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**BEYOND THE RITUAL:
MYSTICAL RELIGIOUS ARTS IN TAIWAN**

By

Tsui-Chuan Lin

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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1997

ABSTRACT

BEYOND THE RITUAL: MYSTICAL RELIGIOUS ARTS IN TAIWAN

By

Tsui-Chuan Lin

The evolution of documentary and related theories are briefly reviewed in this thesis. Then two philosophic camera approaches suggested by documentary filmmakers are used to create a thirty-one-minute-long video text which explores the status quo of Taiwan's religious arts and communicates old religious arts to modern society in Taiwan. In addition, this thesis is intended to examine the effectiveness of intercutting *montage* with documentary. After a focus group discussion of the video text, two results are suggested: first, the program achieves its communication objective to uncover the beauty and meaning of Taiwanese religious arts and help preserve them; second, *montage* provides a kaleidoscopic view of reality and boosts the audience's interest.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Taiwanese had very strong and pious religious beliefs which fostered indigenous religious arts. Vigorous deity festivals have provided not only joy and entertainment but also more understanding of traditional values and spirits. Religious arts, such as vivid troop performance and solemn temples, are original and unique and distinguish Taiwan from other countries as well as connect the new generation to its roots.

However, as agricultural society has transformed, religious arts which were used for worship, entertainment, social, economic and educational functions, have lost their importance. Nowadays, most Taiwanese regard religious folkarts in Taiwan only as an adjunct of religion and the byproduct of superstition. Creators of religious arts are thought to be only craftsmen or vaudevillians. Without adequate preservation, religious arts are disappearing at an astonishing rate and struggling to avoid extinction. Right now they only blossom in limited areas, like Wan-hwa, the region of Taipei. It is very significant and urgent to save the decaying religious arts that can provide the outlets for modern people to connect with traditions.

Priceless religious art should be thought of as an artistic and symbolic order that operates to confirm shared beliefs in Taiwan and manifest an underlying and fragile social process. As Horace Newcomb mentioned in "Television as a cultural forum," the dismemberment of ritual and arts provide both traditional and contemporary society a chance to check themselves through cultural reflexivity, to think who and what they are and how values, meaning and attitudes shift¹. Similarly, realizing the beauty of religious arts and recognizing their cultural value can help Taiwanese connect to their roots and bring alive the realities of the modern world. And a video text may be a good medium to fulfill these goals. This idea leads to the creation of a television documentary, "Beyond the Ritual: Mystical Religious Arts in Taiwan," which serves not only to show and allow appreciation of religious arts as "arts" but also decode their deep symbolic connotations. It is also important to find out how traditional religious arts strive for survival in modern society and what we can do to preserve them.

According to Paul Rotha in "Some Principles of Documentary," a documentary whose essence lies in its dramatization of actual material reflects the problems and realities of the present². Unlike fictional films, documentary films

¹ Horace Newcomb, *Television the critical view*. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 506

² Richard Meran Barsam, *Non-fiction film theory and criticism*. N.Y.: E. P. Dutton & Co, Inc.,

shoot real people in real locations. This format is useful to not only reproduce the actuality, like the beauty and vigor of deity festivals, but also represents the conflicts which are inherent in the preservation issue. In addition, using the documentary format is an attempt to dig out what traditional religious activities really mean to Taiwan's people by exploring the status quo, analyzing deep connotations and uncovering their problems of transformation.

"Beyond the Ritual: Mystical Religious Arts in Taiwan" is a 30-minute television documentary which intercuts with five montages. Theoretically, documentarists regarded *montage* as isolated images which offered essentially only a mute analogy with a fragment of the real. For instance, Andre Bazin and Realist theorists thought that *montage* is a necessary evil³. But if avoiding dullness, documentary will be one of the most exciting and stimulating of contemporary forms. Thus, the documentary should not be just a duplication of the real but an creative interpretation of reality. Montages provide a kaleidoscopic view of topics in this program to boost the audience's interest and show transformation of conflicts between ancient religious activities and contemporary life.

1935, p.53

³ William Guynn, *A cinema of non-fiction*. Cranbury: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1990, p. 32

In the second chapter, the thesis examines with the background and history of religious arts in Taiwan, mainly focusing on the incense troop. It also analyzes the relation of religious arts to traditional roots in Eastern thought, especially in Taiwan. Chapter Three opens with a summary of documentary history and a discussion of different theories and approaches to documentary. Chapter Four describes the design of the program and its rationale. In the end, a small-group evaluation by Taiwanese students and self evaluation are conducted to examine the effectiveness of the aforesaid attempts and the strategy of inserting montage into documentary.

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Religious folkarts, such as temple fairs and Buddhist sculptures, which pass from master to pupils and from generation to generation year after year, are the priceless cultural heritage in Taiwan. In Taiwan's previous agricultural society, poor farmers were often short of food or money, yet they took an optimistic and grateful attitude toward unknown nature and fate due to pious religious beliefs. They contributed almost all they had to religious activities to show their respect for the deities. Thus, religious arts in modern society are valuable resources which reflect abundant cues to the understanding of conventional values and spirits and preserve varieties of precious folkarts.

Vivid religious arts or myriad temples originated from Taiwan's religions which are inherently multideity idolism. Some believe in spirits of nature, such as mountains, winds, or even rocks. Some adore Buddhism which preaches "samsara"-- the process of coming into existence as a differentiated, moral creature. Some idolize Taoism which searches for long-lived secrets. At a glance, Taiwan's multideity idolism may lead to the impression of superstition; however, after taking

a close look, it becomes apparent that what Taiwanese really long for is to gain meaning in life and confirm shared beliefs among the fragmented values and explosive information of modern society. In rapid and chaotic social transition, they need concrete and stark symbolic orders to guide them so that religions melt into Taiwanese daily life. Ironically, at a time when they could be most valuable, religious arts, the beauty of the life, strive to avoid extinction which is caused by improper preservation.

History

Centuries ago, most of Taiwan's residents immigrated from mainland China and struggled against dangerous squalls when they crossed the Taiwan Strait by ship. Those colonists brought their native gods to protect them from hazardous weather, infectious diseases and deadly Taiwanese native tribes. During Taiwan's history, several wars broke out among colonists who immigrated from different provinces in China and respected different gods. "Community temples, at that time, served not only as places of worship to request gods' blessings but also as significant assembly halls to reinforce regional solidarity and self-defense⁴."

⁴ Mei-chuan Tang, "On the enhancement of socio-religious function of a community temple in Taiwan," in *Journal of national palace museum*, Taipei, 1980, p.11

Myriad temples and shrines in every corner of Taiwan apparently signify the prevalent thoughts of adoring gods. For instance, constructed two hundred and fifty years ago, Lung Shan Temple is known as the most spectacular and famous one in Taiwan. It has unique copper-molded dragon poles and richly ornamented plafond as well as delicate sculptures, which are all artistic antiques. Having endured several catastrophes, like the 1984 huge quake and 1945 war bomb, the glamorous architecture still stands upright and miraculously. Accordingly, pilgrims believe deeply that the Goddess of Mercy demonstrated incredible and grand power. Also located in Wa-hwa region and built in Chin Dynasty, Tzu Shy Shrine is another noted ancient temple in a refined style. Most interestingly, a pervasive folktale says that the nose of Peng-lai Founder fell down several times in order to foretell hazardous calamities in the past. Because of mystical folktales and the power of deities, pious disciples make pilgrimages to these two places every day. To them, temples are not only places for worship. They give disciples mental tranquillity and purification. In Taiwan, beautiful temples with refined designs also serve as popular sightseeing resorts.

In the heyday of certain regions, like Meeng Jya (now called Wan-hwa), the rich usually sponsored the construction of numerous shrines or created religious festivals to show their adoration for gods and ask for more blessings. Even if these regions lose their previous business importance, they are still characterized by perky

religious activities, precious relics and traditional folkarts. Having many delicate temples and relics as well as bustling religious activities, they distinguish themselves tremendously from surrounding metropolitan areas and serve as “live museums” to remind people of the good old times.

Deity festival

“Performing in the deity festival makes hustle and bustle everywhere,” “Everyone goes out and enjoys the vigor of parades,”-- this ancient Chinese poem depicts bygone and vivid deity festivals thoroughly. The incense troops were also generated from pious religious beliefs and arose decades ago in an agricultural society. Wandering in the streets, they form a spectacular and long line and perform a variety of acrobatics and traditional music to celebrate god’s birthday, important religious events or temple fairs, which create a vigorous, eye-catching but solemn atmosphere. Whereas religious arts do not play as important roles as before, nowadays the remaining few big deity festivals, like the Chin-shan emperor ceremony, provide cherished chances to have a brief glimpse of the past glory.

Starting on Oct. 20 in the lunar calendar, the Chin-shan emperor ceremony, a three-day festival, is an annual grand gathering in Wan-hwa region. This festivity turns the Wan-hwa region from tranquillity to excitement. To celebrate the Chin-shan emperor’s birthday, a night patrol is held to get rid of epidemics and ask for

blessings. The night patrol is a religious activity which is the duty of judiciary gods. In the past, there were many night patrols which maintained order in society. But they seldom take place now. When in night patrols, scary godly generals and ghost soldiers carrying instruments of torture investigate crime in every corner. In fact, the meaning behind the ritual is the inescapable judgment of Heaven. As the old Taiwanese saying goes: if you have conscience, there is no need to light candles and burn incense. If you have no heart, you have to watch out for ghastly punishment from Heaven in mid-night.

The Incense Troop

Whether in night patrols or day investigations, pilgrims participating in “offering incense” are called incense troops. According to Wen-po Huang, Taiwan’s incense troops consist of three parts: the vanguard troops, the animated troops, and the deity troops⁵. Different troops which preserve traditional arts have different functions and symbolic meaning.

The vanguard troop

In front of the incense troop, the vanguard troop plays roles as a guide and exorcist. Usually we can see head flags, head lights, the courier and the gong-and -

⁵ Wen po Huang, *Myth of Taiwanese religious parades*, Taipei: Zli Newspaper Pub., 1991, p.71

drum troop in the vanguard troop. Head flags symbolize the authority of the main deity by day; head lights symbolize the power of the main deity at night. They are called “day flag and night light” The courier is played by an old man who dresses in Chin-dynasty clothes and wears far-sighted glasses. He informs the audience that deities will come and derives from the concept of the military spy. The gong-and-drum troop, so-called dong-dong-ching, is the basic musical troop in the festivity. The drum is the main instrument, accompanied by cymbals and gongs. It functions not only to impart the deity’s arrival but also to create the climax.

The animated troop

In the parade, troops are sponsored by people both rich and poor. As an old saying goes, “although you are not as rich as others, never lose the honor to sponsor troops.” The animated troops are an impressive display of power and influence. Located between the vanguard troops and the deity troops, the animated troops usually include mystical eight generals, an awe-inspiring giant puppet performance, and spectacular Awakened Lion dance. The animated troops are the most cheerful and attractive parts of the incense troop.

Eight generals possess the supernatural power to divine, and are military officers under the deity’s command. They are responsible for guiding, maintaining order and preventing calamities. According to an interview conducted by the author with Wen-Qwei Shu, a Taiwanese folkart expert, people who intend to compensate

for their sins volunteer to play the eight generals. He also indicated that the performance of eight generals in northern Taiwan is more of an art than a superstition. Conventionally, the eight general performers have to paint colorful faces imitating the models of deities. In folktales, if playing godly guards or ghost soldiers, they have to draw their faces imperfectly. This is called “break face,” which is done to avoid being killed by spirits.

During the parade, giant puppets, as godly subordinates, wander along the street together. Performers inside the giant puppets carry them on their shoulders and swing right and left to shake the hands of tall puppets. On the other hand, short puppets dance more energetically and with more variety because they are easier to control than tall puppets. Usually giant puppets perform in front of a crowd or when passing temples. In terms of folkarts, yellow kuo-money hangs in the back of godly generals’ and giant puppets’ heads, which can cure all kinds of children’s diseases. Shian-kuang cookies are also important accessories. People believe that by eating these cookies they will be healthy and lucky.

The dancing lion is another ancient folkart, which was in an embryonic form in the Han Dynasty. (206 BC -220 AD) In the early Ching Dynasty (1644-1911), the dancing lion spread to Taiwan by immigrants from China. Because the dancing lion can exorcise evil and bring good luck, it is the basic performing troop in present Taiwan’s festivity.

Imitating an agile cat, the Awakened Lion outshines other kinds of dancing lions, because of its excellent performance and difficult stunts. The Awakened Lion derives from Kwangtung Province. It is said that this lion saved the life of Chyan-long Emperor in Ching Dynasty and was given the nickname Lucky Lion. The performance of the Awakened Lion symbolizes plucking Ching (vegetables.) In an old tradition, farmers put vegetables in front of their doors to invite the Lucky Lion to appear in the Chinese New Year. Once the Lion bites their vegetables, they will have good fortune in the coming year. There are two ways of performing "Pluck Ching": high-Ching in the air and low-ching on the ground. The Awakened Lion performs stunts such as the pyramid and the climbing pole, which pleases the audience greatly. According to Ching-lin Wang, vice president of Chin-hu Awakened Lion Troop, earlier there were fewer troops and performers had better Kung fu and functioned as forces to maintain local self-government. In comparison, troops nowadays focus more on fancy performance and entertainment.

The deity troop

People say, "The Tao deity follows behind." It means the more prominent the god is, the later he shows up. In the last but significant position, the deity troop-- some tiny god sculptures sitting in palanquins-- is actually the highlight of the incense troop. The deity troop consists of different godly palanquins and musical troops, which is worshipped most by disciples. In addition, pilgrims walking along

with the deity troop are also a part of it.

Preservation

Although religious arts provide the beauty of Taiwan's culture and significant traditions related to its roots, unfortunately, the impact of westernization makes the new generation in Taiwan blindly adore western culture. They know little about religious arts which foster indigenous traditions and value judgment. Unfortunately, the youth who learn traditional folkarts are extremely rare, like the feather of a phoenix and the horn of a unicorn. Plenty of religious art masters have trouble finding new disciples to whom to pass on their experience. For example, Ching-sheng Shu, a sculptor, who hasn't had any new apprentices for more than ten years complains about the difficulty of preserving Buddhist sculpture carving. "Nowadays almost nobody wants to learn this...My way to preserve this folkart is to keep sculpturing until I can't anymore," he said with a sorrow when interviewed.

Actually, religious art which combines art and magic with religion is essential not only because of its artistic value but also because of its deeply-rooted and profound meaning. To protect Taiwan's unique culture and not to forget its spirits, it is urgent to figure out how to preserve and enhance religious arts, the most colorful and original parts of Taiwanese indigenous arts. Chan-jwei Juan, the Chairman of the Anthropology Department of Province Museum, suggested troops

connecting to temples. If temples sponsor partial incense money to schools and help preserve folkarts, religious arts will be passed on to the next generation by education. Bau-iao Lin, the Chairman of the traditional folkart research center, also emphasizes the importance of saving the performance and experience of folkart masters in video, audio and photos. He also indicated that Taiwan's government endeavors to solve the problem by preserving folkart experts and folkart training.

In a word, clamorous drum beats cease eventually; vigorous troops also disappear. If Taiwanese cannot pass on their experience and embody their culture, priceless religious arts will vanish one day as elders pass away. Once elders and their memories all step into history, what Taiwanese lose is not only touching the beauty of life but also the roots connected to traditions. Then, it will be too late to save the beauty and holiness of religious arts.

Chapter 3

METHOD

This chapter briefly reviews the history and context of the contemporary documentary movement and the development of documentary theory. Whether documentary films just simply reproduce the real and whether the camera is objective are arguments here. Then the researcher associates documentary theory with this program and explains the shooting method and the use of montages.

In television, almost any film that is not “fiction” is called a documentary. The distinguishing characteristics of the nonfiction film are shooting in actual situations-- persons, events and processes-- and attempting to render a creative interpretation of them, just as John Grierson, who first used the word *documentary* in 1932, defined *documentary* as “the creative treatment of actuality.”⁶ The opposite of escapist entertainment, the documentary film reflects a profound respect for actuality and expresses both the externally visible world and interior world of those being filmed.

The World Union of Documentary Filmmakers issued a definition in 1948 that

¹ Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, (1936), p. 68

attempted to please every member, and succeeded in trying to sit on many chairs at the same time. “ All methods of recording on celluloid any aspect of reality interpreted either by factual shooting or by sincere and justifiable reconstruction, so as to appeal either to reason or emotion, for the purpose of stimulating the desire for, and the widening of, human knowledge and understanding, and of truthfully posing problems and their solutions in the spheres of economics, culture, and human relations.”⁷ It appeared that there is probably more agreement concerning these social aspects of documentary film. Lindsay Anderson, for example, admitted that “documentary is certainly a form, I think, that stresses the social relationships...”⁸ In 1936, Paul Rotha also wrote: “ (The documentary) ... to bring alive the realities of the modern world ... so as to base our themes on the relationship of Man to the world in which he lives.”⁹ Thus, a good documentary must clarify the problems to resolve and reflect realities of the present; to avoid dullness, it also has to dig out the immanent dramatization of actual material. In other words, by filming the real life and juxtaposing details, the documentarists create not only a mirror of actuality but an interpretation of life-- how people

⁷ Basil Wright, *World Documentary*. Edinburgh: Documentary '48, (1948)

⁸ G. Roy Levin, *Documentary Explorations*. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, (1972) p.63

⁹ *Op.cit.*, Paul Rotha, p.115

live, what they want, and how they try to get it.

The evolution of the documentary film

In the 1920s, the spirit of documentary was born first in Russian with the kino-Eye of Dziga Vertov who was a leading theorist during the Soviet Union's period of great inventiveness in cinema theory produced educational newsreels about the struggle for allegiance during the Russian Revolution. He believed that the value of natural life caught by the camera records the spirit of the time.

In 1926, while John Grierson, who piloted the British documentary movement, reviewed Flaherty's *Moana* in 1926, the term *documentary* is first used by Grierson to describe the format of *Moana*. Later, Grierson defined the documentary form as the "creative treatment of actuality."

American early documentaries

Flaherty, an American whose previous *Nanook of the North* is recognized as documentary's early masterpiece, began shooting his ethnographic record of an Eskimo family in 1915. While filming, Flaherty asked his subjects to do their normal activities in special ways, just like shooting an acted and fictional film. However, after working together for a long period of time, the Eskimo family considered the camera invisible and continued their lives unself-consciously before the camera. This made *Nanook* look very convincing and natural. Therefore, Flaherty's

unsentimental vision of Eskimo daily life which elicits the larger theme of man in a struggle for survival had an unexpectedly good box office.

From *Nanook* onwards, the factual cinema began showing real life in a way that exceeded the fragmented presentation of news footage. By turning events into stories and depicting mainly the relation between man and nature, early documentary in the US interpreted its subject to imply social effect and cause. Afterwards, the success of Pare Lorentz's films made for the US government-- *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937) ensured the American documentarists that they can be independent of government funding and intervention.

British early documentaries

Cinema as an expression of national publicities created documentary in England. From a sociological point of view, the Empire Marketing Board (E.M.B.) represented the first attempt to portray the British working-class as a human, vital factor in present-day existence, to throw on the screen the rough labor of the industrial worker, the skill of the trained craftsman and the toil of agricultural labor. After World War I, Grierson endorsed Brecht's saying that "art is not a mirror help up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it." Emphasizing the social functions of documentary, he worked for the E.M.B. in the late 1920s and endeavored to make documentaries propagandize exciting peace after the war.

Meanwhile, the British documentary school attempted to reveal the dignity in ordinary people and their work.

Drifters, Grierson's only personally directed film, laid the foundation for documentary in this country. It brought alive not only the routine of the herring catch in the North Sea but also the dramatization and emotional value of the actuality. In other words, Grierson took a simple theme, took actually existing material, and built a dramatized film by interpreting the relationships of his theme and material in the sphere of daily existence. *Night Mail* (1936) and *Coal Face* (1936) recruited some artistic talents to assist in producing works and also became famous as an interpretive representation of humble work. Several years later, Huphrey Jennings's *Listen to British* (1942) and *Fires Were Started* (1943) reflected ordinary people adapting to the duress of World War II. He created a touching but unsensational portrait of Britain itself.

The Soviet Union's early documentaries

In Russia of the 1920s, the new government tried to find a way to unite a huge nation of peoples who neither read nor understand each other's languages. Silent film served as a universal language to cut cross the boundaries of races and languages. Because the government wanted the cinema to be realistic and inspirational and get away from the escapism of Western commercial cinema, a cinema to record life without imposing on it was created by Kino-Eye. Vertov, the

leader of Kino-Eye, produced “*Man With The Movie Camera* (1929),” which is a record of the camera’s mobility to capture life in the streets and ever-changing montages of shots to emerge free of any point of view. Besides, Sergei Eisenstein’s historical reenactments, most notably *Strike* (1924) and *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), show a similarity of documentary realism in their presentation of recent Russian History. In fact, the Russian documentary is an advance on the technical methods and is considerably more important to modern filmmaking than the ancient struggle of Man against Nature, or the impressionist patterns of the Realists.

Europe’s early documentaries

European documentarists of the 1920s and 1930s tended to reflect more urban problems. In high-density and century-old cities, Alberto Cavalcanti, Joris Ivens, and Walter Ruttmann produced experimental films which were labeled “city Symphonies.” They observed the contemporary city scenes and compared poor and rich, clean and dirty, with a tendency to the rhythmic movements of machinery and the implications of garbage cans. The common themes of these documentary films are Man against the Street and Man against the turmoil of the City. For instance, in his impressioned and eloquent *Land without Bread* (1932), Luis Bunuel showed the appalling poverty and suffering in a remote village on the Spanish border with Portugal.

The Nazis realized the unlimited power of film better than any other government. In addition to propaganda films, this regime produced two outstanding epics: Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (1938) portrayed the 1936 Olympic games to a paeon; and her *Triumph of the Will* (1937) is regarded as a peak to exploit the potential of non-fiction cinema. Because of the excellent compositional and musical elements, these two films belong with the greatest documentaries of all time.

World War II was a time when a huge amount of factual films were produced in Europe. Most documentaries focused on the consequences of warfare: the destruction of cities, the misery of refugees, homelessness, and so on. Among them all, Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955) was possibly the most powerful documentary ever made about man's relentless destroying of his relatives.

Direct Cinema and Cinema Verite

Two kinds of philosophic approaches evolved regarding how to operate the newly mobile camera after the 1960s -- direct cinema and *cinema verite*. Direct cinema is known as an observational and uninterrupted camera approach to intrude as little as possible in order to catch the uninhibited flow of life. It is favored by American documentarists, such as the Maysles brothers and Fred Wiseman. Without using special lighting, they wait on the sideline for significant and dramatic events to happen. However, unless the camera is hidden, participants are usually aware of its

existence and adjust their behaviors accordingly. The idea of a transparent and objective camera is almost impossible. Only when participants pay more attention to ongoing events than to the camera, direct camera works better to capture the integrity of the real.

Cinema verite encourages interaction between subject and director while permitting the camera's presence and giving the director the role of catalyst. This approach derived from Jean Rough who believed that authorship could legitimately be shared between participants and filmmakers.

In the book "Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction," Eric Barnouw sums up the differences between the two approaches: "The direct cinema documentarist took his camera to a situation of tension and waited hopefully for a crisis; the Rough version of Cinema Vertire tried to precipitate one."¹⁰ Therefore, the direct cinema documentarists tried to make the camera invisible and played the role of uninvolved and objective observers whereas the cinema verite artists preferred to be participants and believed that the interaction between subjects and creators could bring hidden truth to surface.

¹⁰ Eric Barnouw, "*Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film.*" London: Oxford University Press, (1974).

The influence of new technology

Because of its clumsy technology, the documentary film remained tethered in the 1950s. Heavy cameras and lumbering sound recorders lowered the quality of documentaries at that time. Yet the advancement of equipment transformed location filming by the beginning of the 1960s-- from news covering, to documentary, to drama production. Mobile and flexible, the camera which became a truly active observer was more useful to capture the spontaneity and immediacy of unfolding events.

In the United States, the Mayseles brothers' *Gimme Shelter* (1970) shows the hazardous side of the 1960s counterculture and culminates with the murder by Hell's Angels of a troublemaker in the crowd. Due to the mobility of new technology, the filmmakers can shoot from position to position in the restless crowd.

A French film benefiting from the improvement of equipment was Pierre Schoendoerffer's *The Anderson Platoon* (1927). The film honors ordinary soldiers without romanticizing war. Another filmmaker whose art developed out of mobility is the American Fred Wiseman. In his violent and haunting film *The Titicut Follies* (1967), he shows scenes of cruelty happening in an institution for the criminally insane. By using minimal equipment and no special lighting, he created the film which caused a furor. Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, USA* (1976), which

followed the development of a Kentucky miner's strike and reflected the company intimidation and violence, is also a fine documentary.

Documentary Theory

British documentary theory

According to the British documentary theorists, the distinctive feature of documentary is "creative treatment of actuality." Both John Grierson and Paul Rotha, the major theorists of the movement, identify the feature of documentary in double movement of opposition: 1) The documentary is distinguished from the fiction film because it refers to an observable world, not an imaginary one. 2) It is also different from "films of fact," because documentary is creative, not simply reproductive, in its interpretation of the real. True documentary film is not simply descriptive but analytical, just as Grierson said, "You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your juxtaposition of details, create an interpretation of life."¹¹ The material may be "raw and unrehearsed," the shooting "purely impulsive," but the finished documentary with motivated sequence and narration explosively reveals the reality of life. A documentarist, as a discreet observer, must master material on

¹¹ John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, (1966) p.199

the spot and respect the integrity of the real; then he comes in intimacy to arrange and order his story. In this theory, documentary, an art of choice-making, is more than the real.

Dziga Vertov

Vertov does not think of documentary as a transparent medium of representation which offers viewers unmediated access to an already formed world. Rather, he asserts that the coherence of any discourse is created in progressive stages of production by a collectivity of filmmakers. Using the camera as an objective instrument of investigation, filmmakers look for a rhythm which is inherent in the movement of things. The filming skill he called “life caught unawareness” is similar to the Realist theorists-- cinema has an essential function: the exploration of the real. However, in contrast with the realists who regard cinema as a reproductive technique before the apparent coherence of the “real,” Vertov conceives of the film as an imaginary construct. He also asserts the discursive power of *montage*: “I force the spectator to see, in my way I find most advantageous , such and such a visual phenomenon. The eye is subjected to the will of the camera, which directs it toward the consecutive movements of the action.¹² ”

¹² *Op. Cit.*, William Guynn, p.28

In his “intervals” theory, Vertov suggests how a film can be coherent and at the same time point to its own fragmentation. For him, because *montage* is the joining together of pieces of film in order to create a filmic space/time, then it is the juncture in denial of coherence.

Andre Bazin and realist theory

The central intention of Bazin’s ontological historical theory is to set cinema apart from all other languages and use it to provide an imitation of the real. Bazin sees a natural predisposition toward realism in the camera’s capacity to produce an illusion of actuality. In *Ontology of the Photographic Image*, Bazin links “unmediated, transparent and objective” photographic reproduction to the historical desire for duplication. He considers the photographic image not as sign, but as fetish. And this photo-fetish is the substitute that provides an unsymbolized access to the world of reference, just as the dream of historical discourse: “To be simply true, to be what things are, neither more nor less, not otherwise, nor ¹³“

The cinema, the “photographic eye,” possesses “essential objective.” Bazin has insisted on the repression of the discursive intervention of filmmakers in favor of a objective discourse to reproduce reality. Besides, Bazin abhors the violation of the

¹³ *Op. Cit.*, William Guynn, p.30

unity of space and event perpetrated by the practitioners of *montage*. In his view, *montage* is a necessary evil. In the greatest realist films, like *Nannok*, editing simply reflects the impossibility of seeing everything and of recording everything.

Theory of the ethnographic film

The pivotal work in the formation of a liberal ethnographic methodology is carried out by Bateson and Mead from 1936 to 1938, which legitimate photographic and cinematic technologies as tools in the field work. Bateson asserts that the techniques of *montage* and *mise en scene* are thoroughly alien to scientific purposes. Mead also renounces the fragmentation of montage and embraces depth of field and the long take in order to produce a scientific and realistic document:¹⁴ “At the present time, films that are acclaimed as great artistic endeavors get their effect by rapid shifts of the camera and kaleidoscope types of cutting. When filming is done only to produce a currently fashionable film, we lack the long sequences from one point of view that provide us with the unedited stretches of instrumental observation on which scientific work must be based.”

“Imaginary space,” the creation of *montage*, and the excessive use of close-ups are perceived as dangerous to the authenticity of the document and as a concession to

¹⁴ Margaret Mead, “Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words,” *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers, (1975), p.10

aestheticism. The ethnographic ideal is the respect of real time and the preservation of real sequences, which reduces the discrepancy between representation and reality.

Nonetheless, in the evolution of his ethnographic film practice, Jean Rouch came to reject the aforesaid methodological approach of cinematographic observation and asserted the nonexistence of a transparent image of the real. He argues that ethnographic film is inevitably the product of *montage* and *mise en scene*. For Rouch, the methodological and moral principle that all ethnographic films should practice is “intersubjectivity,” which are understandable across countries, cultures and peoples . Thus, Rouch’s strategy is to view producing documentary as a fiction-making activity and to engage all participants in the creative process of production by using the cinema verite approach.

Discussion

For this researcher, the documentary must be more than real because filmmakers interpret, order and create the treatment of actuality. And the value of documentary is that it affirms the importance of imagination and empathy while simultaneously probing the depths of real life for its meaning. Objective camera is too ideal to achieve after the selection of what to shoot and how to shoot; so is the pure duplication of the real. Even Bazin, the realism theorist, admits that art can

only exist when a choice is made. If documentary is recognized as an art form, each choice-making involves the creative intervention of man and pushes documentary further away from the real. Thus, documentary is not the duplication of actuality but an interpretation of life.

Besides, it will be more effective to take different camera approaches in different situations. While shooting, this author used both direct cinema and cinema verite to either capture the uninterrupted flows of life or uncover the profound meaning under the surface of truth. When an event, like a deity festival, catches everyone's eyes, the direct camera works well to capture the real and the spontaneous; but when unrevealable truth needs filmmakers to dig it out, then the cinema verite is the better way to discover the actuality.

As for *montage*, the disputable editing skill in documentary theory, is actually a effective way to show a kaleidoscope of viewpoints and an imaginary way to show filmic space and time. As Lindsay Anderson mentioned in *Free Cinema*, documentary should not be synonymous with dullness. Therefore, this documentary intercuts *montage* between documentary as a strategy to boost the audience's interest.

Chapter 4

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This video text, “Beyond the Ritual: Mystical Religious Arts in Taiwan,” is a 30-minute television documentary. It is intercut by five montages into six main segments: the incense troop, the Awakened dancing lion, giant puppets, Buddhist sculptures, lost roots and preservation. The purpose of the program is to communicate old, religious arts to modern society in Taiwan so that the viewers can appreciate their beauty, realize their meaning and understand the crisis that religious arts face in a modern society. Because it will be cablecast in Netwave Cable System in Taiwan, the program uses Chinese narration with subtitles. The target market is 18~35 year old Taiwanese who just have a superficial comprehension about the deity festivals and rituals. They do not know the profound and symbolic meanings behind these events. Since the target audience is TV literate and often exposed to western films, the documentary uses modern TV production techniques to appeal to them; that is, intercutting five montages with the documentary segments intends to not only provide in-depth discovery of changing religious arts but also give these traditional folkarts a new interpretation.

Program Content

There are two central ideas of this documentary: 1) Taiwan's religious arts are "arts", not the byproduct of superstition 2) religious arts which connect Taiwanese to their roots strive for an inevitable transformation in the modern social milieu.

As for the structure, this documentary is divided into six segments by montages. (Figure 1) The program opens with a montage of a variety of religious arts. Section one describes the past glory of religious arts and introduces the Chin-Shan Emperor ceremony. The following part decodes profound meanings behind the incense troop, which consists of the vanguard troop, the animated troop, and the deity troop. Then montage two functions as the preface of section three-- the Awakened lion. This section is about history, performance, and training process of the Awakened Lion. Next, montage three is spooky giant puppet studio, followed by section four which mentions the creating process of giant puppets. Then montage four about delicate Buddhist sculptures and architectures prefaces section five which depicts the difficult process of sculpture carving. The avant-garde montage six of Taiwan's teens is followed by section six, "lost roots." This section explores the minds of Taiwan's teenagers, including those who learn religious arts and those who do not. Then comes the preservation issue and the claim to save the decaying religious arts that connect people to the past and anchor a rootless society.

Figure 1-- Structure of program

Title	Description
Montage One-- opening	A variety of religious arts
Section One	The past glory of religious arts and introduction to Chin-Shan Emperor Ceremony
Section Two	The composition and meaning of the incense troop (interview)
Montage Two--Incense troop	The performance of troops
Section Three	The history, performance, and training of Awakened Lion (interviews)
Montage Three-- Giant puppet	Spooky giant puppets
Section Four	The creating process of giant puppets (interviews)
Montage Four-- Buddhist sculpture	Delicate Buddhist sculptures and architectures
Section Five	The creating process of sculpture carving (interviews)
Montage Five-- Lost roots	Perplexed Taiwanese teens
Section Six	Taiwanese's attitudes toward religious arts; the problem of preservation and the solution to it (interviews)

Program format

Because this program attempts to explore the status quo of the religious arts, analyze their deep connotations, and uncover the problems of preservation, it is appropriate to use the documentary format which reflects conflicts in contemporary society. Here documentary is not only descriptive but analytic and interpretative. Although the Realist documentarists regard *montage* as discursive fragmentation of the real, it actually is an effective strategy to avoid the potential boredom of purely recording of life. It also provides intriguing points of views to actuality. In addition, it appeals to the target market and also serves as good transitions between segments. Therefore, the documentary includes montages. And it is proved a good strategy by the small group evaluation articulated in next chapter.

The documentary uses direct cinema while shooting vigorous deity festivals, for the troop performance and rituals caught everyone's eyes and the camera becomes less visible and intrusive. On the other hand, the cinema verite approach is adopted only when profound meaning or truth is deeply-hidden. The interaction between subjects and producer help discover the concealed meaning in limited shooting time. Hand-held camera operation is also used a lot to catch fast-moving troop performance. In order to shoot colorful footage that induces Taiwanese to appreciate the beauty of religious arts, considerable attention is paid to lighting, both outdoor and indoor.

As for postproduction, the idea-associative montage uses complex editing skills, like dissolves, slow motion and fades, accompanied by upbeat Taiwanese ballads. Although brisk religious parades have a quicker pace, most parts of the program remain “Lento.” As for the documentary part, dissolves and cuts are the dominant editing skills.

Chapter 5

EVALUATION

This chapter presents results of self and group evaluation. Self evaluation focuses on the bottlenecks in the process of creating this program. As for group evaluation, there will be a summary from a questionnaire (Appendix A) and discussion of a focus group.

Self Evaluation

This program is actually customized to Netwave Cable TV station in Taiwan because its location, Wan hwa, is an old place full of indigenous folkarts. When the program, “ Beyond the Ritual,” was suggested to this company in the summer of 1996, they thought that this program would be popular and promised the producer a camera and related equipment in exchange for the free cablecasting right. While shooting footage in Taiwan in the winter of 1996, there was much technical difficulty because of the professional assistance and advice of the cameramen in this company. Thus, the program had a good start-- quite colorful footage and human-interest material.

Since it was the producer's first time creating such a long program, it was easy to feel lost in an extensive forest quite often. The first bottleneck was how to select and organize a huge amount of raw material. To avoid dullness, it was decided to intercut montages and create a program following emotional flow. After pre-planning, still some flaws existed in the structure of the program. According to Prof. Bob Albers's advice, moving the part of the little kid playing the Awakened Lion to just before the ending would create a climax and have more emotional impact. The producer did not rearrange the sequence because she and some of Taiwanese thought that original structure is more logical. However, the advice of Mr. Albers proved correct by the results of the following group evaluation.

The second difficulty that the producer encountered was translating narration from Chinese to English. Because Taiwanese religious arts is unique and rarely-known to the Western world, translation of slang and ritual is not only time-consuming but also there is inevitably some loss of the true meaning. Do English subtitles help American viewers understand the video text? It is still questionable because of the huge cultural gaps.

Editing is the most challenging thing in the process of creation. First, it was necessary to get used to the new Media 100 digital editing system and spend much more time on trouble shooting than using a conventional editing machine. Secondly, Mr. Albers asked me to try to make my program "breathe," which allows video and

audio speak by themselves, and interweave with narration seamlessly. But it is easier said than done. After much effort to learn the skill, the producer still did not quite feel the inherent rhythm of the footage.

After finishing, the producer is satisfied with the program, especially the colorful footage and the editing of montages. It appears to meet the needs of cable company and achieve the communication objective-- "to communicate old religious arts to modern society in Taiwan so that the viewer can appreciate their beauty, realize their meaning and help preserve them." But if it were possible to do it all over again, there would be some adjustments: cutting down the narration, making voice-over more clear, slowing down the tempo of the part of incense troop, and lowering the level of audio during mastering to tape.

Group Evaluation

On April 13, 1997, there was a viewing session with six male and eight female Taiwanese students in attendance¹⁵. Belonging to the target audience, they only have rough ideas about religious arts in Taiwan and their age ranges from 24-32. Before watching the program, several of attendants were confused by the definition

¹⁵ All attendants of the group evaluation are acquaintances of the author, which might influence the results of the questionnaires and discussion.

of religious arts. After the viewing session, they were asked to fill in open-ended questionnaires and join in a half-hour discussion. The following are summarized opinions mainly from questionnaires as well as discussion regarding each designed question:

1. What is your first impression, reaction, or feeling after viewing this video?

They all expressed positive reaction after viewing. Three viewers were impressed with colorful footage; three viewers liked the editing; two viewers indicated that editing matched with music well. Some other opinions include: well-framed shots, well-lit, interesting, touching, sincere and good strategy to remind Taiwanese of the responsibility to preserve religious arts.

2. Do you think that by watching this program you understand religious arts and appreciate their beauty more? Why?

Twelve viewers thought that they could understand and appreciate religious arts more because “content is informative,” “narration explains well,” and “program is good.” One indicated that she felt the beauty of religious arts after viewing; however, she had hard time listening to voice-over so that she could not understand them well. Besides, one viewer was confused with the definition of religious arts and thought that this topic was too broad.

3. Does this program urge you to help preserve traditional religious arts? Why?

Nine viewers said yes. Most of them specified their reasons as the following:

realizing how beautiful religious arts are (3), worrying about the preserving issue (2), and gaining some basic concepts (2) by watching the program. The one who said no thought that the program should mention how to access religious arts and how to preserve them if the intention is to urge viewers to save them. The other three who answered “a little,” “so so,” and “not really,” felt this topic is not what they were interested in or they thought that the program does not focus on this issue.

4. Do you think that intercutting montages between documentary is a good strategy? Why?

Thirteen viewers thought that intercutting montages within the documentary is a good strategy. Three of them thought montages showed diversity of religious arts. Some other reasons why montages worked well here were: good transition (1), colorful (1), interesting and touching (1), impressive (1), natural (1), beautiful and persuasive (1). According to the discussion, the opening *montage* of various religious arts functions well to catch their attention. And the other four montages help boost their interest. The one answered no and indicated that after montages, the long pause of titles caused the feeling of breaking the flow of this program. From the response of this question, I am very satisfied with the effect of *montage* and regard it as a useful way to show kaleidoscopic points of views instantly.

5 Do you like or dislike this program? why?

All of the viewers answered that they liked it. One viewer particularly expressed that the seamless editing, beautiful shots and montages brought boring religious arts alive and changed her stereotype of religious arts. Another viewer liked the color and music in the program. Some mentioned good lighting skills and editing.

Besides, most of the viewers laughed while watching five-year-old Sheng-iang Wang playing the Awakened Lion above the poles. This part seems to be most successful because it arouses the audience's emotional reaction.

Overall, it appears that this program fulfills its communication objective, especially uncovering the beauty of religious arts and realizing the meaning behind it.

Montage seems to be an effective strategy here by the result of this focus group.

Yet according to viewers' suggestions, there are still things to be improved: the quality of voice-over and the structure of the whole program.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Religious arts are indigenous and merge into Taiwanese daily life. In contemporary society, “ritual and the arts offer a metalanguage,” according to Newcome, “(it is) a way of understanding who and what we are, how values and attitudes are adjusted, how meaning shifts.”¹⁶ Accordingly, religious arts provide a connection to traditional roots. Perhaps idolizing gods was the initial impetus to generate religious arts in the past; however, religious arts can be appreciated as “pure art” without the intervening factor of superstition. Actually, mysterious religious parades or solemn Buddhist sculptures not only arouse the spirit to adore unknown natural powers but also capture formative aesthetics and profound connotations.

However, as years pass, the past glory of religious arts fade for lack of preservation; hence “the transforming process of traditional folkarts is unavoidable,” stated Wen-po Huang.¹⁷ Pitifully, the beauty of traditional folkarts is

¹⁶ *Op. Cit.*, Horace Newcomb, p.506

¹⁷ Wen-po Huang, *Myth of Taiwan's Religious Parades-- Seguel*. Taipei: Zli Evening Newspaper Pub., Feb. 1991, p.8

vanishing little by little in the new society.

In order to save Taiwan's colorful and unique culture, this documentary is created not only to represent diverse and appealing religious arts but also explore the deep meaning behind them and the conflicts existing in the preservation issue. Analyzing results of group evaluation, the program has accomplished the aforementioned communication objective. And the format of this program, intercutting montages between documentary, is also proved a successful strategy by the group evaluation. Unlike Realists' theoretical bias against *Montage*, it actually is an effective strategy to avoid the boredom of simply copying life and provides diverse point of views. Most importantly, it appeals to the target market and brings traditional religious arts a new interpretation.

In terms of camera operation, the producer adopts either direct cinema or cinema verite, depending on different situations. The combination of two camera strategies resulted in satisfying and colorful footage.

In editing, the nonlinear editing system, Media 100, caused a lot of problems. For instance, when redigitizing to higher resolution, it ran out of the memory space, resulting in the delays and confusion. Also it was very difficult to know if the program had a proper audio level because the audio chart of Media 100 is different from the one of Betacam machine. Thus, when mastering to tape, the audio level of the betacam tape is a little higher than it should be. In second thought, Media 100 is

indeed a fine equipment which shortens the editing time by speed up transition and rearranging sequences easily. Just like other technologies, it takes time to get adroit.

As Grierson says that the ideal of documentary is to “draw men together into a homogeneous global group by portraying them so that the essential humanity of each nation will shine through its strange clothes and exotic habits¹⁸,” documentary can serve as a universal language to come across the boundaries of borders, languages and culture. Although the target audience of this program, “Beyond the Ritual: Mystical Religious Arts in Taiwan,” is Taiwanese, it attempts to reach the goal of “intersubjectivity” by using English subtitles. But as a result of the huge culture gaps, it is doubtful if American viewers can get a clear picture of indigenous Taiwanese religious arts.

Overall, creating this thesis program not only gave the producer a chance to care about Taiwan’s religious arts and their preservation, but also polished her skills of shooting and editing. It is a wonderful experience!

¹⁸ Lewis Jacobs, ed. *The Documentary Tradition from Nannok to Woodstock*. N.Y.: Hopkinson and Blake, (1971) p.252

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APPENDIX A

Appendix A-- Questionnaire of Group Evaluation

- 1. What's your first impression, reaction, or feeling after viewing this video?**

- 2. Do you think that by watching this program you understand religious arts and appreciate their beauty more? Why?**

- 3. Does this program urge you to help preserve traditional religious arts? Why?**

- 4. Do you think that intercutting montages between documentary is a good strategy? Why?**

- 5. Do you like or dislike this program? Why? Which part?**

- 6. Any suggestions?**

APPENDIX B

Appendix B— Subtitles of the Program

Historically, Taiwanese had very strong religions.

Pious religious beliefs foster indigenous religious arts.

In a solemn temple, disciples chant harmonically.

What you see is delicate Buddhist sculptures

and refined architecture.

It is like visiting a folk art museum.

You appreciate the beauty of religious art.

“ Performing in the deity festival

makes hustle and bustle everywhere,”

“ Everyone goes out and

enjoys the vigor of parades,”—

this ancient Chinese poem depicts

bygone and vivid deity festivals thoroughly.

However, as agricultural society has transformed,

religious arts which were used for worshipping,

entertaining, social, economic and educational functions,
have lost their importance.

Nowadays the remaining few big deity festivals,
like the Chin-shan emperor ceremony,
provide a brief glimpse of the glory of the past.

Starting from Oct. 20th in the lunar calendar,
the Chin-shan emperor ceremony, a three-day festival,
is an annual grand gathering in Wan-haw region.

This festivity turns Wan-haw region
from tranquillity to excitement.

To celebrate the Chin-shan emperor's birthday,
a night patrol is held to get rid of epidemics
and ask for blessings.

The night patrol is a religious activity
which is the duty of judiciary gods.

In the past, there were many night patrols
which maintained order in society.

But they seldom take place now.

In the dark, scary godly generals and ghost soldiers

carrying instruments of torture,

investigate crime in every corner.

In fact, the meaning behind the ritual

is the inescapable judgment of Heaven.

As the old saying goes: if you have conscience,

there is no need to light candles and burn incense.

If you have no heart, you have to watch out for

ghastly punishment from Heaven in mid-night.

Whether in night patrols or day investigations,

pilgrims participating in “offering incense”

are called incense troops.

In general, the incense troop is composed of three parts:

the vanguard troop,

the deity troop,

and the animated troop.

The Vanguard troop locates in the front of the incense troop.

It functions as a guide and exorcist.

Head flags symbolize the authority of the main deity by day;

Head lights symbolize the power of the main deity at night.

They are called day flag and night light.

The courier is usually played by an old man

who dresses in Chin-dynasty clothes

and wears far-sighted glasses.

He informs the audience that deities will come.

The gong-and-drum troop , so-called dong-dong-ching,

is the basic musical troop in the festivity.

The drum is the main instrument,

accompanied by cymbals and gongs.

It functions not only to impart

deity's coming but also to create the climax.

People say, "Tao deity follows behind."

It means the more prominent god is,

the later he shows up.

Although deity troop is located in the end,

it actually is the highlight of incense troop.

Disciples always worship it most.

The deity troop consists of different
godly palanquins and musical troops.

Pilgrims walking along with deity troop
are also a part of deity troop.

In the parade, troops are sponsored by people
both rich and poor.

As an old saying goes,
“although you are not rich as others,
never lose the honor to sponsor troops. “

The animated troops are impressive display
of power and influence.

Located between the vanguard troops and the deity troops,
the Animated troops are most cheerful and attractive.

Eight generals possess the supernatural power to divine,
and are military officers under the deity’s command.

They are responsible for guiding,
maintaining order, and preventing calamities.

Interview: Wen-Qwei Shu, Folkart Expert
(meaning of eight generals)

*People who intend to compensate for their sins
volunteer to play the eight generals.*

*The Eight generals are performed
in both the north and the south.*

*But in the north the performance is more
of an art than a superstition.*

*The Eight generals performers have to paint colorful faces
according to the models of deities.*

*In folktales, if playing godly guards or ghost soldiers,
they have to draw their faces imperfectly.*

This is called "break face."

*To avoid being killed by spirits,
they cannot look identical to deities.*

During the parade, giant puppets, as godly subordinates,

wander along the street together.

Performers inside the giant puppets

carry them on the shoulder.

Then they swing right and left

to shake the hands of tall puppets.

This creates a frightening atmosphere.

The movement of short puppets

is also controlled by performers inside.

The short puppets dance more energetically

and with more variety.

Interviewee: Chian-Chen Wu (Giant puppet performer and creator)

Giant puppets dance in front of crowd

or when passing temples.

In general, short puppets have more action

and dancing steps than tall puppets.

Under City god's command,

the seventh and eighth Master, also-called

black and white *anitya*,

apprehend criminals and spirits at large.

According to hearsay,

the feather fan which is held by the white *anitya*,

records the names of the evil ghosts.

Chong-kuei, the master of exorcism,

is also in the spotlight in Chin-shan Emperor Festival.

Little ghosts with colorful costumes

prepare the way for Chong-kuei.

Some take lanterns; some take umbrellas.

Chong-kuei usually tilts his body

and leaps with one leg when performing.

Additionally, the benign God of Earth, buxom wealthy babies, and cute three Nuo-cha princess are common.

According to folktales, yellow Kuo-money hangs in the back of godly generals' and giant puppets' heads, which can cure all kinds of child's diseases.

Shian-kuang cookies are also important accessories.

People believe that by eating these cookies they will be healthy and lucky.

Montage 2 - Troops

The dancing Lion is an ancient folk art.

It was in an embryonic form in the Han Dynasty. (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.)

In the early Ching Dynasty (1644-1911), the dancing lion was spread to Taiwan by immigrants from China.

Because the dancing lion can exorcise evil and bring good luck, it is the basic performing troop in festivities.

Imitating an agile cat, the Awakened Lion outshines other kinds of dancing lions,

because of its excellent performance and difficult stunts.

The Awakend Lion derives from Kwangtung Province.

It is said that this lion saved the Chyan-long Emporor

and was given the nickname Lucky Lion.

The performance of the Awakend Lion

symbolizes plucking vegetables.

According to an old tradition, farmers put vegetables

in front of their doors to invite the Lucky Lion

to appear in the New year.

Once the lion bite their vegetables,

they will have good fortune.

There are two ways of plucking vegetables (Ching).

High-Ching in the air and Low-Ching on the ground.

The Awakened Lion performs stunts such as the pyramid

and the climbing-pole, which pleases the audience greatly.

In the past, people who played the Awakened Lion

were good at martial arts.

When the Awakened Lion first came to Taiwan, performers

also functioned as forces to maintain local self-government.

As society changes, what kind of adjustment

should the Awakened Lion troop make?

According to Ching-lin Wang, vice leader of Chin-hu troop,

earlier there were fewer troops

and performers had better Kung fu.

The performers spent no less than three to four years

to comprehend the essence of the Awakened Lion.

In comparison, troops nowadays focus more on

fancy performance and entertainment

Interview: Ching-lin Wang, vice leader of Chin-hu troop

The process of learning the Awakened Lion is step-by-step.

A disciple who learns the Awakened Lion

starts with squat deep knee bend.

Then he practices the head of the lion.

After he is dexterious, he is taught

about different dancing steps,

such as Three-bow, Three-fling, Seven-star, etc.

Next, if a disciple is able and willing to

dance the Awakened Lion in the air,

he can play it on the pole.

Learning the Awakened Lion requires not only overcoming

the fear of height but also understanding different dancing lion styles.

Most disciples of Chin-hu troop are students
in Shuang-yuan Junior High School.

Teenagers have good skill and are fearless.

Learning this folkart is a healthy hobby and
a great outlet for their excessive vitality.

Interview: Kuo-feng Huang, disciple of Chin-hu troop

*Most parents of the troupers don't want
their children learning the Awakened Lion,
because they think playing the Lion
will do them nothing good but harm.
In fact, they are all wrong.
Practicing this traditional folkart keeps us
occupied and stop fooling around.*

Novices start with learning how to

play the musical instrument ,

control the head of the lion,

and perform on the ground.

They cannot go up on the pole

until they are well-trained.

To play the Awakened Lion vigorously,

performers have to listen to drum and move with the beat.

For the dance to be effective,
the head player and the tail player should
communicate with each other without words.

Montage-3 Wu-shang Studio

In Wu-shang Studio, surrounded by giant puppets with hideous
faces, it is spooky to feel dozens of eyes watching behind your back.

What kind of place exactly is the special Wu-shang Studio?

The place gives birth to giant puppets.

When performing, giant puppets are awe-inspiring.

Even when they are still,

they create an eerie atmosphere.

However, the giant puppets consist of

a wood-sculptured head and a bamboo body,

wearing a delicately-embroidered costume.

Different deities and ghosts have

their own specific required appearance,

their creators embellish their required appearance

by adding colorful details.

Interview: Sheng-ming Wang, the owner of Wu-sheng Studio

*Generally speaking, Swallowing- monster generals
are created to have colorful faces.*

*But we differentiate our Swallowing- monster generals
by putting a plastic doll into the general's mouth
instead of a wood one.*

When you touch it, you 'll feel it is resilient.

You can twist it but

it 'll still be exactly the same later.

*Besides, Turtle and Snake generals are often seen
a carved turtle and snake on their forehead.*

*After our innovation, we paint a golden turtle
and snake on their faces.*

Generally speaking, it takes two to three months

for many people to create one giant puppets.

Interview: Chian-Chen Wu, the creator of giant puppets

Making a giant puppet begins with the part of head.

*After the head is created by southern masters,
we will modify it, coat it
with lacquer and paint it.*

*Then we lacquer the hat, draw decorative patterns on it,
and embellish them with velvet balls and beads.*

*At last, we put the clothes made by
southern masters on the giant puppet.*

If the head is sculpted to appear lifelike,

the spirit of a giant puppet is captured.

Actually, carving sculpture is an significant part

of traditional folkarts.

No matter what kind of sculptures-- richly ornamented
temples or dignified deity images-- they are unrivaled folkarts
because the sculpture master puts all his mind to his creation.

Montage 4 -- Sculpture and temple

In Sheng-lin-kuang Buddhist sculpture shop,

so many sculptures come into sight

that eyes are kept fully occupied.

The sculptures are big and small, simple and complex.

Sheng-lin-kuang is one of the few sculpture shops

in Shi-iuan Rd, Wanhwa,

that create their sculptures.

Its sculptures are custom-built and flexible to the customers' needs.

Balance, defined carving, and the quality of wood are

three factors to decide if a sculpture is excellent or not.

Having carved buddhist sculptures for 29 years,

Ching-sheng Shu considers sculpturing

a time-consuming art.

Interview:

Ching-sheng Shu: sculpture master in Sheng-lin-kuang

*It is a painstaking process
to learn how to create buddhist sculptures.
As an apprentice, I spent more than one year
on rubbing stones, practicing tools,
and refurbishing sculptures with sandpaper
before I really touch the knife.*

Jai-fu Tasi: Sculpture master in Sheng-lin-kuang

*Since I was only a disciple, I thought that
carving buddhist sculptures is an art.
The more I learn about this,
the more sense of achievement I have.
As I regarded carving sculptures an art,
I became more and more interested in it.
Becoming a master, I try to upgrade
my work by keeping study.
I believe that a sculptor gives
life and beauty to a piece of wood.*

Because each deity has his own fixed appearance,

sculptors can only bring their creativity

in full play under this restriction.

Interview:Ching-sheng Shu: sculpture master in Sheng-lin-kuang

*The first step of engraving a Buddhist sculptures is
selecting proper wood and sketching on it.
Then I use a chainsaw to trim the wood to a rough shape.
A rough sculpture looks like this.
The next step will be refurbishing the rough sculpture with a sand paper.
There are two ways to adorn a sculpture:
One is carving decorative patterns.*

The other is inlaying lines or ornaments on it.

After this, I coat the sculpture with golden lacquer and paint it.

These Taiwanese artists expend all their efforts to
troop performance, sculpture carving and giant puppet creation.

Although western religious art in the Middle Ages
is regarded as the cultural heritage of all human beings,
most Taiwanese regard religious folkarts in Taiwan only
as an adjunct of religion or the byproduct of superstition.

Creators of religious arts are thought to be only
craftsmen or vaudevillians.

Therefore, fewer and fewer young people
are willing to engage in these careers.

Religious folkarts, are disappearing
at a astonishing speed as time goes by.

Ching-sheng Shu who hasn't had new disciples
for more than ten years

complains about the difficulty of preserving sculpture carving.

Interview: Ching-sheng Shu: sculpture master in Sheng-lin-kuang
Learning to carve buddhist sculptures
requires tremendous patience.

*When you first use a knife to engrave the wood,
you will have a pain in your hand.
Nowadays almost nobody wants to learn this.
Only a few study how to cover sculptures
with golden lacquer and paint them.
People who can create a buddhist
from beginning to end are extremely rare.
My way to preserve this folkart is
to keep sculpturing until I can't any more.*

Montage5-- teenagers

Western culture makes most teens blindly

enjoy eating fast food and wearing imported-brand clothes.

Thus, they know little about religious art

which fosters indigenous traditions and value judgment.

Fortunately, a few teens are still willing to study

these religious folkarts which are almost lost in time.

Interview: motivations to learn folkarts

Kuo-feng Huang (Awakened lion)

*I learned the Awakened Lion
in junior high school.
I was fond of and curious about it
when I first saw it.*

Chi-kang Liou (Awakened lion)

*I was so curious and interested in it
that I gave it a try.*

Ming-fu Wu (Sculpture)

*I felt frustrated about engraving
buddhist sculptures in the first place.*

*The reason why I didn't give up is
the pressure of my family.*

*They said, "if you don't have a skill,
how can you make a living?"*

Chian-chen Wu (giant puppets)

*When the incense troops from Taipei
or anywhere else came to my hometown,
our troops welcomed them with hospitality.*

I liked to hang around with troupers.

*Over a long period of time, I felt very interested
in performing the giant puppet.*

In the new generation,

the youth who learn traditional folkarts

are extremely rare, like the feather

of a phoenix and the horn of a unicorn.

Among them, quite a few generate

strong interest in religious arts

because they are influenced by their families

unobtrusively and imperceptibly.

For instance, five-year-old Sheng-iang Wang,

a member of Ching-hu Awakened Lion Troop,

has wanted to play the acrobatic Awakened Lion

since he was a tiny boy.

Interview: Sheng-iang Wang, Ching hu Awakened Lion Troop

Do you like to play the Awakened Lion?

Yes, very much.

*Will you perform the Lion on the pole
after you grow up?*

Yes, I want to.

Taiwan's religious arts, like a lighted

candle in the wind, struggle to avoid extinction.

The little hope of preserving religious arts is

embodied in Sheng-iang's brilliant smile

which reveals how much he loves performing.

Religious arts are colorful and

original parts of Taiwanese indigenous arts.

To protect Taiwan's unique culture

and not forget its roots,

it is urgent to figure out how to preserve

and enhance these precious folkarts.

Interview: How to preserve and enhance religious folkarts

Chan-jwei Juan (Chairman of Anthropology, Province Museum)

*The development and achievement of religious folkart
distinguish Taiwan from other countries*

First, Taiwanese should be aware of its beauty,

*recognize its cultural value,
and furthermore preserve it.
Second, the government should encourage related research
and cooperate with the academic circle
to classify religious arts.
Next, troops had better connect to temples.
Disciples donate a huge amount of
incense money to temples.
If temples are willing to help preserve folkarts
and sponsor money to schools.
Then schools can hire good coaches to teach folkarts.
Therefore, religious arts will be passed on to the next generation.*

Bau-iao Lin (Chairman of traditional folkart research center)
*Because of Taiwan's special religions,
religious arts which are related to festivals and life and death
are preserved well and improve.
The government endeavors to preserve them.
For instance, our center was assigned two cases:
Preserving folkart master plan and Folkart training plan.
When a folkart master is alive, we save his performance and experience in
video, audio, and photos.
If religious arts are not preserved well,
they will pass away, just like human beings.
Thus, we emphasize the preservation of relevant documents and pictures.*

Clamorous drum beats cease eventually.

Vigorous troops also disappear.

If we can't pass on experience and embody our culture,

priceless religious arts will vanish one day

as elders pass away.

When they and their memory are all lost into history,
what we lose is not only touching the beauty of life
but also the roots connected to traditions.

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