

Chinese Shadow Puppetry: Shifting from the Traditional to the Modern

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Abstract

This article confirms the origin of Chinese shadow show on the basis of historical documents and standpoints of most Chinese and Western scholars and researchers. Combining theory with practice, the article discusses the procedure of making puppets and performing shadow shows, and further analyses the cultural connotation, social function, artistic and aesthetic features of this traditional shadow show. Through comparative studies, this paper also indicates the distinctions between Chinese show and Western show, between the north show and the south show, and between the traditional and modern. The highlight is in the shifting from the traditional to the modern.

Keywords: Chinese, modern, shadow show, traditional

Like India, Egypt and Babylon, China is one of the four countries with an ancient civilization in the world. China owns a long history and cultural heritage. Shadow show is a strong evidence.

Shadow show is the most ancient folk opera in China. It is the first ancestor of modern movies.

Developing and spreading in the past 2,000 years, shadow show has become a recreational performing art well received by the world people.

While many scholars and researchers have published books and articles on Chinese shadow show, I would like to study this topic from my own perspective and position.

Both making puppets and performing shows are practical activities. They constitute the foundation of this research paper. I spare more time to discuss and analyze the origin, cultural connotation, social function, artistic and aesthetic characteristics of this traditional show. They are always abstract, complicated and theoretical. In the last part, my special attention is paid to the changes of this show from traditional to modern.

I am trying to explore this Chinese show more extensively and intensively. My hope is that all readers, through this paper, will understand and appreciate Chinese shadow show more impressively.

The Origin of Chinese Shadow Show

Most Chinese scholars believe that Chinese shadow show conceived in the Han Dynasty (206BC.-220AD.), spread in the Tang Dynasty (618-907AD.) and flourished

in the Song Dynasty (960-1179AD.). Their conclusion is that Shaanxi is the birthplace of China's shadow show. All their common understanding originates from China's historical documents.

Sima Qian (145-90BC.), a historian of the West Han Dynasty, wrote in his book, *The Historical Records*, "The next year, Shao Wong, a man from Qi State, visited his Majesty. Shao Wong brought some mystic techniques to his Majesty. His Majesty had a concubine Madam Wang. And Wang died. At night, Shao Wong played his mystic techniques to evoke Madam Wang's spirit. His Majesty saw Madam Wang's shadow and the shadow of Kitchen God through his bed curtain." (Sima 322.)

Ban Gu (32-92AD.), a historian of the East Han Dynasty, wrote in his book *Annals Of Han*, "Madam Li died young. His Majesty missed her very much. Shao Wong, a sorcerer from Qi State said that he could evoke Madam Li's spirit. One evening, he lit up lamps and candles, laid wine and food, and set up a bed curtain. His Majesty stayed in another bed curtain and saw at distance a beautiful woman resembling Madam Li in appearance. His Majesty tried to see her more clearly but he failed. His Majesty felt more sad." (Ban 1764.)

Gao Cheng, a historian from the North Song Dynasty, wrote in his book *Origin Of Incidents and Articles*, "It is said for generations that shadow show originated from the death of Madam Li in the Han Dynasty. Shao Wong of Qi State set up a bed curtain & lit up lamps and candles. His Majesty stayed in another bed curtain and through the curtain saw Madam Li's image. Since then, shadow show conceived." (Gao 256.)

Gu Jiegang (1893-1980AD.), a modern Chinese historian, wrote in his article *The Brief History & Present Situation Of CHINESE Shadow Show*, "It is no doubt that shadow show is deprived from China & Shaanxi is the birthplace of Chinese shadow show." (Gu 119.)

Shaanxi is a province in the northwest area of China. It is the cradle of ancient Chinese civilization. The archaeologists discovered that 6,700 years ago, the ancestors of Chinese people lived in this place. Xi'an, capital city of Shaanxi, served as capital of thirteen Dynasties in ancient China.

The above historical documents fully prove that Chinese shadow show was conceived in the Han Dynasty. The capital city of the Han Dynasty was Chang'an. And Chang'an is today's Xi'an. So it is easy to understand that Shaanxi is the birthplace of China's shadow show.

Apart from Chinese scholars, many Western scholars also approve of the idea that Chinese shadow show originated from China's native land. F.Von Luschan, Berthold Laufer and Benjamin March are their representatives. F.Von Luschan says, "We must suppose that all the different forms have a common source, which is probably to be found in China." (trans. and qtd. in Wimsatt) Berthold Laufer asserts, "The shadow-play is, without a doubt, indigenous to China." (Laufer 36.) Benjamin March claims, "That the art is of Chinese invention appears to be undisputed." (March 13.)

However, a small number of scholars advocate that Chinese shadow show may have stemmed from foreign countries. Richard Pischel, Tom Cooper & Fan Pen Chen are their representatives. Fan Pen Chen wrote, "This study suggests that the shadow theater may have originated in either Central Asia or India." (Chen 25-64.) At the 1999 Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Tom Cooper presented a paper proposing that missionary Buddhist Priests took the shadows from India to both Indonesia and China.

Up to today, these scholars have no historical documents or archaeological discoveries to verify their hypothesis.

While we are searching for the origin of Chinese shadow show, we should not forget to search for the social and historical background on which Chinese shadow show was conceived.

Historical data proved that the spreading of Buddhism and Sorcery was the direct cause for Chinese shadow show to conceive.

Sorcery was a primitive religion in ancient China. Sorcery believed in ghosts and gods. Sorcerers carried out religious activities by making use of mystic techniques. Buddhism spread to China from India in the Han Dynasty. Buddhists propagated Buddhist doctrine & scripture by making use of speaking, singing and drawing pictures.

All the above religious activities of sorcery and Buddhism speeded up the birth of Chinese shadow show.

Processing Shadow Puppets

Chinese shadow show is a perfect combination of shaping art and performing art. The theme and artistic effect of the shadow show is realized through light, screen, aria, music and the shadow puppets operated by the two hands of the actor. So processing shadow puppets is the precondition for performing shadow show. In China, there exist unique technology and mature skills of processing shadow puppets.

I was lucky enough to get acquainted with Mr. Wang Tianwen. Wang is one of the great masters of shadow puppet carving & authenticating in China named by the Ministry Of Culture of the People's Republic Of China. Wang was born in Huaxian County in 1949. Huaxian is a "Town Of Shadow Puppetry" named by Shaanxi Provincial Government. Master Wang started to learn puppet carving when he was 12 years- old. So he has 50 years' rich experiences in puppet carving and he is the most prominent carving artist in China.

One sunny day in 2010 summer, I made an appointment with Master Wang and saw him in his workshop. I told him that I was preparing a research paper on Chinese shadow show and asked him to tell me the detailed procedure of making puppets. He put aside his work on hand and spent 2 hours time telling me how to process a puppet step by step. I have summed up his talks as follows:

i. Choosing Hide

The first working procedure is choosing hide. The cowhide of the yellow cow peculiar to Shaanxi Province is chosen as the material for processing shadow puppets. The best choice is the hide of 1-3 year-old cows for its high pliability, transparency, and utilization ratio.

ii. Pre-treating Hide

The carving artists put the chosen hide in a clean water tank and add some plant ash, lime & etc. in the water to cause fermentation. This procedure is called "soaking hide". Summer and Autumn are the best seasons for soaking hide. And the water should be replaced every day.

After soaking, the carvers scrape the hair and remained meat off the right and wrong sides inch by inch with a special cutting tool. This procedure is called "scraping hide."

After scraping, the carvers strain the hide with a wooden frame and rapes, and then put it in a shady and cool place for air-drying. This procedure is called "straining and cooling". The length of time for straining and cooling depends on the temperature. It takes two days' time for straining and cooling in summer and 3-4 days in Spring and Autumn. Drying the hide in the sun or warm it over a fire is prohibited to prevent cracking.

After straining and cooling, the carvers polish the hide with fine sand paper, wash it clean with water, and then put it in a shady and cool place for air-drying. This procedure is called "polishing".

iii. Tracing Patterns

After polishing, the carvers cut the hide into pieces as required and wrap it in a piece of damp cloth and press it with a wooden scraper so as to smooth the surface of the hide and reduce the shrinkage. Then the patterns designed in advance including facial make-up, body, four limbs, dressing and etc. are put under the transparent hide to be carved. The carvers trace the outline of the patterns with a steel needle on the hide. This procedure is called "tracing patterns".

iv. Carving and Hollowing

After tracing the patterns, the carvers wrap the hide again in a piece of damp cloth so as to soften it. The softened hide is put on a hardwood board for carving. There are 20-30 cutting tools used by the carvers. The basic technical skill is "pushing hide to knife". To be exact, while carving, the carver moves the hide with his hand around the cutting knife which is fixed.

Facial carving is divided into two kinds: carving positively and carving in intaglio. While carving positively, the carvers hollow out the entire face of the shadow puppet and reserve the contour line of the image. This carving technique is always applied to display the roles of Sheng (male characters) and Dan (female characters). While carving in intaglio, the carvers reserve the entire face of the shadow puppet and hollow out the outline of the

image.. This carving technique is always applied to the roles of Jing (painted-face characters) and Chou (clowns).

The carving technology of Chinese shadow puppets has been accumulated and inherited by Chinese carvers through practice from generation to generation.

v. Painting

Painting is a working procedure following carving and hollowing. There are mainly five colors for painting Chinese shadow puppets: red, green, yellow, black and white. All of them are natural pigments. Five pigments should be prepared before painting.

The method of preparation is as follows:

Pour each pigment in a tank with some hide-glue aqueous solution. Heat the tank with an alcohol burner. Painting is then carried out using hot pigment and the painting tools are writing brushes.

The experienced carvers are good at mixing colors in proper proportion and mastering the depth and lightness of colors. The shadow puppets they paint are more bright and colorful.

vi. Dehydrating and Ironing

Dehydrating and ironing is a procedure after painting. Dehydration has two functions. First, pigments permeate the hide in high temperature with a result that the colors of the shadow puppets look more fresh & bright and will never fade. Second, the remaining moisture in the hide will evaporate in high temperature with a result that the shadow puppets will never change shape.

The traditional practice of dehydrating and ironing by Chinese carvers is as follows.

Lay all the parts of a shadow puppet between two wooden boards. And put the wooden boards on a heating Kang (a traditional bed in north China's rural area). Cover the wooden boards with a mat. The favorable temperature for dehydrating and ironing is 70°. Higher or lower temperature is harmful to shadow puppets.

vii. Assembling

Assembling is the final working procedure for processing shadow puppets. A Chinese shadow puppet is made up of 13 parts:

1 head, 1 chest, 1 stomach, 2 thighs, 2 shanks, 2 upper arms, 2 lower arms and 2 hands. The carvers join 13 parts one by one with cotton thread to form a complete body. While assembling, the carvers find out the barycentre of the shadow puppet to maintain body's balance and display perfect body type and flexibility in performance.

As required by performance, the carvers install three bamboo sticks on each shadow puppet. One stick is joined to the neck, the other two are joined to

the two hands respectively. While performing, the actor operates the shadow puppet through three sticks.

Performing

The basic principle of performing shadow show is as follows.

Shadow puppets and other stage props, operated by an actor and supported by lamplight, produce movable images on a white curtain so as to display the plot of the shadow show. So, there are at least six factors for performing Shadow Show including:

- i. props: shadow puppets and other stage props
- ii. the skills of operating shadow puppets
- iii. singing: script and aria
- iv. lamplight
- v. stage
- vi. musical instruments

Script is the foundation of Chinese shadow show. All the scripts of traditional Chinese shadow show were written by literary men of the past dynasties. For example, the most famous writer in Shaanxi Province was Mr. Li Fanguai (1748-1810AD.) of the Qing Dynasty. Li was born in Weinan County, Shaanxi Province. He wrote dozens of shadow show scripts in his whole life. "*Firing Horse*", "*Zi Xia Palace*" & "*White Jade Headdress*" are three masterpieces.

The themes of Chinese shadow show mainly cover historical story, romantic story, religious story and the story of ghosts and gods.

The performing institutions of Chinese shadow show are private theatrical troupes. In Shaanxi, for instance, there are at least five actors in each theatrical troupe. One is singer, the other is operator, and the rest three are musicians. An experienced singing actor is able to act various roles of Sheng (male), Dan (female), Jing (painted face) and Chou (clown). An experienced operating actor is able to operate 4-6 shadow puppets at the same time with his two hands.

Stage is the performing place for Chinese shadow show. There are two kinds of stages in general: permanent and makeshift. There is a permanent stage in many villages of China's rural area. A makeshift stage is put up temporarily and demolished when the performance ends. The stage of shadow show is popularly 1 metre high, 3.5 metres wide and 3 metres deep.

There are different arias and musical instruments in different places. Let me take Shaanxi as an example.

The main musical instruments in Shaanxi shadow show are: 9 percussion instruments, 3 stringed instruments and 4 wind instruments. Each musician is good at playing various musical instruments perfectly. The arias of Shaanxi shadow show mainly involve "Wanwan tune" and "Xianban tune". Wanwan is a small handleless cup made of copper. It is a leading percussion instrument.

Xian(chord) is a leading stringed instrument and ban(plate) is also is leading percussion instrument. The two arias are characterized by locality, forming two different schools of shadow show in Shaanxi Province. Wanwan tune is distributed over the east area of Shaanxi and Xianban tune is distributed over the west area of Shaanxi.

The main roles in Chinese shadow show are separated into four kinds: Sheng (male character), Dan(female character), Jing(painted face) and Chou(clown).While acting Sheng and Dan, the singing actor should pronounce the words with his real voice, and drag out the words with his false voice. And while acting Jing and Chou, the singing actor should pronounce and drag out the words with his real voice.

Influenced by religions and folkways, traditional Chinese shadow show follows a regular performing order.

- i. offer libation before performing
- ii. perform complete series
- iii. perform highlights

While offering libation, the head and all the actors of a theatrical troupe arrange wine and food in front of the stage, light three joss sticks, kowtow to the gods and scatter the wine around the stage. At last, they let out firecrackers before performing.

The performance of Chinese shadow show is made up of two parts: acting and singing. Acting refers to that the operating actor, according to the plots, operates the shadow puppets to demonstrate various movements. And singing refers to that the singing actor, accompanied at the musical instruments by three musicians, sings the words according to the melody of the arias.

The other three musicians closely follow the singing and operating actors by playing the instruments accordingly.

In the course of performing, all the actors work in coordination to achieve a satisfactory effect.

A Chinese Ballad goes, "Speaking behind a paper screen, expressing his emotion by shadow, one actor can tell thousand years story .Two hands can operate millions of soldiers." This ballad, spreading far and wide in China, is a vivid explanation and concise generalization of performing shadow show.

Schools and Styles of Chinese Shadow Show

It is said that "China is like a giant tree .Beijing is the crown, and Xi`an is the root."

There exist various schools and different styles of shadow show in China. All these schools and styles took the shape gradually in the course of its dissemination .The root of Chinese shadow show was stricken in Shaanxi, but its seeds were sown all over the country. In the past one thousand and more years, shadow

show widely spread from Shaanxi to all corners of the country .This dissemination mainly took place in the Song Dynasty.

Along Yellow River ,shadow show spread westwards to Gansu and Qinghai provinces£¬southwestwards to Sichuan and Yunnan provinces£¬eastwards to Henan province .And from Henan ,this show further spread northwards to Hebei and Shanxi provinces ,southwards to Zhejiang ,Fujian ,Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong and Yunnan provinces including Taiwan.

Various schools & styles of shadow show evolved in the course of dissemination. There are mainly two schools of shadow show in China :the north show & the south show .The north show covers all the areas of Yellow River basin including Shaanxi, Hebei, Gansu , Shanxi ,Henan ,Shandong & Liaoning provinces .And the south show covers all the areas of Yangtze River basin including Sichuan, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Fujian, Hunan, Hubei provinces, and Taiwan.

When we further review and compare the artistic styles of the two schools of Chinese shadow show, we can easily find the following two similarities between them:

- i. Both of them are mixed closely with local opera in script, aria, music, performing movements etc.
- ii. Both of them are mixed closely with local folkway custom.

Besides the similarities, there are also some differences between them as under:

- i. The north show emphasizes carving and the south show emphasizes coloring.
- ii. The movements of the north show are straightforward and the south show, exquisite.
- iii. The north show put speaking and singing first and the south show put performing first.
- iv. The operating actor of the north show holds the sticks slantingly and the operating actor of the south show holds the sticks horizontally.

Both shows are important components of Chinese shadow show.

Their performing styles further enrich the art of shows in China.

Of all the schools, Huaxian(Shaanxi) ,Tangshan(Hebei) and Lufeng(Guangdong) shows are most famous in China.

Chinese shadow show originated from Shaanxi province and Shaanxi show was born in Huaxian. So Huaxian is the source of Chinese shadow show. Huaxian is a small county in the east area of Shaanxi. There are mainly two schools of shadow show in Shaanxi: the east area show and west area show. Huaxian show belongs to the east area show.

Huaxian shadow puppets are made from yellow cowhide .A puppet is composed of 11 parts .The height of the shadow puppet is 33 cm in general. There are at least 5 actors in each Huaxian troupe. Among them, one is responsible for speaking and singing .The other is for operating the puppets. The rest three are musicians

.An experienced singing actor is capable to act the four roles of characters of Sheng(male), Dan(female), Jing(painted face)and Chou(clown). An experienced operating actor is capable to manipulate 5 or six puppets with his two hands simultaneously. The aria of Huaxian shadow show is called "Wanwan tune". Wanwan, as discussed in the above chapter, is a small and handleless cup made of copper .The diameter of this cup is about 4.5cm.Wanwan is the most important percussion instrument in Huaxian show performance .Wanwan tune is characterized by sweetness and mushiness .There are about 250 extant manuscripts of Huaxian show. The masterpieces are "*Firing Horse*", "*White Jade Headdress*", "*Zixia Palace*"etc. Up to 2006, there existed 13 troupes, 67 actors and 800 and more puppet carving artists in Huaxian County. Huaxian shadow show is wellknown for its long history, exquisite puppet carving and mushy aria.

History proves that Tangshan shadow show formed in Leting County of Luanzhou district, Hebei province during the reign of Emperor Wanli, the Ming Dynasty (1573-1620).So, Tangshan show is also called Luanzhou shadow or Leting shadow. Tangshan shadow puppets are made from donkeyskin. The height of the puppet is 23 cm in general. Like Huaxian puppets, a Tangshan puppet is made up of 11 components. There are at least 9 actors in each Tangshan troupe. Among them, four are singers. Two actors operate the puppets .And the rest three are musicians .The aria of Tangshan show is called "Shadow Tune". Shadow Tune makes a feature of simplicity and flexibility. Moreover, Tangshan show is famous for its "singing technique of pinching throat". When the actor is singing, he pinches his throat with his two fingers(a thumb and a forefinger) to make his voice more minute and more melodious .There are more than 500 extant manuscripts of Tangshan show .The most prominent are "*White Snake*", "*Second Plum*", "*Hua Mulan*", "*Generals of Yang Family*" etc. Tangshan shadow show has a far-reaching influence in Beijing, Hebei , Liaoning and Inner Mongolia.

Lufeng shadow show belongs to the south show .It is the representative of Guangdong show, Fujian show and Taiwan show. Lufeng is a small county in Chaozhou district ,Guangdong province. So Lufeng show is also called Chaozhou show .Lufeng shadow show was brought in from the north area of China in the late period of the Song Dynasty. It is a leading part of the south show. Lufeng shadow puppets are made from paper board & sheepskin .The height of the puppet is about 35.5cm.Each puppet is composed of 12 parts .There are at least 9 actors in each Lufeng troupe. Among them, three are singers. The other three are operators. And the rest three are musicians. The aria of Lufeng show is called"Chao Tune". Chao Tune produced on the basis of South Drama (emerged in Wenzhou area during the early South Song Dynasty),Guangdong dialects & folk songs . Lufeng shadow show is divided into two types: gentle show & acrobatic show. Gentle show is focused on singing & performing.And acrobatic show is focused on acrobatic fighting .Classical gentle show includes "*The Butterfly Lovers*" , "*Wang Zhaojun*", "*Gold Hairpin*" etc. Classical acrobatic show includes "*Flaming Mountain*", "*Havoc in Heaven*", "*The Romance of Three Kingdoms*" etc.

All the above three shows were placed in the Roster Of China National Nonmaterial Culture Heritage in May 2006.

Social Functions of Chinese Shadow Show

Being a dramatic art, Chinese Shadow Show is in a position to meet the multiple requirements of a large audience as mentioned below:

i. Entertainment

The function of entertainment is the basic social function of a dramatic art. It is the lifeline of Chinese shadow show.

In ancient China, vast numbers of farmers lived a poor life. Watching shadow show was their sole recreational practice. The singing experiences and performing skills of the actors brought about pleasure to the audience. The performing pattern of cracking jokes and playing the fool in Chinese shadow show, like the farce in Europe, was applied to depict the nature of the figures, adjust the stage atmosphere and arouse the feelings of the audience.

ii. Education

The educational function of Chinese shadow show was divided into three aspects.

To publicize historical knowledge to the audience

There were many historical stories in Chinese shadow show. The audience learnt Chinese history from these themes.

To publicize feudal ethics and morality to the audience

China was a feudal society with a long history. Feudal ethics and morality had a far-reaching influence in China. The sense of loyalty and filial piety, the sense of good and evil, and the sense of hierarchy, etc. were extensively reflected in Chinese shadow show.

To regulate the mental state of the audience

Some plots and words in Chinese shadow show lead the audience to put out pent-up grievances and search for a better life.

iii. Aesthetics

Appreciating beauty refers to the psychological course in which the aesthetical subject experiences, feels, judges and recreates the aesthetical object. To be exact, appreciating and tasting Chinese shadow show is the course in which the audiences appreciate the beauty of art in Chinese shadow show.

Chinese shadow show possesses four unique aesthetic forms: visual beauty, comprehensive beauty, performing beauty and conflicting beauty. Visual beauty is referred to that Chinese shadow show infects spectators with lively and concrete stage images. Comprehensive beauty is referred to that Chinese shadow show summarizes the techniques of expression from multiple arts including literature, performance, carving, music, dance and etc.

Performing beauty is referred to that all the stories and plots in the show are realized through performing conduct of the actors and puppets. Conflicting beauty is referred to that Chinese shadow show depicts life, voices feeling and portrays characters through conflicts.

Moreover, Chinese shadow show possesses a vast number of audience with strong aesthetic awareness. The above four aesthetic forms and the strong aesthetic awareness of the audience constitute the aesthetical function of Chinese shadow show.

The Features of Art in Chinese Shadow Show

Like other forms of traditional Chinese opera, Chinese Shadow Show possesses the following three basic characteristics of art.

i. Chinese Shadow Show is a comprehensive art. It is a perfect combination of shaping art and performing art.

In Europe, drama, opera and dance are independent to each other. But in China, traditional opera is a harmonious blend of drama, opera and dance. Chinese shadow show covers multiple artistic categories: poetry, music, dance, carving, painting, acting and architecture, etc.

ii. Chinese Shadow Show stresses expressing impression.

The European drama, opera and dance search for the effect of expressing reality. But the traditional Chinese opera searches for expressing impression. This effect of expressing impression is fully displayed in the stage scene, the words and the performing movements of Chinese shadow show. For example, on the stage, there is no staircase while a character is ascending the stairs. There is no door while a character is opening the door. There is no horse while a character is riding a horse. The real intention of expressing impression in performance will be understood by the audience through their plentiful imagination and association.

iii. Stylization prevails in Chinese Shadow Show.

Stylization is a tradition in traditional Chinese opera. Stylization refers to a relatively fixed model applied to different subjects of the traditional Chinese opera.

Stylization in Chinese Shadow Show is displayed as follows.

Stylized roles: There are mainly four roles of characters in Chinese Shadow Show: Sheng(male), Dan(female), Jing(painted face), and Chou(clown).

Stylized make-up: The same make-up is applied to the same role.

Stylized dressing: The same dressing is applied to the same role.

Stylized movements: There exist fixed movements for the roles to express crying, laughing, walking and acrobatic fighting , etc.

Stylized words: The words covering 5, 7 or 10 Chinese characters in one sentence are very common .There are also some short and long sentences.

Stylized aria: Music and aria are always regular in all schools of shadow show in China.

Stylization is beneficial to the actors so that they are in a position to master promptly the performing skills and the roles they act in the show. A prominent

actor should integrate perfectly the stylization of traditional opera with the personality of the role he acts.

Apart from the above basic characteristics of art, Chinese Shadow Show also possesses the following three unique characteristics of art:

- i. All roles in Chinese shadow show are played by shadow puppets, not real persons.
- ii. As compared with the performances of real persons, there is no time limit and space limit for the shadow show. So more plots are displayed in the shadow show than in the performances of real persons and the story of ghosts and gods is preferable.
- iii. Performing stunts are very popular in Chinese shadow show. Spitting fire and spitting smoke from mouth are two good examples.

All the above characteristics of art in Chinese shadow show reveal the talent and wisdom of Chinese artists and enhance the appeal of Chinese shadow show.

Cultural Connotation in Chinese Shadow Show

With a long history and wide influence, Chinese Shadow Show is rich in cultural connotation in terms of the following :

i. Religious Culture

In the past 2000 years, various religious influences were very active in China. Of all these religions, sorcery, Buddhism and Taoism were most popular. There were countless ties between religions and Chinese shadow show. These close ties are demonstrated as follows.

Sorcery and Buddhism were the direct reasons for conceiving Chinese shadow show. Sorcery was the primitive religion in ancient China. And Buddhism was introduced to China from India in the Han Dynasty. Both religions spread their religious ideas by making use of the performing patterns of Chinese shadow show. Moreover, there were many religious stories, religious figures and religious conceptions in Chinese shadow show. "The Story of the White Snake" was a good example. The close ties between religions and Chinese shadow show were also seen through the stage props. In some subjects of Chinese shadow show, the sculptures of the ghosts, gods and Buddha served as props on the stage. In fact, Chinese shadow show acted as a mass media for religions in the Chinese history.

ii. Folk Customs

Folk custom is referred to the habits of a nation, a social group or a locality. It was a complicated cultural appearance. The folkway practice was the basis for the survival and development of Chinese shadow show, and in turn, Chinese shadow show was a reflex of folk custom. So the art of shadow show is also called "folkway art".

The close ties between Chinese shadow show and folk custom were demonstrated in following three aspects.

First, the performing occasion of Chinese shadow show was related to folkway practices.

In China's rural area ,shadow show was put on constantly whenever there were festivals ,weddings ,funerals ,birthdays , harvests ,temple fairs , etc.

Furthermore, the performing ceremony of Chinese shadow show was related to folkway custom.

The head and all the actors of a theatrical troupe used to offer libation before performance. Offering libation, in essence, was a variety of offering sacrifices to the gods. And offering sacrifices to the gods was an expression of folkway practice.

In some cases, the spectators let out firecrackers in the course of performing to voice their thanks to the respected and beloved theatrical troupes and actors. This was another expression of folkway practice.

Some taboos and commandments further revealed the close ties between Chinese shadow show and folk customs. For example, putting shadow puppets on the ground was prohibited. Storing shadow puppets face to face was prohibited.

From above descriptions you can fully understand that Chinese shadow show was a carrier and an inseparable part of the both religious culture and folk custom.

Aesthetic Features

Beauty is divided into natural beauty, social beauty and artistic beauty by the European classical philosophers. Being an ancient folk art, Chinese Shadow Show possesses the undermentioned characteristics of artistic beauty in traditional Chinese opera:

i. Comprehensive beauty

The artistic beauty in Chinese shadow show covers the beauty of various artistic forms including carving, music, painting, dance, poetry, etc. Moreover, the aesthetic form in Chinese shadow show is also contained in the shapes and movements of the four performing patterns: speaking, singing, acting and acrobat fighting.

ii. Impressionistic beauty

The European artists stress expressing reality and the Chinese artists stress expressing impression. For instance, while drawing a landscape picture, an European painter makes every effort to achieve his objective that the colors and shapes of the landscape on the painting board are exactly the same as that in nature. But a Chinese painter strives to master the spirit of the landscape he is drawing. In his picture, lotus is dyed black and fish is swimming without water...

Impressionistic beauty is the core of aesthetic conception in traditional Chinese opera. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804AD.), a German classical philosopher wrote in his book *Critique of Judgment*, "Aesthetical art is a

mood.”(Kant 151.)This mood, as it is, is fully displayed in Chinese shadow show .First, the impressionistic beauty is displayed in the flexible time and space of the performing stage. For example ,in the highlight of “Li Yangui Selling Water “from the complete series *Firing Horse*, the audience learnt from the words that Li Yangui ,the son of a feudal official, making an excuse of selling water, walked into the Huang’s back garden and secretly dated his girl friend Huang Guiying, an official’s daughter. But from the stage, the audience could not see the door and wall of the garden, let alone the trees and flowers. The length of time for the dating was also very dim. However, the impressionistic beauty in this highlight touched deeply a large number audience in heart.

Furthermore, the impressionistic beauty is also displayed in the plots of Chinese shadow show .The scripts of Chinese shadow show were written by literates. These intellectuals were well-educated, far-sighted and ambitious. But their social position was very low. So they wrote scripts to reveal their sentiments and express the aspiration.

Ludwig A.Feuerbach (1804-1872), a German classical philosopher, wrote in his book *Selected Philosophical Works of Feuerbach*, “Aesthetical feeling is the premise for artists”. (Feuerbach 55.) The impressionistic beauty in the plots of Chinese shadow show is the expression of aesthetic awareness of the script writers.

At last, stylized characters also display the impressionistic beauty in Chinese shadow show.

In real life, the shape of everybody’s face is different to each other. There is some difference even between twin brothers and sisters. But in Chinese shadow show, the facial shape of all the shadow puppets for the same role is exactly the same. In other words, the facial shapes of Sheng (male characters),Dan (female characters),Jing(painted face) and Chou(clown) are stylized in all themes.

Stylizing characters is beneficial to highlight the image and morality of the characters and identify the status of the characters by audience. It is an expression of the aesthetical awareness of the shadow puppet artists.

The impressionistic beauty in Chinese shadow show originated from China’s Confucianism.

Confucianism was the doctrine in running the country in China. In philosophy, this doctrine leads people to give priority to subject. And in traditional opera, this doctrine was expressed as impressionistic beauty.

The aesthetical characteristics in Chinese shadow show have fully reflected the aesthetic values and standard of the Chinese people.

From the Traditional to the Modern

With the development of new technology and the advancement of modernization in China, great changes have taken place in Chinese shadow show in the past 30 years. These changes are symbolized as follows:

i. Shadow Puppets

The materials for processing puppets are changed. Traditional puppets were made from paper, sheepskin, donkey-skin and cowhide. Modern puppets are made from celluloid board. The size of the puppets is changed. Traditional puppets were comparatively small. The regular size was from 30 cm to 70 cm in height. Modern puppets are comparatively big. The biggest one is 150 cm in height. The carving tools are changed. Traditional puppets were cut by hand with various knives. Modern puppets are cut by carving machines. The use of puppets is changed. Traditional puppets served as props in shadow show performing. Modern puppets, in most cases, are applied to tourist handicrafts.

ii. Themes

Traditional show mainly covered historical story, romantic story, religious story and story of ghosts and gods. Now most of these outdated plays have been replaced by modern subject plays like *"White-haired Girl"*, *"Three Monks"*, *"Panda Mimi"*, *"The Little Match Girl"*, *"Turtle & Crane"*, *"A Wolf Child"*, *"Chang'e Flew to the Moon"*, etc. Modern subject shows reflect new life and meet the needs of the audience.

iii. Stage Light Fittings

From the ancient to present, the stage light fittings of Chinese shadow show have experienced six historical periods. Different light fittings were applied in different periods: the first period - oil lamp (soya oil, rape oil, sesame oil, etc.); the second period - wax candle; the third period - kerosene lamp; the fourth period - gas lamp; the fifth period - electric lamp and the sixth period - laser lamp. The change in stage light fittings is a symbol of social progression and technical development.

iv. Performing Spots

In the Tang Dynasty, Chinese shadow show was regularly performed in temples. According to historical records, in Chang'an, the capital city of Tang, The Ci'en Temple, Jianfu Temple and Qinglong temple were well-known for performing shadow show.

In the Song Dynasty, when this show was most flourishing, the spots for performance were shifted to city squares. It was recorded that in Bianliang, capital city of the North Song, there established many "Washe" on city squares. Washe was the place for performing shadow show.

When entering the Ming and Qing Dynasties, shadow show was further popularized. The feelers of this show stretched widely into rural areas. Stages for performing sprang up like mushrooms all over the country.

Nowadays, shadow show is commonly performed in special theatres in cities. Sometimes, theatrical troupes go out and perform in factories, schools and the countryside.

v. Stage Settings

Traditional shadow show applied simple and fixed stage settings. These settings lacked vividness. Modern show applies multimedia equipment to create kinetic settings. These new settings serve as a foil for the plots and attract the audience' attention more effectively. For example, by integrating multimedia with fixed settings, technicians create the scenes of blowing, raining, snowing, thundering and flashing to achieve the effect of mixing the spurious with genuine.

vi. Audience Group

Traditional show was performed in rural areas. The audiences were farmers. Now, aside from farmers, urban residents, workers and students have also joined the audience group.

The above changes fully prove that Chinese shadow show has transformed from traditional to modern in the past thirty years.

Furthermore, these changes have been reported by some Chinese mass medium. The following typical cases I quoted from Chinese newspapers offer solid proofs for such changes:

- i. In 2005, Huanxian County of Gansu province added the subject of "Shadow Show Making and Appreciation" to the courses of local primary and middle schools.
- ii. In 2006, an aged people dance troupe from Tangshan of Hebei province, combining shadow show movements with dancing, produced and performed the dance "Pretty Sunset" and won first award in CCTV Spring Festival Party.
- iii. In 2010, directed by tutor Cai Jianping, Jiang Chaobo, Guo Minghao and Sun Ninan, three students of Beijing University Of Technology, designed a set of "Interactive Platform of Digital Shadow Show". They applied computer and digital technology to shadow show ϵ -simulated traditional show performing techniques and realized interactions between shadow puppets and computer operators. This research fruit will benefit distance performance through internet.
- iv. In 2010, Hunan Provincial Puppetry and Shadow Show Art Troupe put on a newly created shadow show *A Wolf Child* in many cities of China and received warm applause from the audience. This show was characterized by the following four modern factors. The subject of this show was modern. The harmonious relations between mankind and animals were praised. 3D and kinetic stage settings were applied to the full. The puppets and the actors performed at the stage simultaneously.
- v. From 14 to 18 May 2010, Tangshan Shadow Puppetry Troupe put on 20 shadow shows for World Exposition Shanghai. Their performances were full of innovation and creation. All the eight plays they performed were newly produced or revised with modern themes. The size of puppets was enlarged from traditional 70 cm high to modern 150 cm high. Each puppet

was coated with fluorescent powder to increase brightness. Each puppet was made from celluloid board, rather than traditional donkey-skin. The actors and puppets performed at the stage simultaneously. Both stage and curtain were enlarged from traditional 3m wide to modern 6 m wide. The actors' lines were subtitled in English version to let foreigners understand them. A combination of fixed settings with kinetic settings was applied at the stage in performing.

- vi. In 2011, an Inner Mongolian theatrical troupe, by making use of shadow show performance to publicize birth control, produced some new subject shadow plays like "Erniu's Marriage", "An Idiot Meets His Mate", etc.

Now, I have every reason to believe that a modern shadow show is rising in China.

In the above, I have discussed in practice the modernization of Chinese shadow show. Now I would like to pay more attention to analyzing its modernization in theory. These theoretical key points involve the following three aspects:

i. Necessity of Modernizing Chinese Shadow Show

There are mainly two reasons why Chinese shadow show should be modernized.

First, the old and decayed contents and rigid performing forms can no longer meet the needs of modern people. This is the internal cause. Traditional shadow show advocated feudal and superstitious concepts of loyalty and filial piety, good and evil, hierarchy, autocracy etc. Kings and princes, generals and ministers, scholars and beauties, ghosts and gods occupied the stage of shadow show for hundreds of years. Modern people need a new shadow show. This show is in a position to reflect existing social life, to express the democratic thinking, the spirit of humanism and the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy of modern people. They claim that the image figures representing modern people with a distinct individuality and independent personality dominate the stage of shadow show. Furthermore, the artistic forms including expressing impression, stylization and stereotyped make-up in traditional show departed from the aesthetic awareness of modern people. It is unintelligible if modern people are simply differentiated into four roles of characters of Sheng (male), Dan (female), Jing (painted face) and Chou (clown) in shadow show performance. At last, the unhurried and time-consuming speaking and singing in traditional show does not conform to the speedy life style and thought patterns of modern people.

The shock of Western culture to Chinese shadow show is the external cause for its modernization. It was recorded that the modernization of Chinese show started during Opium War in 1840 when the Qing government opened the boundary to Western countries. The changes of Chinese society stimulated and promoted the transformation of traditional Chinese culture including shadow show. Many scholars and artists made great effort to prepare the ground for modernizing this traditional show. New theatrical

values demand that shadow show display new life, new thought, new spirit and new feelings. In the past dozens of years, new technology from Western countries covering television, computer, internet etc. rushed into China like fierce floods. The result is that more and more Chinese people prefer to stay at home watching TV or playing internet. Hollywood movies, Disneyland cartoons and pop music disks become their daily necessities. On the contrary, less and less people go to theatres to watch traditional show. Without spectators, this traditional show will lose its value of existence. Under this circumstance, I believe that modernizing traditional shadow show is a must.

ii. Connotation of Modernizing Chinese Shadow Show

What is modernized shadow show? Modern shadow show, as far as I know, should cover following five contents:

- a. Its spirit is modern. That is to say, it must conform to the ideology of modern people including democratic awareness, scientific awareness, enlightenment awareness and etc.
- b. Its language system should conform to the thought patterns of modern people. Almost all schools of traditional show applied local dialects. Modern show applies popular language.
- c. Its performing forms should conform to the aesthetic conception of modern people.
- d. It is a necessity of modern people in their social life. Shadow show is a spiritual culture. It is an inseparable component of spiritual life of modern people.
- e. It is part of the world dramatic arts. It is part of the world stage arts. In the course of globalization, Chinese shadow show must demonstrate its artistic value to the world people. And the world people understand and accept this Chinese show.

iii. Avenues of Modernizing Chinese Shadow Show

While we are exploring the change of Chinese shadow show from traditional to modern, we should focus our eyes on its noumenon, its forms of expression and the relations between the audience and the shadow show.

In order to modernize this traditional show, Chinese scholars, artists and troupes have carried out long-term exploration and accumulated rich experiences. On the basis of theory and practice, they put forward the following six channels:

a. To write new scripts and revise classical scripts

Script is the foundation of shadow show performance. All the decadent scripts should be discarded for they are divorced from existing social life of modern people. New scripts should discover the conflicts and contradictions related to modern people and represent their voice. The classical scripts must be revised so as to conform to modern theatrical value.

b. To transform old performing forms and create new ones

The performing forms can never be separated from the contents of shadow show. The performing forms are external and intuitive. Spectators feel shadow show from performing forms earlier than from the contents. Traditional performing forms are divorced from the requirements of modern people for entertainment and aesthetical conception. So it is imperative to reform the old and create the new.

c. To establish commercial theatres in big cities

China is now on the way to urbanization. Establishing theatres in big cities will conform to the development of modern society. Traditional show was closely tied up with religious culture and folkways in the past. It served as mass media in religious, feudal and superstitious activities. Against the background of urbanization, the independence of shadow show will be enhanced. Commercial theatres will attract more spectators from urban residents.

Since nineties of the twentieth century, China has quickened its pace of modernization and urbanization with the rapid development of its economy. All the traditional dramas including shadow show have removed towards cities from the countryside. Central cities and metropolises have already turned into foundations for shadow show. Cities are in a position to decide the future and destiny of shadow show.

d. To portray the personal image of Shadow Show artists

In the old days, artists created and performed shadow show on purpose to make a living and support their families. In the course of modernization, their social status should be heightened. They are encouraged to create and perform masterpieces of shadow show, and train successors. At the time when these artists take shadow show creation and performance as their lifelong ideal and goal, the artistic value of Chinese shadow show will be achieved. Moreover, fostering a good image of the shadow show artists will benefit to enhance the approval and respect for them by the whole society and build close relations between the broad audience and the shadow show.

e. To apply modern technology to the Shadow Show stage

The stage effect is realized through performance. The stage of traditional show was simple and crude. So it was very hard to infect spectators. With the development of modern technology, applying multi media, and computer to shadow show stage will produce great artistic appeal. Moreover, internet will bring shadow show art to faraway places and realize long distance performance.

f. To highlight the function of entertainment

In the age of commercialization, people spend money to watch shadow show in theatres with a purpose of entertainment. Chinese shadow show is no longer a tool for feudal etiquette and custom. So, it is imperative to

give prominence to its function of entertainment. Stressing the function of entertainment will help attract more audience and melt the shadow show into the modern society.

g. To take the Chinese Shadow Show across countries

Globalization has brought China more closely to the world. Chinese shadow show must go abroad. Now many people are learning Chinese language and culture. Some of them even go to China personally to learn shadow puppet carving and performing. Chinese shadow show should present its artistic charm at the world stage.

With the progress of global economic integration, the culture and ideology of the strong nations ceaselessly shock that of the comparatively weak nations. National culture and regional culture are falling into the circumstances of being obscured and dispelled. It is unwise to protect national culture and regional culture in the forms of enclosing land or remaining aloof from the world. On the contrary, we should take an open approach to communicate and interact with the civilization of various sources, and search for a more extensive developing space on the basis of the entire global platform.

Conclusion

Chinese shadow show is famous for its long history, far-reaching influence and fantastic shape and performance. Many historical documents prove that Chinese shadow show originated from China's native land. This is a common understanding obtained by most Chinese and Western scholars. When we are looking for the reasons why this show spread so far and wide and received applause so warmly throughout the country, we can easily find that all this resulted from its cultural connotation, social function, artistic and aesthetic features, as I analyzed above.

The world is changing. So is China, and together with Chinese shadow show. This change, in essence, involves inheritance and creation. A new and modern shadow show is on the way to replace the traditional one in China. This change, I make sure, will bring to the audience a more splendid and fascinating shadow show and in the near future. Let us expect its arrival.

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