

The study of maintaining and developing aboriginal culture -

An art action on Thao tribe culture

Abstract

The culture of aboriginal tribes in Taiwan has been suppressed in the past century due to the political authorities. It was until 1980s that the self-consciousness movement arose, their cultures, therefore, got raised from the death. The multi-culture phenomenon is getting stronger and stronger in Taiwan society and each aboriginal tribe does their best to reveal their mother tongue language, life ceremonies, folk songs and dance as much as possible. On the other hand, in the past ten years, the government encouraged “cultural creativity industry” so strongly that the policy provided a modern and might be more efficient way to interpret the old history and culture of aboriginal tribes.

The researcher, also as a composer, cooperated with choreographers, and a panel of experienced researchers in Thao culture, produced a big dance drama in which the important legends and life ceremonies of Thao tribe were interpreted and revealed on stage in modern theatre and attracted audiences from different cities. Through the researcher’s self-reflection during field study and literature review, interview with the elders and intellectual of the Thao tribe, and observation of the reaction of the audiences, some findings were made after the performing art action: first, Thao tribe, with the smallest population among aboriginal tribes in Taiwan, facing the serious loss of language and culture, in the desperate crisis, this art work arose new attention, not only to the audiences, but also the tribe people themselves. The self-consciousness of Thao tribe leads to a positive thought that Thao culture is beautiful and worthy of maintaining and developing. Second, using dance drama as a form transcending the precious legends and ceremonies in which dance and folk songs were included meant a lot to the tribe people, and they expressed deep appreciation to the dance company. Third, though the tribe people were happy about this art action, they still expressed strong worry that their young people did not value their culture much and they sincerely hoped their people, in the future, should do the job, rather than depending on people of Han tribe.

The results showed that performing arts can be a very good way to interpret old legend and culture of a aboriginal tribe. Nevertheless, it will be more practical that the tribe people take the responsibility of maintaining and develop their culture with real actions through education and art creation.