

CHINESE TOURING BALLET:

Stopping their trucks outside a Buddhist temple in a Formosan village are one of the 134 groups of touring players whose visits are a regular feature of life in Nationalist China's island stronghold. These touring companies, who perform all round the year for the 10 million population of Formosa, employ nearly 4,000 actors and actresses. It's all strictly tradition - even to the make-up, for every mark and colour means something, describing each character to the highly critical audience. Critical, but appreciative - for they know these stories of old China as we know nursery rhymes - and in far greater detail.

The stories need no words; the basis of the acting - which derives from the old Peking opera - is mime.

To a Chinese audience, every gesture has significance. A somersault means "the enemy is fleeing". Shouldn't somebody tell those warriors?