



The Puppeteers: The Undead Hero vs. The Mist Man

A Full English translation is available.

龍泉俠大戰謎霧人

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It was an era when plays existed only as outlines, their dialogue passed down orally. Competing troupes flourished, performing at temple festivals and ritual occasions as gongs and drums thundered through the air. From beloved adaptations of classical tales to thrilling new chivalric dramas, Master Jin Feng led the Jinfuxuan Troupe to introduce two iconic heroes: The Undead Hero and The Mist Man.

From Japanese rule to the Nationalist era, from classical-script theater to the dazzling Jinguang style, the turbulent currents of history shape the lives of puppeteers and the bonds between masters and disciples. As The Undead Hero confronts The Mist Man, the martial world unfolds onstage while the trials of human life play out offstage—together weaving a grand, legendary saga of Taiwan's glove-puppetry tradition. This book shows how puppeteers forged new paths to keep the tradition alive.



Author **Hambuck**

A native of Taipei, Hambuck was the resident artist for the Taiwan pavilion at the 2016 Angoulême International Comics Festival. Foreign language rights to his previous works have been sold in Japan, Thailand, France, and Russia.

A Deeply Beloved Indigenous Folk Art: This Manga Traces Taiwanese Glove Puppetry Through Renewal and Transformation

by Kuo-feng Lai, Creative Comic Collection Editorial Department

Once immensely popular and deeply beloved by the public, Taiwanese glove puppetry stands as one of the most representative indigenous theatrical forms and folk arts. Its ceaseless spirit of innovation reflects the resilient vitality of grassroots culture. Today, it continues to thrive and evolve alongside the course of Taiwan's history.

Taiwanese glove puppetry originally comes from the coastal regions of Fujian and Guangdong in China. Puppeteers from the mainland crossed the treacherous "Black Ditch"—the historical name for the Taiwan Strait—carrying chests of puppets on their backs. They traveled from place to place performing. In their early days, the repertoire mainly consisted of single, narrative plays. While manipulating the puppets, the masters would recount stories of the past and present, accompanied

by the gentle and refined sounds of what is called Nanguan music. In the agrarian society of earlier times, when entertainment was scarce, temple festivals and thanksgiving rituals were major occasions for communal celebration, and glove puppetry was immensely popular.

Gradually, glove puppetry became localized. Performers adapted to local accents and speech patterns, incorporating poetry to make the spoken lines more rhythmic and memorable. They replaced Nanguan with Beiguan music, a brisk and rousing style popular in Taiwan, and greatly enhanced martial-arts choreography. The small puppets, controlled in the palm, could wield all manner of weapons, punch, kick, leap, and whirl, displaying dazzling combat sequences that left audiences in awe. These innovations were warmly received

and led Taiwanese glove puppetry onto its own distinctive developmental path. As the number of fans grew, the earlier format of isolated, single-episode plays was no longer sufficient. Audiences longed for continuous, climactic, and ever more exciting stories.

During the late Japanese colonial period under the Kominka (Japanization) movement, the Governor-General's Office banned Taiwanese theatrical performances, plunging glove puppetry into several years of silence. It was not until the late 1940s that authorities adopted a more lenient stance, establishing an Entertainment Committee to assess whether local drama could both serve policy goals and satisfy popular demand. Taiwanese member Huang De-shi argued that the glove-puppet repertoire, with its emphasis on loyalty, filial piety, integrity, and righteousness, was well suited for moral education in rural society. With carefully selected scripts, he maintained, it could meet official requirements. He invited famous puppeteers and troupes to help reform the art, introducing new performance techniques: accompaniment with Western instruments and Japanese records, puppet costumes combining Japanese and local styles, three-dimensional modular stage sets, and faster scene transitions. These changes brought fresh and unprecedented influences to the form of Taiwanese glove puppetry.

After the R.O.C government relocated to Taiwan and temporarily banned outdoor performances, glove puppetry moved into theaters, adopting new equipment and lighting effects—

multi-layered painted stages, colorful illumination, and both Eastern and Western music—to attract cinema audiences. Puppet sizes were enlarged once again. In 1953, Wu Tian-lai and the rising star Zhong Ren-bi of "New Prosperity Pavilion" launched The Great Hero Baicao Weng, a long-running sword-hero epic that played for years and thousands of performances. This formally marked the dazzling arrival of the "Golden Light Glove Puppetry" era, now a part of shared collective memory.

By then, both in form and in content, Taiwanese glove puppetry had diverged greatly from its origins. After the Golden Light era, successive generations continued to create new stages of expression: radio glove-puppet dramas that sparked boundless imagination through sound alone, television glove-puppet series that emptied the streets when broadcast, and the groundbreaking Pili puppetry that opened entirely new horizons.

This essay has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.

Since 2009, Kuo-feng Lai has served as the responsible editor for comic titles such as One Hundred Views of the Northern City, The Puppeteers: The Undead Hero vs. The Mist Man, Tales of the Orchid People, and A-Huo-Dan, Guardian of Hobe, and has also assisted with research and source-gathering for other projects. Since 2017, he has shared methods for collecting and organizing digital resources on historical topics through the Cultural Heritage Adaptation Workshop.



WE'LL
PERFORM
A NEW PLAY:
SET FIRE TO
THE MIST!

LADIES AND
GENTS!
TONIGHT, WE
BORROWED
THE RONG-
LE CREW'S
STAGE!



HEY!
DON'T GO
AWAY!

WHAT?



OOOH!

A... REAL FIRE?!





SONGS
ABOUND,
OF YEARS I'VE
LOST COUNT

MY HEART
STAYS CALM
THROUGH UPS
AND DOWNS

IS THERE
A FIRE?

...



ZEALOUS AS
I AM, A ZEALOUS
SWORD I WIELD

FAR AND
WIDE I ROAM,
PERFECTION
MY IDEAL



BROTHER...

I WISH YOU
COULD SEE
THIS TOO...



THAT NIGHT, THE AUDIENCE
WAS JAM-PACKED.

BUT THE PUPPETRY,
THE RECITATION, THE
ACCOMPANIMENT...

TRUE, MANY OF THEM
WERE ATTRACTED BY
THE STAGE EFFECTS.

UNTIL THE
SPECTATORS BECAME
ONE WITH THE STAGE.

THEY CAME TOGETHER
ORGANICALLY.

WAVES AFTER WAVES
ENGULFED THE PUBLIC...