Theatre Performance Market

The so-called Puppet is a finished product made of puppet heads, and access to Puppet Theatre is limited to the rural areas of towns and cities, as young people in the big cities do not enjoy this ancient theatre culture. [8] Likewise, if young people do not enjoy the puppet shows, then naturally no one will enjoy performing this traditional cultural theatre, thus leading to low sales of puppet heads, which are priced out of the market.

3.2. Shortcomings in the development of the art of puppet head carving in Zhangzhou

Zhangzhou puppet head carving is a carving skill activity that spreads traditional culture and is now facing loss for various reasons. For various reasons the craftsmen are unpaid to stick to this trade, and what keeps them going is a passionate heart for traditional skills.

3.2.1. The beauty of traditional techniques feels the impact of modern mechanical production

The new era has seen the emergence of machinery instead of manual carving, and the finished product is nowhere near as good as hand carving. The traditional techniques of carving are beyond the reach of mechanical engineering, and the original production process is therefore subject to a certain amount of persecution.

3.2.2. Puppet heads carved in a similar style

Not only limited to Zhangzhou's local puppet carving but also Taiwan and Southeast Asia's puppet head carving, presenting a single mode of development. Craftsmen from various regions have not innovated, leading to a standstill in puppet head carving techniques.

3.2.3. Lack of expertise

A traditional craft should never be left without a successor, and the master needs to find the next group of inheritors to drive the development of the puppet head carving industry.

3.3. Factors affecting the development of the art of puppet head carving in Zhangzhou

Local authorities do not pay attention to the preservation of local intangible cultural heritage. Traditional carvers are poorly paid and no one wants to work in this field. The number of puppet carvers has declined with each passing year as the number of people watching the Puppet Show has fallen.

4. The Road of Inheritance and Development of Zhangzhou Puppet Head Carving

The many intangible cultural heritages that need to be passed on today mostly face a lack of professionals to carry them on.

4.1. The policy path: promoting talent acquisition and market protection

"No talent is left to chance" to attract more young people to learn about traditional puppet head carving skills and get them interested in this traditional culture. The government should subsidize salaries so that young people can make a secure living. The government should introduce relevant laws and regulations to protect the local intangible cultural heritage.

4.2. The path of ideas: insisting on traditional craftsmanship and conceptual innovation

Insist that puppet heads are carved by hand and that modern machines should not be used to replace traditional craftsmanship. The beauty and finesse of the puppet head should be maintained. Machines are in a sense controlled by human beings who set up the relevant procedures and produce a uniform product. Puppet head carvers, on the

other hand, carve their hearts with their hands, putting their emotions into their puppet heads.

4.3. The road to openness: insisting on cultural exchange and joint development

Intangible cultural heritage is a culture that requires us to take the initiative to exchange and learn from each other, rather than remain stagnant. Promote the exchange of intangible cultural heritage and innovation in carving techniques. Puppet head carvers from different regions should maintain a certain frequency of exchange and learning to explore new directions for the development of puppet head carving.

4.4. The Way of the Model: Puppet Head Carving Skills in Schools

The school will select a group of teachers to study in the Xu ZhuChu's Workshop Academy and then bring the sculpture knowledge back to the school to teach students. The art design major in colleges and universities can set up courses related to puppet carving, and cooperate with the e-commerce major of our college to combine non-heritage culture with modern technology, carry out innovation, especially produce cultural and creative products belonging to puppet carving, and further enhance the cultural value of non-heritage.

5. Conclusions

Each intangible cultural heritage is the fruit of the spirit of the local people. For example, the Zhangzhou puppet head carving has a history of thousands of years, but in the new era of society, it has suffered and is now facing the prospect of being lost. As a country where culture is blossoming, China should take some remedial measures to bring the intangible cultural heritage, which should be alive, to the world. This paper takes Zhangzhou puppet head carving as an example to analyze and propose the inheritance and development of puppet head carving. The non-heritage culture should return to the people's stage so that the puppet head carving skills can be inherited and developed, and the world can see the colorful puppet head of Zhangzhou.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] Zou, Y.; Chen, B.W. On the heritage and development of Zhangzhou puppet theatre. *Hebei Pictorial*, 2022, 10, 13-15.
- [2] Sprinkling, Y.B. On the origin of puppet carving in Zhangzhou, Fujian. *Journal of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts*, 2010,
- [3] Wang, Y.L. A comparative study on the aesthetic style of puppet carving in Zhangzhou through the ages. *Journal of Minnan Normal University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, 2014, 2.

- [4] Chen, Y.S. A discussion on puppet carving in Zhangzhou, Fujian. *Enterprise culture*, 2017, 21, 279-280.
- [5] Fujian Opera Research Institute, ed. The history of Fujian opera. Fuzhou: Fujian People's Publishing House, 1983.
- [6] Sprinkling Yubo. The origin of puppet carving in Zhangzhou, Fujian. *Journal of Chongqing Institute of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 2010, 14, 138-139.
- [7] Yu, F.; Yang, T. The art of carving Zhangzhou Budai puppets. *Art and design (theory)*, 2019, 5, 126-128.
- [8] Zou, Y.; Chen, B.W. On the heritage and development of Zhangzhou puppet theatre. *Hebei Pictorial*, 2022, 10, 13-15.
- [9] Xu, X.S. Bottlenecks and countermeasures for the development of Min-Tai puppet carving art in the creative industry pattern. *Journal of Zhengzhou Institute of Light Industry (Social Science Edition)*, 2013, 3.
- [10] Liang, G.C. The past life and present life of Zhangzhou Budai Puppet Theatre - A brief discussion on the national intangible cultural heritage of Budai Puppet Theatre and puppet head carving. *Music Time and Space*, 2016, 7, 6-10.
- [11] Shang, Z.Z. Exploring new ways of inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage - taking Xu Zhuchu's puppet carving art into school as an example. *Modern Communication*, 2019, 20, 102-103.



© 2022 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)