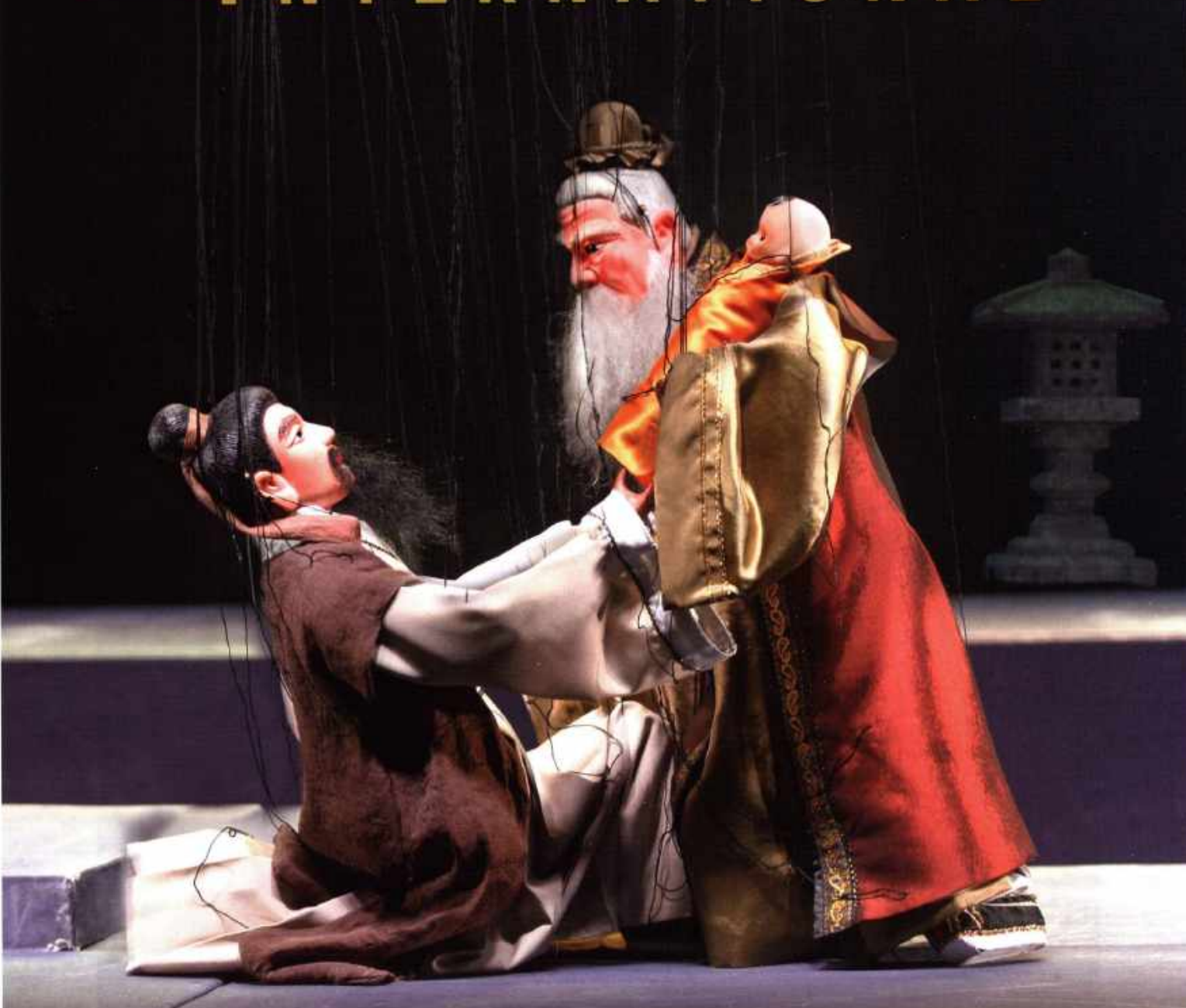


SPRING and SUMMER 2014 Issue #35

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

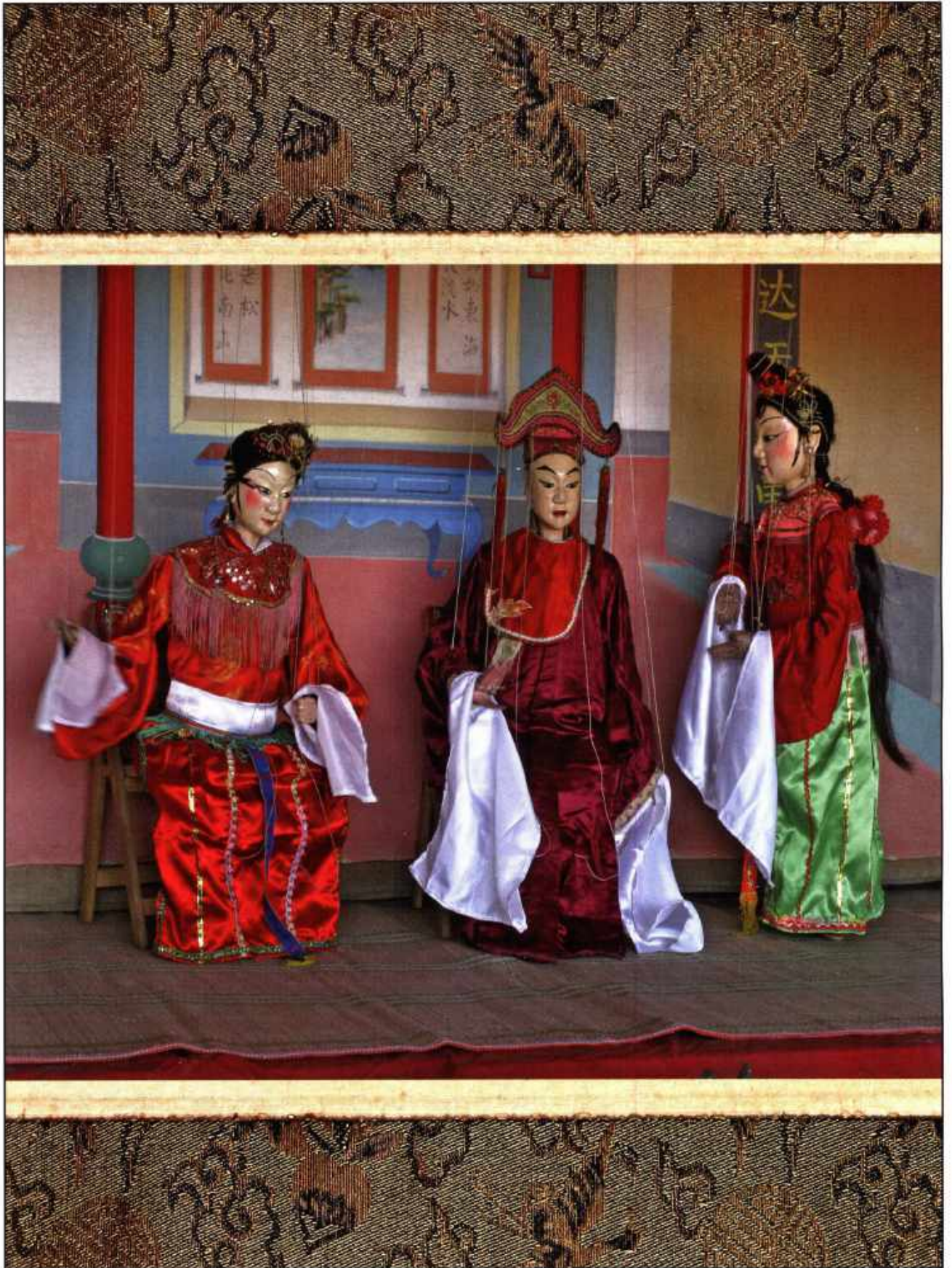


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FOLK PUPPET THEATRES IN CHINA  
by Mingsheng Ye (SEE ARTICLE, PAGE 22)



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issue no. 35

中国



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On the COVER:

*A Quanzhou Marionette Production of  
The Orphan of Zhao*

*(see article, page 4)*



*Editorial*

China. I think it is not unusual for Americans to have complex, often contradictory, associations with the name—from fine teacups to Jackie Chan, from the sayings of Confucius to *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, from the invasion of Tibet to the Cultural Revolution, from SARS to Peking Opera. It has been said that the world is currently going through the sixth great extinction; Puppetry scholars are concerned that, in China, traditional puppet companies are also going extinct at an alarming rate. This is happening, in part at least, to the

Josh Stenberg, from Nanjing University, describes a Quanzhou Marionette production of *The Orphan of Zhao*, an ancient text that has seen many modern adaptations (page 4), while Annie Rollins is on a mission to help preserve some of the more endangered shadow traditions in “The Last Masters” (page 8). Fan Pen Chen writes about ritual puppetry (page 12), but has also translated a

largest migration in human history as hundreds of millions there move from the countryside to cities. Small, traditional theaters are losing their audiences. Perhaps some of them will be saved by a hoped-for wave of preservation zeal. New companies will surely spring up in the quickly expanding urban centers, but the puppetry landscape there is inexorably changing.

This issue is full of articles about puppetry in China, as well as puppetry that has moved out of China to other parts of the world. We are fortunate here to have had

two-part article by Professor Ye on traditional puppet theatres in China (pages 22 and 44) and Claire Dolan remembers a workshop production she led in Shanghai for Bread and Puppet Theater (page 18). Political theater of the sort proposed in the workshop was entirely foreign to the college students participating, but as other members of the community got involved, something truly magical happened.

such Chinese immigrant artists as hand puppeteer Yang Feng, rod puppeteer Hua Hua Zhang and singer/dancer/puppeteer Kuang-Yu Fong add their artistry to our cultural buffet, and then collaborate with other artists here, helping American puppetry evolve. In this issue, we can, at best, scratch the surface of China—a country in which puppetry stretches back some 2,000 years, but we have some stories to share that we hope will at least pique your interest in this amazing, enormous, multi-ethnic culture, and the puppetry that has evolved there.

And that is the amazing thing about puppetry in China or anywhere else. Whether it is in the delicate movements of a marionette, or performing a 13<sup>th</sup> century script that still speaks to us today, or in parade figures made from used cardboard boxes to address the conundrum of rampant urban renewal: In the stirring together of puppeteer, puppet and audience, something new and unexpected is created.





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**–Dassia N. Posner**

This issue features an article by Josh Stenberg on a modern production of *The Orphan of Zhao* (featured on our cover) based on medieval script. Stenberg explores its veneration of blood revenge, and how contemporary audiences find such themes “provoke deep reflection and thought.”

**Thank you, Jane Henson**

The Board of Directors and Officers of UNIMA-USA are pleased to announce and grateful for a generous gift from the Jane Henson estate. Jane served on the board of UNIMA-USA and was a generous supporter during her lifetime. We are honored that she remembered us in her will. Thank you, Jane, and thank you to the Henson family for their continued interest.

Marianne Tucker  
President, UNIMA-USA

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# VENGEFUL MARIONETTES AND STRATEGIES OF REFORM: A Quanzhou Marionette Production of *The Orphan of Zhao*

by Josh Stenberg, Nanjing University

In 2012, the Quanzhou Marionette Company premiered their production of *The Orphan of Zhao*. It went on to feature in prominent festivals, including the World Minnan Cultural Festival in June 2013 and the 10<sup>th</sup> China Arts Festival in Shandong in October of the same

year, where it was the only puppet performance. These successes culminated in a prestigious Wenhua Prize—the third time the troupe had won it with a new production. Nevertheless, the choice of this material for a marionette play is for a number of reasons a novel decision: though *The Orphan of Zhao* and the Quanzhou marionette tradition share a considerable antiquity, this is not the sort of text generally associated with either the marionette genre or the region. The choice of such a plot, drawn from the national literary canon and grave in subject matter, for production by Quanzhou marionettes, instantiates a recent general tendency in the official practice of traditional Chinese

theatre, including puppet troupes, towards grand narratives, told at a single sitting, and intended for prize competition and festivals.

*The Orphan of Zhao* is a historical revenge play, the only extant script attributed to 13<sup>th</sup> century dramatist Ji Junxiang. Tu'an Gu, the villain of the piece, is a general in the State of Jin during the Spring and Autumn period (4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E). He leads the king to believe that an honest official, Zhao Dun, is plotting against the nation. As a result, the entire Zhao family, consisting of over three hundred members, is massacred. Only one woman, Zhao Dun's noble daughter-in-law, survives. While in hiding, she gives birth to Zhao Dun's grandchild, entrusting her newborn son to the imperial doctor Cheng Ying. Learning that one child has escaped him, Tu'an Gu resolves to kill all newborns unless the orphan of Zhao is produced and put to death. Cheng Ying presents his own newborn child in place of the orphan, and that child is sacrificed. Cheng Ying, having won the general's trust, takes up residence in his palace, where the orphan is raised. Years later, when the orphan has grown up, Cheng reveals the truth. Upon learning it, the orphan of Zhao slaughters the General and executes his revenge.



This synopsis outlines both the original Yuan *zaju* script and the new script co-written by Fan Xiaoning and marionette troupe director Wang Jingxian (b. 1955). Wang was a playwright at the Quanzhou Gaojia opera (1979 to 1992) before he was transferred in

1992 to the marionette troupe as general director and party secretary. Important recent achievements during this tenure include the 2011 and 2012 Wenhua Prizes and 2006 and 2011 agreements to train new classes of puppeteers at the Fujian Art School (Quanzhou branch) and the Shanghai Theater Academy.

Positive reception of *The Orphan of Zhao* narrative typically stresses the imperial loyalty of Cheng Ying and the final redress of wrongs. Judging by the alterations made by a number of other adaptations, however, many have found it expedient to mitigate the bloodiness of the play, since the moral—that violence will be avenged by more violence, and that this renewed violence constitutes redress—does not always sit well with Western or contemporary Chinese audiences. Although the Quanzhou version does not alter the basic ending, Wang indicates that such concerns also informed the marionette script:

The original script's praise and affirmation of values such as kindness, righteousness, self-sacrifice and moral courage are positive values that cannot be abandoned or diminished [in the marionette adaptation],...but I do not agree with its veneration of eye-for-an-eye revenge and massacre, or of bloodlines, considering that [such veneration] should not only be abandoned, but also that [such themes] should [instead] provoke deep reflection and thought. As I worked on the adaptation, this is what I tried to achieve. (Wang 2013)





The production of *The Orphan of Zhao* was part of a concerted effort to make the puppets more “serious” or “weighty,” since the assumption that puppetry is a minor form of theatre (*xiaoxi*) persists in the theatre and intellectual world. Quanzhou playwright Hong Chuan has outlined approvingly how the new production represents a shift in how the marionette troupe is trying to position itself:

The intention [of *The Orphan of Zhao*] was to write scripts for the genre [of Quanzhou marionettes], to have puppets perform great works, to have puppets perform historical tragedies, and not to be satisfied with plays for children or legendary plays, while also aspiring to passing on the performing art of the various [role types]. This is a very good idea, and in my opinion they have achieved this purpose. (Hong 27)

Several local media outlets echoed this thinking, with the claim being oft repeated that this was “the first puppet tragedy.”

Yet tragedy was not a concept present in traditional Chinese dramaturgy, and positing tragedy as the legitimate or prototypical form of serious theatre in this case is deeply connected to the reception history of the *Orphan of Zhao* in the West. The high status and frequent revival of *The Orphan of Zhao* within China is partially an effect of Western influence on both Chinese theatre studies and the rewriting of Chinese literary history. In 1735,

*Orphan* became the first Chinese dramatic text available in European translation, in an abridged French version written by Jesuit missionary Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare (1666-1736). Voltaire’s adaptation, *L’orphelin de Chine*, which was one of several eighteenth-century European versions of the story, is particularly noteworthy for altering the ending to allow humanism and forgiveness to trump revenge. As recently as 2012, with James Fenton’s adaptation for the Royal Shakespeare Company, which insisted on claiming that *The Orphan of Zhao* was “the Chinese *Hamlet*,” and caused a brouhaha when it cast mostly white Europeans, *Orphan*, cast as classical tragedy, took centre stage in the European engagement with Chinese dramatic texts.

As the comparatist Fei Shi points out, however, “*The Orphan of Zhao* remains one of the most acclaimed *Chinese tragedies* because its thematic and aesthetic qualities are similar to those of its Western counterparts” (177; emphasis in original). Its “tragedy” is also the quality which has prompted its inclusion in several canon-forming designations of Chinese theatre, typically from a literary (rather than a theatrical) perspective—i.e. Wang Jisi’s influential designation of it as one of “China’s 10 Classic Tragedies” (Wang Jisi). These literary canonizations tend to foreground plot-driven texts that are not necessarily representative of the pacing or structure of traditional Chinese theatre. Moreover, the emphasis on literary canon privileges scripts that rely on dialogue and song over the many narratives (both puppet and human) that are movement-based.

European reception of the story has come back to influence Chinese productions: Voltaire’s adaptation, for instance, has proven influential in Chinese stagings, such as Lin Zhaohua’s 1990 *huaju*



(Western-style spoken theatre) production *The Orphan of China*, where Voltaire's ending and the original run are both provided (Du 224-26), a solution which calls to mind Judith Weir's *A Night at the Chinese Opera*, in which enacted revenge in a stage production of *The Orphan of Zhao* is contrasted with frustrated revenge in real life. Recent adaptations in China, including TV series and Chinese *geju* (Western-style opera), have caused media to speak of "an *Orphan of Zhao* wave" (Guo Canjin).

Presented without substantial narrative reinterpretation, the viewer is expected to accept that the revenge is justified and that murder can only be rectified by revenge in kind. Thus Wang makes a claim to thematic authenticity, writing that the "biggest difference with other scripts on the subject is that it does not create a 'jokey' or 'subversive' version, but honors the original values" (Wang 2013). The result is a dark production, that, with its relentless and numerous killings, can make for a grim audience experience. However, it is precisely the association between marionettes and levity or playfulness that Wang is seeking to sever; he therefore does not choose to lighten it with Voltairian humanity or comic interludes.

Bloody revenge is not the traditional stuff of the Quanzhou marionette play, which is one of two major local puppet traditions (the other being the *budaixi* glove puppets) and which was substantially a temple- and festivity-based ritual tradition (a tradition that, among non-official troupes, has continued in parallel).<sup>1</sup> Although the Western association between puppetry

and children's entertainment likewise does not apply, the Quanzhou performance were also not based in practices drawn from the literati traditions that produced such plays as *The Orphan of Zhao*. Western influence and post-1949 theatrical restructuring—themselves interrelated phenomena—produced, as with other genres of Chinese theatre, a state-owned, professional Quanzhou marionette troupe. Thus, for much of the People's Republic, the preferences of the general audience did not heavily bear on artistic decisions; simultaneously, traditional beliefs that undergirded ritual forms of performance were under concerted ideological attack. Thus, in the last few years, when theatres are being increasingly pressured to reform and find non-state sources of income, the majority of marionette performances have privileged a child- and tourism-oriented type of performance that draws on tradition, but emphasizes technical feats over narrative and omits ritual altogether. The most commonly seen repertoire of the Quanzhou Marionette Company, the variety show prompted the *New York Times* to report that its 2009 Carnegie Hall audience was "laughing through tears" at "the endearing marionettes" (Tommasini). Although such performances help to make the company viable, the most crucial productions for the troupe's viability are those that can earn major prizes at state-run festivals or can be included in national theatre projects. In this realm, the Quanzhou Marionette Theatre has had remarkable successes, yet its productions of plays like *The Orphan of Zhao* signal a shift from puppet-specific repertoire, often highly visual, to grand texts of Chinese dramatic literature that privilege spoken dialogue.





Wang's comments on the script and production of *The Orphan of Zhao* give unique insight into his thinking. In one article, he gives three central reasons for producing the play: for the puppeteers, for profit and for himself. Each rationale is briefly excerpted:

1) Puppeteer development:

[The troupe has a group of puppeteers] in their prime, proficient in traditional technique and who as a group cover all the role types quite well... If they are to become real artists, they must undergo the training offered by productions featuring higher levels of artistic thinking and thus elevate themselves from "performing technique" to "performing theatre," to go from "playing with puppets" to "creating characters." For that reason, at the beginning of this century, we raised the matter of producing a large-scale comedy [*The Inspector General*, based on Gogol's play] and a large-scale tragedy. (Wang 2011: 68)

2) Ticket Sales:

Since the beginning of this century, the Chinese performing world has increasingly lent importance to "ticket value" and "market outlook"... Creation, production, and marketing entities all have increased mental pressure to "contend for livelihood, and strive for development [or "to make it rich"]". (Wang 2011: 68)

3) Himself:

In order to be an adequate theatre director today, especially as the person responsible for the "transition to the corporate model" and the "performance corporation" [model], when choosing one's plays one must relentlessly "benefit maximization." But as a playwright, one wants to pick a subject that allows the fulfillment of personal reflections, judgments and pursuits. The awkward thing is that I am both director and playwright...[The play makes me] feel deeply satisfied and proud for the great ethical qualities we [Han Chinese] once had...I strongly believe that loyalty and righteousness are the core values of *The Orphan of Zhao*. At the same time, they are also our [Han Chinese] core values! (Wang 2011: 68)

Wang's production of *The Orphan of Zhao* suggests several key points about official puppet theatre in China. Firstly, the considerations of such a troupe at the administrative, rhetorical, narrative, financial and educational levels are substantially similar to other forms of contemporary Chinese traditional theatre. Secondly, there

is an assumption that "great plays" must be produced in order to maintain the art<sup>2</sup> and keep it viable. This is never stated as an opposition to tradition, which is also valorised, but it is implicit that moving on to perform "great plays" or "historical tragedies" is an elevation of the theatre. Thirdly, one possible cumulative effect of such policies could be to diminish local specificity.

This third point is part of a tendency not only in puppetry or in Chinese theatre but in all of Chinese culture towards a weakening of locally specific characteristics. Quanzhou marionettes are bearers of a regional culture with a traditional repertoire containing dialect, musical and narrative elements that do not exist elsewhere (although there are also non-official troupes that share in the tradition). The less often such plays are performed and the more plays like *The Inspector General* or *The Orphan of Zhao* are, the more troupes approach a national theatre that erases regional distinctions. For the troupe, and for much of the Chinese cultural establishment, this shift signals the elevation of Quanzhou marionettes into a weightier and higher art form of increased literary and pedagogical value, as well as greater potential in the prize-oriented economy of state-owned theatre. It is also a prominent example of an ongoing trend towards the large-scale and the ambitious in Chinese puppetry. The production is part of a long-term strategy, an attempt to redefine the genre in the terms of the serious and literary theatre that is currently most likely to win official approval.

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**Endnotes**

1. This is the theme of Robin Ruizendaal's *Marionette Theatre in Quanzhou*, which, though it touches on the official troupe considered here, is largely concerned with the lively world of non-official (*minjian*) theatres in the area. Those interested in the techniques, traditions, and history of this genre should refer to this groundbreaking work.



# THE LAST MASTERS: *The Tenuous Heritage of the Traditional Chinese Shadow Puppet-Making Craft*

by Annie Katsura Rollins



China has always been enigmatic. Through its ancient history, its dynastic era, the 20<sup>th</sup> century of revolution and now, in its unprecedented push towards globalization and modernity, it remains quixotic. The country is so large that it resists generalizations simply because of its vast geography, let alone its ethnic diversity. Most who research in China are used to the impossibility of comprehending the entire picture; knowing, too, that as soon as a conclusion has been drawn, it has surely changed. What is certain, however, is that China stands at the forefront of a question that will surely confront us all: how does a culture best continue the lineage of its inherited folk practices with it while barreling towards a future in conflict with its traditions?

China is not the only country that will deal, or has dealt, with reconciling its past art traditions with its dreams of modernity, but it is an ideal case study as one of the oldest civilizations on earth racing towards progress at an unprecedented rate. Shadow puppetry, one of China's oldest and widespread folk art forms, is finding itself floundering in the wake of this dramatic change. With an origin point somewhere around the Tang dynasty (618-907CE), shadow puppetry has traversed through every strata of society, eventually finding its stronghold in the peasant class for the last 500 years. Its recent decline began toward the collapse of the dynastic era (1911CE) but hit outright repression during the Cultural Revolution (1966).

When the ban was lifted on shadow performance in the 1980s, the artists were ready to pick up where it left off, but their audience had wholly changed. In a move to denounce all things pre-Communist, the new political regime had shifted the culture to devalue its

ancient traditions, shadow puppetry included. The ban also ensured that the recent generations grew up without having seen a shadow puppet performance, which rendered the dialogue and symbolism confusing for young audiences. Without those few decades to evolve the art form organically, their older stories of emperors and warlords had little relevance in the New China.

With such a swift decline and change in their audience, shadow puppetry has stuttered to catch up. In the last few decades, the remaining artists have hit additional obstacles; urbanization has sapped the rural audiences even further and competition with modern forms of entertainment has proven overwhelming. All surviving troupes, performers and makers are somewhere on the spectrum between traditional and modern in order to continue. In the few years that I've been working with the shadow practitioners in China, I've already witnessed a marked change in their practice. Troupes that were performing locally for their rural community a few dozen times a summer in 2008 have had just a few commissions in 2011 and 2012. While there are some troupes protected by geographic isolation or ritualistic communities that help encourage more regular performances, these are the exceptions to the rule. Most traditional countryside troupe members have gone back to farming full time, moved to the city to perform modern shows for tourists and children's audiences or passed away.

Chinese shadow puppetry does have its dedicated stewards who are working to ensure that shadow puppetry meets another generation. Much of their effort, however, is being directed towards the performers, singers or the artifacts themselves. Little attention





has been paid to the puppet makers, even though their skills are nuanced, hard won, and rare. Puppet-making demands the same dedication, stamina and life-long commitment.

The Chinese shadow puppet is the exquisite ancestor of nearly 1500 years of inherited skill and accumulated artistry. The intricately carved translucent figures evolved from simple shadow silhouettes, torn out of dried leaves or paper, into agile articulated two-dimensional colored leather puppets. And while their beauty may stupefy, their real gift is in their ability to communicate something more. In ancient times, shamans used to practice "ghost calling" which connected the living with their passed loved ones through a shadow conjuring. In shadow puppet lore, the puppets are said to embody the characters and stories they depict, which is why the heads are removed for storage when they're put away at night; no one wanted to risk a shadow puppet left to its own devices. For more than a millennium, shadows have represented something beyond the shared quotidian experience into the unknowable, the magic and the "other."

My first encounter six years ago with a Chinese shadow puppet left me utterly speechless. It instantly rewrote my own understanding of what is possible in the puppet arts. And what has continued to stay with me through the years is the indelible image these colorful actors left. I can still see them nimbly leaping, weeping, fighting and emoting across the screen. Just standing still, their visage is arresting. Even now, in the cold winter across the world in America, I can close my eyes and see their faces so expressive, their colors so vivid, their humanness so impossibly alive. Through them, I feel a connection to our human past and inherited stories.

As such vital go-betweens, a puppet's design, engineering, agility and coloring is *everything*. Without a perfected balance of all these elements, the puppet remains lifeless behind the screen with no ability to inspire or transport. What is not apparent to the untrained eye when looking at one of these puppets, is the heritage of engineering, design perfection and accumulated mastery of skill required to bring a shadow puppet to life. A Chinese shadow puppet-making master spends nothing short of a lifetime to perfect every stage of the making process from hide preparation to tool making to carving to design innovation. Anything short of a lifetime is not mastery and yields a shadow puppet that cannot evoke, inspire or transport an audience; when you see a master's puppet, you'll know.



In my own pursuit of shadow puppet-making knowledge, I set out to complete an apprenticeship in the summer of 2008. It took me the entire three months to realize just how foolish that was. Instead of learning shadow puppet craft, I spent the bulk of the time simply reworking my Western understanding of learning and knowing as predominantly cognitive into the traditional master-apprentice format, which is based in tacit learning and knowledge. Tacit knowledge, originally coined by Michael Polanyi, is defined loosely as "that which we know but cannot tell." For instance, how do you balance on your bike or match harmony when singing? You can do these tasks without fully being able to explain, even misunderstanding, just what your body and mind are doing to achieve this. Put into an educational mode, this predominantly non-verbal method of both teaching and learning places an emphasis on embodied practice and much less on cognitive verbal understanding. That which is practiced in the body is best taught through a kinesthetic modality and creates tacit knowledge. Most importantly, though, the acquisition of tacit knowledge takes time. There are no shortcuts.

This tacit learning, which turns into tacit knowledge, has been the basis of shadow puppetry's traditional master-apprentice system. Historically, the form was passed from father to son; apprentices would spend at least a decade in close observation, trial and repetition with their master. These years would not only give the apprentice enough time to fully master each step of the puppet-making process through tacit learning, but also grasp design symbolism, engineering principles and artistry which enables a maker to evolve the puppets alongside their own generational changes and keep a form relevant.

Within the current generation of Chinese shadow-making masters, however, the master-apprentice system that is so essential to transmitting the craft has almost fully evaporated. With the swiftly decreasing audience base due to urbanization and modernization, among other reasons, shadow puppetry has seen a near decimation of what little activity was left after the mid-century repression. In some provinces, the masters have already passed on with no apprentices to succeed them. What little support and funding there is for this struggling folk art, is mostly being diverted to the performers and troupes rather than the makers.







Without economic viability or government support, what student would or could dedicate a life to shadow puppetry? Many masters who have children that are interested, often discourage them exactly because of its tenuous future. Most students that do study puppet-making, do so primarily in commercial settings, cutting repeated patterns designed for interior decorations, not performances. Their workshop resembles a factory more than it does an artist's studio. In these large commodity companies, the puppet-making tasks are often compartmentalized into multiple tasks to lessen the time to mastery, creating partial masters of only a fraction of the process.

As if that wasn't enough to combat, China's introduction of the machine-made puppet seems to be the inescapable future for China's shadow puppet. In 2008, a mere 10-20% of the tourist market consisted of machine-made puppets, compared with almost 90% in 2011. More importantly, these laser-cut machine-made puppets are sold as handmade shadow puppets, preying upon a non-specialist's inability to tell the difference. The handmade market for puppets has taken an irrevocable blow, splitting what little demand is left between the top masters in the country and a few peasant cutters still eking out a few extra *yuan* in the winter months. Without the demand for handmade puppets, the incentive and time to master the full process has evaporated. Without demand for performances, the experience of cutting for performance masters has too. Knowing that a traditional master-apprentice system is necessary for full transmission of knowledge and mastery, what is left? Is this the end for the 1500-year-old inherited practice?

This issue of craft inheritance is not unique to this century, China or shadow puppetry. So many equally deserving art forms and treasured crafts have already disappeared as collateral damage to progress and change. One must also consider the inevitability of evolution, certainly within a live performance form. Things must change, we must move forward. Still, my proximity to the artists and my love of the art form doesn't allow me to accept their extinction with a shrug. Even if I understand there are changes to be made, I'm simply afraid that soon we'll have rushed ahead with too little consideration, so that by the time we look back to retrieve what we once had, it will be gone.

In the time we have left, I'll be working to increase China's own awareness of their shadow puppet legacy and champion ways to support the surviving artists, both locally and internationally. For the puppet maker this means regulating machine-made puppets on the market, working to increase the market value of handmade puppets, encourage performance by way of making demand for shadow puppets and, hopefully, re-establishing some version of the master-apprentice system. While those may seem like lofty goals, I think the shadows are worth it.

#### Endnote

1. Polanyi, Michael. *The Tacit Dimension*. Double Day & Co, New York. (1966)

Annie Rollins is a researcher and practitioner of traditional Chinese shadow Puppetry. She was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to canvass mainland China for the last remaining artists in 2011 and began a PhD on the art form at Montreal's Concordia University in 2013. Rollins recently launched the first English language comprehensive Chinese shadow puppetry site at:

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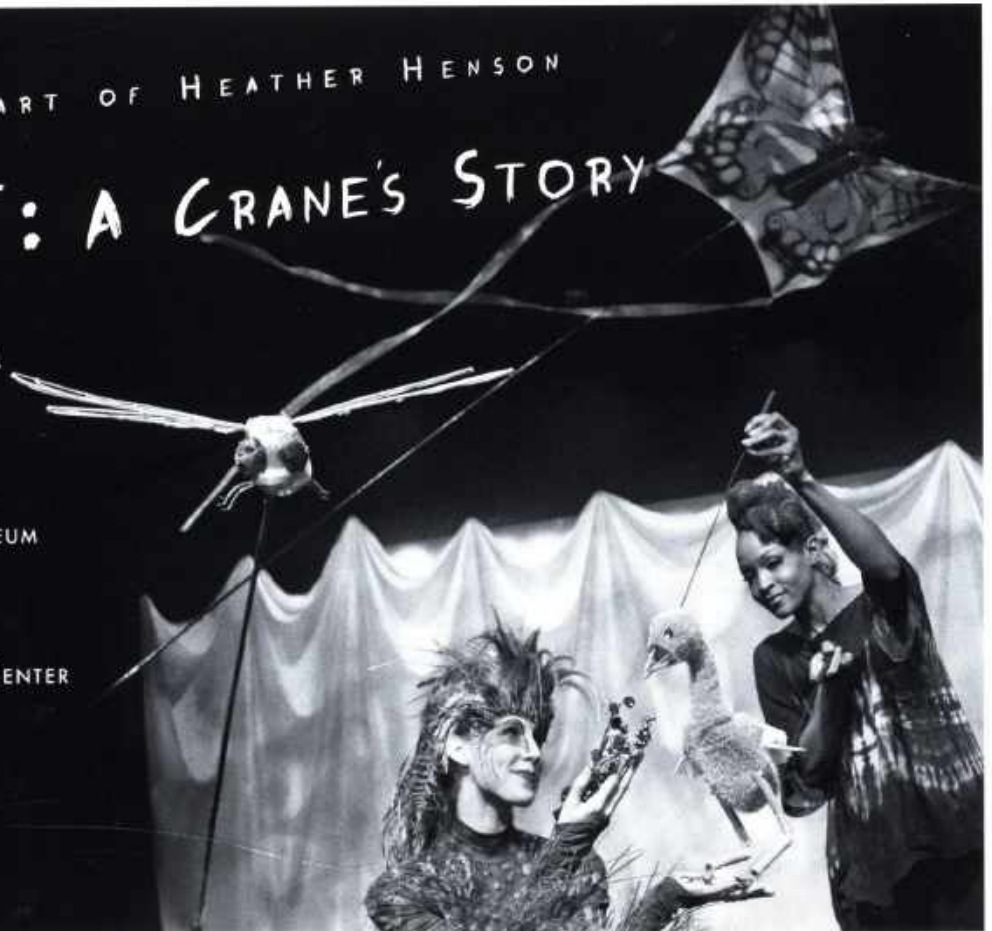
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## EVOKING SPIRITUAL POWER: *Deity Plays in Puppet Theatres*

by Fan Pen Chen, State University of New York at Albany

Rural theatrical performances, including puppet plays, usually serve religious functions in two ways: 1) they represent deities who bring blessings to the audience in opening ritual playlets (the Eight Immortals; the Gods of Fortune, Prosperity and Longevity, etc.); and 2) they enact tales that entertain deities for whom the plays are sponsored. Although stories of gods and goddesses may be performed in the latter main plays, the mythical characters enacted tend not to be endowed with spiritual powers beyond the realm of the play. Among the puppet theatres of southern China, however, certain folk rituals of local religions have survived in which the puppets representing deities with veritable numinous powers are manipulated by puppeteers who also serve the functions of shamanic priests. This paper will introduce efficacious deity puppet plays of southern China in which the puppets become the deities themselves and are endowed with potent spiritual powers.

Certain rituals must be observed before and after the performance of such deity plays. When we<sup>1</sup> requested that an episode

from the Goddess Chen Jinggu's 陈靖姑 saga be performed rather than a story on the poet Li Bai 李白 that a marionette puppeteer in Taishun 泰顺, southern Zhejiang, had planned to perform for us, we had to wait for an altar-table to be set before the stage. Candles, incense and liquor were offered when the goddess appeared on stage. In preparation for performing this deity play, the puppeteer also had to wash his hands and face. At Chenhe 辰河 in western Hunan, the rod puppet performance of the life of Guanyin 观音 in *Xiangshanzhuan* 香山传 was preceded by a ritual performed by the puppeteer-priest that included the biting of a red rooster's comb and application of its blood on the forehead of the deity puppet Wang Lingguan 王灵官 who would purify the stage. The play ended with the slaughtering of the rooster and the dripping of its blood around the stage to rid it of defilement. Aside from worshipping the main deity of the play by lighting candles and incense and offering liquor and food, the sponsor-audience also celebrated significant events of the life of the deity while they were being

portrayed. When Guanyin was born, bowls of glutinous rice balls cooked in sweet rice wine were served to all the performers and audience. When the temple in which she resided was burnt to ashes, which caused the deaths of innumerable monks and nuns, mock money was burned by villagers as offerings to the ghosts of the deceased, including roaming ghosts in the village. When Guanyin became a goddess, a celebratory red scarf was placed on her head, and offerings of rice with incense, candles and pork were offered to her. The fact that Guanyin should have been Buddhist and vegetarian was obviously not of concern. Similarly, when the Snake King deity got married in the marionette performance of *Creation of the Immortals* 度仙记 in Yong'an 永安, western Fujian, the sponsor of the play lit candles and set off fireworks in celebration of the event.

Certain deity plays are particularly suitable for specific situations. The marionette performance of the story of Mulian 目连, the pious monk with great spiritual powers who enters Hell to rescue his mother, enables descendants to have their ancestors released from the tortures of Hell. In Putian 莆田, southeastern Fujian, we watched a marionette Mulian play performed alternately in conjunction with elaborate Daoist rituals performed by seven priests of the Three-in-One Sect (*Sanyijiao* 三一教). The sponsors consisted of a clan, which spent more than \$10,000 US for a three-day event to ensure the health and prosperity of the descendants through ascertaining the welfare and salvation of their ancestors. When Mulian reached Hell in the marionette play, clan members knelt before the stage and beseeched him to save their ancestors as well, many of them wailing and weeping loudly. During the last day of the event, the marionette troupe performed "Beidouxi" 北斗戏, an episode from the Chen Jinggu saga in which the goddess prevented an empress from miscarriage and protected the Crown Prince to whom she gave birth until he reached adulthood. This play



PUPPETEER PRIEST AND SPONSOR OF CREATION OF THE IMMORTALS FROM YONG'AN, WESTERN FUJIAN (MARIONETTE) PHOTO: FAN PEN CHEN





THE SNAKE KING AND HIS WIFE IN CREATION OF THE IMMORTALS PHOTO: FAN PEN CHEN

is traditionally used to help children go through difficult passages (*guoguan* 过关) and ensure their health as they grow up. In this particular case, a rather weak looking boy was carried by his grandmother and accompanied by his mother to the stage for "ritual fortification" conducted by the puppeteers, after the performance of this particular play.

In northeastern Fujian, a type of string puppetry was traditionally performed by priests as a component of religious rituals. Religion was such an important part of this form of puppetry that it was known as Ritual Puppetry (*fashi kuilei* 法事傀儡) of the Pear Garden Sect (*liyuanjiao* 梨园教).<sup>2</sup> Performed for individual homes and entire communities, these religious rituals were used to exorcize evil and invoke blessings from deities. They may have been the predecessors of the present long deity sagas. Ritual Puppetry performed scenes from six deity-related tales known as the Six Cave Plays (*liudong* 六洞). They enact stories of important local deities who may have been mythologized folk memories of historical heroes and heroines. Powerful figures when they were alive, these folk heroes and heroines apparently became saint-like deities who continued to protect the populace after their deaths. Except for the Cave Play, the *Southern Dynasty Cave* (*nanchaodong* 南朝洞) on Judge Bao 包公, the other five Cave Plays all seem to depict tales of local deity-saints of Fujian. The *Hibiscus Cave* (*jiurongdong* 芙蓉洞) depicts how a rebellious hero, Huaguang 华光 became a god. The *Water Border*

*Cave* (*linshuidong* 临水洞) and *Water Country Cave* (*shuiguodong* 水国洞) enact the stories of two female shamans, Chen Jingguo and Mazu 妈祖, possibly the two most popular deities in Fujian. The *Purple Gold Mountain* (*zijingshan* 紫金山) enacts episodes concerning four brothers known as golden dragons of the mountain. They were possibly local chieftains originally beyond the control of the imperial court as they were eventually "pardoned" and enfeoffed by the emperor. The *Yellow Emerald Cave* (*huangbidong* 黄碧洞) seems to be another folk memory of the sinification or co-option of indigenous rulers originally not under the control of the imperial court of the Han ethnic group.

Descriptions of some of the fragments of the *Yellow Emerald Cave* suggest that this tale of a Snake King and his sons is related to *Creation of the Immortals* in which the Snake King lives in the Red Cliff Cave (*chibidong* 赤壁洞) of the Yellow Nie-Tree Peak (*huangniefeng*

黄蘗峰). Given that these performances were transmitted orally, emerald and cliff probably referred to the same word originally, both being *bi*. Also of significance is that although the colors of the two caves are different, the Red Cliff Cave is located in a mountain that has the color yellow in its name. The names of the deity Snake King are also similar. Named Zhao Meng 招猛 in the Cave Play, he is Jiao Mang 焦蟒 in the latter. According to the Han dynasty dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字, the indigenous people of Fujian were known as descendents of snakes. In both, the Snake King marries a human girl and their three sons attain greatness. Although this Cave Play is no longer performed in northeastern Fujian, one can safely pronounce *Immortal of the Snake King* as a variation that has survived in western Fujian, not only as an extended deity play, but also replete with religious rituals performed by the main puppeteer as a priest.



THE OX-FACED AND HORSE-FACED DEMONS CAPTURE MULIAN'S UNCLE IN MULIANXI FROM PUTJIAN PHOTO: FAN PEN CHEN



I had the good fortune of having had the opportunity to observe one day of the two-day rare performance of *Creation of the Immortals*. The sponsor of the event was repaying a vow he had made to the deities twenty years ago after the back of his house was buried under a landslide. He vowed that if the deities protected the rest of his house from harm, he would sponsor a marionette performance for him/them. In due time the government moved the entire village to a town, but he did not forget his vow and decided to repay it last summer. The puppeteer who would have had to perform for Marshal Tian (*tiangong yuanshuai* 田公元帥), God of the Marionette Theatre, on his birthday anyway, killed two birds with one stone by arranging to execute this vow repayment on Marshal Tian's birthday. Having the performance at the puppeteer's roomy front courtyard was also a necessary convenience for the sponsor. Although the play should have been performed at the sponsor's home with assistance from his entire family, the fact that they are now living in apartments in a town and his sons and daughters-in-law are all busy working would have made the logistics for putting on a performance very difficult. As it was, the puppeteer's family not only performed and provided all the accouterments (candles, incense, steamed

rice cakes and snacks, fire crackers, mock paper money, etc.) but also cooked three meals a day for everyone present.

The rituals began shortly after 5:00 am, in accordance with an almanac published for Daoist priests. Two tables representing altars are set in front of the stage. Dressed in the garb of a priest, the puppeteer chanted and prayed to the Snake King deity along with the burning of mock paper money, candles, incense and the blasting off of a stick "cannon," for more than half an hour. He and his entourage (musicians and helpers) then hiked to the hills nearby where he identified a wild banana tree that would be dug up to represent the Snake King. There he set up an altar near the tree and performed another round of complex rituals for one and a half hours. A further round of rituals that lasted for another half of an hour continued after everyone returned to the house. The actual marionette performance did not begin until after breakfast, at 9:45 am. A typical ritual playlet of a celestial official (*tianguan* 天官) brought blessings to all before the main play on the Snake King finally began. Representing the deity himself, the wild banana tree that was dug up was placed against a wall in full view of the stage. The life of the Snake King was duly celebrated by the sponsor as the story progressed. As the Snake King was characterized by deafness—possibly so attributed because he could not understand the language of the Han people—one of the jobs of the sponsor was to fill a "cannon" (long rod) with gunpowder and set it off with a stick of incense to create deafening bangs that presumably the "deaf" Snake King could hear.

The priestly function of the puppeteer in this particular region is not limited to the above ritual. Wang Hua 王华, an old puppeteer, father of the priest-puppeteer who performed the Snake King legend for us, uses eggs to prognosticate the source

of ailment for sick children when he performs the child-protecting "Beidouxi" mentioned earlier. Wang Hua would roll a fresh egg around the body of the sick child, break the egg with a "spiritual knife" (*lingdao* 灵刀) and examine it for the cause of the ailment. The child who has gone through this ritual becomes so "potent" that any pregnant being (birds and animals included) who subsequently comes in contact with the child would miscarry. Wang Hua confesses that it is very difficult to find "good" eggs and he is reluctant to perform this ritual.

Both the Chen Jinggu and the Snake King legends contain episodes in which the protagonist of specific scenes effect the bringing of rain to the populace, either as a shaman priestess (Chen Jinggu) or as a deity (third son of the Snake King). Xu Maobao 徐茂宝, the puppeteer in southern Zhejiang, was famous for being particularly efficacious for ending droughts when he performed the episode in which Chen Jinggu prayed for rain. Wang Hua also brought rain during periods of drought when he performed the episode in *Creation of the Immortals* in which the protagonist opened the heavenly reservoir and led the water dragon to the suffering populace who prayed to him for rain. Wang Hua claimed



CHEN JINGGU IN "SHOU NANSHE" FROM TAISHUN,  
SOUTHERN ZHEJIANG (MARIONETTE)  
PHOTO: FAN PEN CHEN



GUANYIN IN XIANGSHANZHUAN FROM CHENHE,  
WESTERN HUNAN (ROD PUPPETRY)  
PHOTO: YE MINGSHEN



# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



MULIAN IN THE MULIAN SAGA FROM PUTIAN,  
EASTERN FUJIAN (MARIONETTE) PHOTO: FAN PEN CHEN

fifty percent success rate and that it would only rain within three kilometers of the villages where he performed.

The populace in southern China has always been known for its fondness in worshipping the spirits and carrying out shamanistic activities. Although local religious activities were either discouraged or totally banned by the government from the inception of the People's Republic of China (1949) through the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), rural China has experienced a revival of traditional activities since the 1980s. The inherited shamanic-Daoist rituals and puppet performances discussed represent a cultural heritage inextricably tied to local religions. As the hold of the belief system weakens due to outside influences and even temporary migration to towns and cities of the younger generation for work, it is feared that these rediscovered ritually potent deity puppetry performances will once again become extinct.

Fan Pen Chen is an Associate Professor in the department of East Asian Studies at SUNY-Albany. She has published two books, *Visions for the Masses: Shadow Plays from Shaanxi and Shanxi*, and *The Chinese shadow Theatre: History, Popular Religion, and Women Warriors*, and dozens of articles on the imaging of women in Chinese literature and history, the shadow and puppet theatres and popular religion.

## Endnotes

1. I was accompanied by Ye Mingsheng 叶明生, Huang Jiangxing 黄健兴 and Bradford Clark on a research trip on puppet theatres of southern China during the summer of 2008.
2. Pear Garden is the name of supposedly the first theatrical troupe formed by Emperor Xuanzong (r.713-756) of the Tang dynasty.



OFFERINGS AND THE HUNDRED FLOWER BRIDGE FOR  
"BEIDOUXI," AN EPISODE OF THE CHEN JINGGU SAGA  
FROM PUTIAN (MARIONETTE) PHOTO: FAN PEN CHEN



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**Object of Her Affection**  
Marsian De Lellis

# ARCHITECTURE, MEMORY, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE: *Making a Puppet Parade in Shanghai*

by Clare Dolan



As a workshop leader for the Bread and Puppet Theater, I was invited last March (2013) by Shen Liang of the Shanghai Theater Academy, and Hou Qinqhui of the Grassstage Theater Company, to give a workshop in "Community Theater and Street Theater." Peter Schumann, Bread & Puppet's Founder and Director, lately is more interested in working at the theater's home base in Vermont, and now sometimes sends puppeteers like myself in his stead to give Bread and Puppet workshops further afield. So, over the course of two weeks, Hou Qinqhui and I worked with 12 Shanghai Theater Academy students, some Shanghai University volunteers, and about 20 to 30 pre-and-elementary school-aged migrant worker children, to build puppets and make a parade through the migrant neighborhood of Bei Yao Wan. I had previously worked with Hou in Korea in 2010 in an "Environmental Theater Residency" with Namoodak Movement Laboratory, and Hou had worked one summer with Bread and Puppet in Vermont. However, this was our first time working together in Shanghai, and quickly it became clear that the city itself would become as much a living participant in the workshop as any of the human ones. Because articles in this journal tend to focus on the particulars of puppetry and its history, what follows may seem a bit off-topic for some readers. However, I share my experience here because it points to interesting ways in which the very materiality of our practice (performance created with puppet objects) intersects with the vagaries of Memory, Place, and Politics.

Upon my arrival, I experience Shanghai as a science fiction movie set. As my host's car zips into the center of the city, I exclaim at the highway on-and-off ramps awash in neon purple, skyscrapers adorned with multicolored lights

cutting crazy shapes against the night sky. I'm told that all of this development happened in the last fifteen years. But to the Shanghaiese that seems very long ago indeed. *The only constant thing here is that it is constantly changing*, Mr. Shen says as he deposits me in a hotel across from the Shanghai Theater Academy, where he is on the faculty of the Educational Drama Program of the Theatre Literature Department. From my room's window the next

morning I stare out at the city, and it takes a minute to notice what I soon realize is an excellent illustration of the contrasts embodied here: nestled between a busy expressway overpass and my high rise hotel is a tiny, walled temple. From my 18<sup>th</sup> floor window I can see inside the courtyard, where incense smoke curls over small fires, and modest crowds of (mostly old) people are folding tiny origami figures to cast into the fires in honor of today's holiday, the birthday of the female Buddha.

Our workshop space is a catholic church/community center in a migrant worker neighborhood. Each day the Theater Academy students, Hou, Shen, and I, made the long commute from one Shanghai reality into another. The area of the city around the theater academy and my hotel is a soaring, concrete, commercial place, filled with busy, well-stocked stores and busy, well-dressed people, whose eyes slide over and past my face without comment. In contrast, the migrant neighborhood's low buildings line narrow cramped alleyways. The tiny front rooms of the squat shacks house makeshift "stores," often with just one or two shelves containing a few plastic bowls for sale, a bit of twine, a couple of bottles of oil or alcohol, a pack of batteries. Life spills out into the alleyways. Tons of little kids run around in gangs, laughing



and shouting and playing games. Hou explains to me that all these kids are technically “illegal.” Migration from other parts of the country to the city is strictly controlled, and the majority of these folks are not registered, do not conform to the one child rule; they are invisible people. In these streets my Caucasian face is an event. Often there is shock, then laughter, then pointing and exclamations of “foreigner!” The sight of my face makes some folks double up with laughter.

We stumble through the first few days. Theater Academy Students are bright and positive, but reluctant to speak up. We discuss the goals of our time together: to create sets of puppets to use in a parade that we’ll organize here in the neighborhood. We’ll work with the elementary school kids who regularly come to the community center after school, and be joined periodically by several Shanghai University students who are already volunteering at the community center. I talk about how, at Bread and Puppet, we think of a Parade as a moving series of images that tell a story right in the street. I explain how parades can tell the story of the place they occur in, or they can address an issue, or deliver a message. They can be simple gestures of celebration and also of protest. The students nod and smile. “So when we talk about this neighborhood, this place, or even about this city, Shanghai, what kinds of stories might we be talking about?” I ask, naively.

Silence.

“Um, this is a poor neighborhood, maybe the kids here are sad,” one of the students offers finally. “Maybe we want to talk about happy things and make cute puppets?”

Some mornings, Hou and I walk around the city. Shanghai has a memory problem, she explains. The face of the city is changing so quickly, no one can keep up. Streets appear and disappear,

skyscrapers rise and fall, old traditional neighborhoods are demolished and new “traditional” neighborhoods for tourists are constructed. Hou points out a massive marble money symbol centrally mounted in the facade of a new building. “In the 1980s money came,” she says. “Now China is addicted. Money is the new opium.”

We walk along the river. “This used to be a big open area,” she says. “In 1989 thousands of students gathered here. Now there is no open space here at all. Each building has a purpose. I wonder if you knew this was a possibility—to erase memories through architecture.”

The first few days we engage in a complicated dance with the students. Hou warns me that my idea of a parade and of what street theater is all about does not exist in Shanghai (*and perhaps is not relevant*, I quickly start to think). But gradually we all get to know each other, and start to build images together. We decide to make houses and little hand puppets who will stick out of the windows of the houses and speak to each other. We talk about the problem of pollution, (which the students joke about constantly). The big news story just then happens to be about thousands of dead pig carcasses that ended up in tributaries of the Huangpu River, and we agree to make a river, complete with comical swimming/floating/drowning pig puppets. One evening on our walk back to the bus, Mr. Shen points out a set of letters that I have often seen stenciled onto the sides of buildings. It means “Condemned,” more or less, and is a mark that the building or area is slated for demolition. Many of these neighborhoods are being cleared out to make way for the new highrise housing developments and businesses. In the aftermath of the demolition, the invisible people melt back into the streets, scrambling to establish themselves somewhere else. I think of this the next day, when





Hou and I demonstrate a technique for making very large lightweight figures from papier maché, using cardboard and newspaper armatures. We create a giant monster, with a huge mouth and teeth. When the figure is dry, removed from the mold, and mounted on sticks, we end up painting the word "Condemned" on this monster's face, naming him after this neighborhood's nightmare. The students don't like this figure. It is too ugly and sad they say. When it is their turn to use the cardboard and newspaper armature technique to build a giant puppet, they build a large festive female figure which they will call Hope.

We build everything from cardboard, paper, cornstarch paste, fabric, and paint. We mass-produce flags using stencils that we cut from file-folders and print with latex paint. After a little awkward negotiation, we are allowed to gather wood branches from a local construction yard, which we use as sticks for flags and support structures for puppets. In the early afternoons Hou and I work with the Theater Academy students, then when the neighborhood kids come by after school, the Academy students work with them to finish the puppets – often painting, decorating, or creating costumes for the figures we've started earlier. It is hard for all of them to imagine what the final parade will look like. I try to explain that in the last few days of the workshop, we'll do movement experiments with each group of puppets. These different puppet groups will comprise the different sections of the parade. Each student will become the leader of a particular section, and on parade day, when all the children and neighborhood folks and last-minute volunteers arrive to join us, the section leaders will show newcomers how to put on the puppets and perform the choreographies.

Our first movement rehearsal is a bit painful, due to shyness. Initially, the Academy students are extremely embarrassed. But then a miracle comes running into the courtyard, in the form of the little neighborhood kids, who

gleefully climb into the puppets and so easily and naturally play follow-the-leader, moving and dancing and falling down and giggling, that the older students loosen up, and soon everyone is engaged.

Parade day arrives. Gradually the space fills up with the neighborhood kids, their parents, volunteers from Shanghai University with friends in tow, Grasstage Theater members, and other random people who I haven't seen before. The Theater Academy Students rise to the occasion and start rehearsing with their parade sections in different places in the courtyard. At a certain moment there's a complete chaos of simultaneous motion, wild colors and overlapping sounds, and to me this moment in the courtyard seems like the true achievement of the project: the coming together of disparate populations of this complicated city – migrant worker grandmas with their three-year-old grandkids, young theater students and middle-aged theater practitioners, professors from various institutions, Catholic church-goers and NGO workers, even the lady who sells my favorite sesame cakes from the cart down the street. Everyone is engaged in moving their bodies, making sounds, creating admittedly sloppy but bright, lively images which are passing through the street, opening up a new kind of public space. That seems to me what the work is all about. The puppets are what make it possible: scruffy paper-mache figures which encourage laughter of recognition, which necessitate cooperation to operate them, and which signify simply "pig," "bird," "water," and "house," but also – when engaged by the bodies of the participants who dance them in public down the commonest city street – resonate through deeper layers of meaning.

Who knows what the community really makes of this. Folks line the streets and watch, with both terrified and delighted expressions on their faces, pointing, shouting things, laughing, scowling. Kids and dogs run after us, join us. I hear





# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

Hou and I demonstrate a technique for making very large lightweight figures from paper. We made a newspaper monster. When the mold, we put up paint in this mold. This monster is made by this neighborhood students who are ugly and turn to us. We use paper armatures for the puppet, the figure which we buy paper, we paint. We use stencils to print and print awkward. When we gather we use construction paper, flags and. In the end, we work with the then when by after a work with often pair costumes earlier. It is fine what I try to express of the we experimenter. These different surprise the day. Each student a particular when all the folks and to join us, newcomer and perform.

We buy paper, we paint. We use stencils to print and print awkward. When we gather we use construction paper, flags and. In the end, we work with the then when by after a work with often pair costumes earlier. It is fine what I try to express of the we experimenter. These different surprise the day. Each student a particular when all the folks and to join us, newcomer and perform.

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lighted expressions on their faces, pointing, shouting things, laughing, scowling. Kids and dogs run after us, join us. I hear

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a few spectators shout out loud the word "Condemned" written on the monster's face. After it is over, all the participants are clearly eager to continue, but we're unsure where else to go, we've sort of "run out" of parade too soon. But despite these things, when we meet in the church afterwards to talk and evaluate the experience, a clear transformation has taken place: very many are eager to share their feelings and thoughts.

When I leave the city, as I watch the buildings, neighborhoods, and street signs approach and recede and disappear past the car window, I think about Memory, the intersection of public and private space, and the furious pace of change that shapes life here, and indeed shapes us all in our rapidly unfurling 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Clare Dolan is a Painter, Director, and Performer of Cantastoria, Toy Theater, Outdoor Puppetry, and Stilt Dancing, while simultaneously living a secret double life as a nurse in her small Vermont town. She's a veteran of the Bread and Puppet Theater, and founder of The Museum of Everyday Life.



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# FOLK PUPPET THEATRES IN CHINA, PART I

by Mingsheng Ye, Senior Researcher,  
Fujian Provincial Research Institute for the Arts

Translated by Fan Pen Chen

Chinese puppetry has been known traditionally as *kuileixi* and *murenxi* and by a host of different names among the populace, but basically consists of the following types: string puppetry, rod puppetry, glove puppetry, water puppetry and iron-rod puppetry, etc. Sporting a long history and a variety of forms, it can be considered a precious portion of the treasures of traditional Chinese culture. It not only manifests the artistic creativities of the ancients, it also represents an amalgamation of religion, folk culture and art, and truly is one of the gems of the intangible cultural heritage of China with outstanding characteristics. Chinese puppetry survives as an integral part of the lives of many rural communities. Despite tremendous changes in global cultures, puppetry still thrives among folk communities in China. Folk puppetry in China survives in so many locations with so many locally famous troupes that it is impossible for me to mention all of them. In this article, I will selectively introduce the



FIGURE 1: PICTURE IN THE YUAN DYNASTY (1280-1368) BOOK, *SIX CREATIONS OF THE WESTERN CHAMBER (LIUHUAN XIXIANG)*

more characteristic as well as the more neglected artistic forms and troupes in presenting a survey of the present situation of Chinese folk puppet theatres.

## STRING PUPPET THEATRES

String Puppet Theatre (*tixian mu'ouxi*; marionettes), also known as Puppet Theatre (*kuileixi*) and String Theatre (*xianxi*), is the oldest and most prevalent type of Chinese puppetry. It was used during the Han dynasty (25 BC - 220

AD) at funerals and was referred to as "funerary music." Widely spread since the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1280) dynasties (Figure 1), it presently survives in southern China at Shantou and Wuhua of Guangdong, Taishun and Pingyang of Zhejiang, Xinghua in Jiangsu, Jingxi in Guangxi and Yilan and Tainan in Taiwan; and in northern China in western Liaoning and Heyang in Shaanxi. But it is in Fujian that the String Puppet Theatre is most popular. In Puxian of eastern Fujian, there is the Puxian Wooden Ritual Priest Theatre (*Puxian mushixi*). In northern Fujian, we find the Daqiang Music Golden-String Puppet (*daqiang jinxian kuilei*) and the Historical Tales Theatre (*zhuanxi*) of Pucheng. Zhenghe and Shouning in eastern Fujian sport the Siping Puppet Theatre (*siping kuileixi*). Fuzhou of central Fujian has the Siming String-Puppet Theatre (*ciming xianxi*). Gaoqiang and Luantan [Music Style] Puppet Theatres thrive in western Fujian. These different traditions of puppetry have always



FIGURE 2: THE STRING PUPPET THEATRE OF QUANZHOU PERFORMS *FOUR GENERALS ESTABLISHING THE TANG (KAITANG SEIJANG)* AT THE UNITED NATIONS



FIGURE 3: THE STRING PUPPET THEATRE OF QUANZHOU PERFORMS *THE IMPERIAL OFFICIAL (QINCHAI DACHEN)*



FIGURE 4: STRING PUPPET PLAY, *MULIAN SAVES HIS MOTHER (MULIAN JIUMU)* IN PUTIAN, FUJIAN



existed to serve the functions of religious activities and the repayment of vows made to deities (i.e., performed basically for the gods and goddesses). Despite the frequent prohibitions imposed upon them since the 1950s, during the twentieth century, more than 400 troupes have survived in rural Fujian. Indeed, Fujian sports the largest number of String Puppet traditions and troupes in China. Among the traditions in Fujian, the String Puppet Theatre of Quanzhou is the most influential (Figure 2).

According to *Document on Transformation (huashu)* by the priest, Tan Xiao of the Five dynasties (907-960), String Puppetry was already very popular in Quanzhou by the end of the Tang dynasty. During the Yuan (1280-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, it developed into a form of puppetry that used Nanqu Music under the influence of the prevalent Nanxi Opera, but still maintained the style of "Storytelling Puppetry" (*shuohua kuilei*) of the Song and Yuan dynasties. The plays in its traditional repertoire (known as *luolongbu*) include 42 volumes of more than 400 plays of historical tales, beginning with *Wiwang Invades Zhou (wiwang fazhou)* of the Zhou dynasty (1122-722 BC), through events up to the early Ming dynasty, and mythical stories on deities such as Han Xiangzi, Wang Shipeng,

Guanyin and Mulian in Nanxi style.

The number of strings of Quanzhou puppets ranges from 10 to more than 30 per puppet. Their height ranges from 70 to 80 cm with strings of 140 to 150 cm. Their string manipulation includes numerous extraordinarily difficult techniques and the various roles of the characters are guided by strict rules. From the traditional four character roles of the "Four Beauty Troupes" (*simeiban*) to the numerous roles of the "Five Famed Troupes" (*wumingjia*), one discerns its progress to perfection and the creative artistry of its generations of traditional artists. In terms of manipulating techniques, Quanzhou puppetry tops all in this field. Aside from the internationally renowned Quanzhou Puppetry Troupe, Quanzhou boasts of Yangchun Puppetry troupe of Yangchun county and numerous family-based folk troupes, the most technically accomplished of which are found in the counties of Nan'an, Anxi and Dehua. Quanzhou String Puppet Theatre was among the first batch to be named a national intangible cultural heritage (Figure 3).

The Wooden Ritual Priest Puppet Theatre of Putian enacts ancient Nanxi operas, as well as still popular religious plays aimed at requesting blessings, exorcising evil influences and performing funerary rites through plays such as *The*

*Northern Dipper (beidouxi)*, *Favor Repayment (yuanxi)* and *Mulian (mulian)* (Figure 4).

String Puppet Theatre that uses the ancient music of Gaoqiang (translator: all traditional Chinese puppet theatres are basically operatic in form) deserves attention for its wide variety and link to historical traditions. The closest to Song dynasty puppetry is the Golden-Stringed Puppet Theatre (*jinxian kuilei*) of Pinghushan and Taqian south of the mountains of northern Fujian where historical tales are enacted by only one puppeteer manipulating the puppets at the front of the stage and one "puppetry drummer" (*kuileigu*) behind him. The second most ancient tradition is the Daqiang Puppet Theatre of Qingshui County of Yong'an City. The tales enacted here tend to be myths concerning deities, such as Goddess Chen Jinggu executing a snake demon, God Huaguang rescuing his mother and the Snake King named Jiao Mang (Figure 5). The Siping Puppet Theatre of Shouning, Zhenghe and Pingnan counties in eastern Fujian also enact mythical tales about deities using the ancient Gaoqiang music. Due to the religious functions it serves, this puppet theatre is referred to locally as the "Pear Garden Sect" (*liyuanjiao*) (Figure 6). The puppets of Siping Puppet Theatre are also noteworthy in terms of the



FIGURE 5: DAQIANG MUSIC STRING PUPPET PLAY, CREATION OF THE IMMORTALS (DUXIANJI) IN YONG'AN, FUJIAN



FIGURE 6: "INVITING THE DEITY" RITUAL PERFORMED BY A SHAMAN-PRIEST OF LIYUAN CULT OF SHOUNING, FUJIAN



FIGURE 7: PUPPETS OF THE SIPING OPERA IN PINANG, FUJIAN





traditional artistry in their carving and costumes (Figure 7). The Hakka Gaoqiang puppet troupes among the various counties in western

Fujian have also gained international fame. String puppet troupes using Gaoqiang and Luantan music still thrive among the populace of several villages at Baishazhen in Shanghang County (Figure 8).

Known as "Kuileixi" and "Jiali," the string puppet theatre migrated to Taiwan along with the immigrants from mainly Quanzhou, Zhangzhou and Yongding regions of Fujian. The style found in southern Taiwan and Jinmen belongs to the Quanzhou tradition while that in northern Taiwan came from western Fujian. They differ in the contexts for performance, style of music, performance, carving and repertoires. The function is exorcism in the north, performed usually after unnatural tragedies such as deaths caused by car and mining accidents, and suicides. String puppet performance in southern Taiwan serves mainly in rituals that beseech blessings, such as during the celebration of the birthday of the Jade Emperor, the 100<sup>th</sup>-day of newborns, weddings, birthdays and purification rites before worshipping Lord Heaven (*tiangong*), consecrating new

temples and homes, and at the conclusion of funerals. Aside from the above, Taiwan also has a Hakka string puppet theatre which originated from Dingzhou, Fujian; and an exorcising ritual that uses marionettes employed by Glove Puppet troupes (Figure 9).

Zhejiang is another province in which String Puppet Theatre thrives. Villages in the counties of Taishun, Pingyang and Changnan of Wenzhou, and those of Suichang and Songyang of Lishui are particularly fond of performing the tales of Goddess Chen Jinggu (*Chen Shisi* and *Furenzhuan*) for vow repayment due to the local popularity of her cult (Figure 10).

String Puppet Theatres once proliferated in northern China with folk troupes in Shandong, Hubei, Henan, Hebei, Shaanxi and Gansu. Those found in Lingbao of Henan, Xiaoyi and Ruicheng of Shanxi and Heyang of Shaanxi were particularly popular. Also known as String-Barbarian Opera (*xianhuxi*) and String-Monkey Opera (*xianhouxi*), the strings used by the String Puppet Theatres of Heyang only number 5 to 7 of about 1 meter in length. The puppets are rather flat in shape without either

hands and feet, or with hands but no feet, showing characteristics of the puppets of antiquity (Figure 11). Like other string puppet traditions, that of Heyang once served mainly religious functions including vow repayment. But tradition has it that during the period from the end of the Ming to the beginning of the Qing dynasties, its music and repertoire underwent reform under the influence of the local Confucian, Li Guan, who advocated for the reduction of its service to religious activities and promoted instead technical artistry and its role as a spectators' art form. Aside from historical and court mystery tales, Heyang String Puppet Theatre also sports romantic stories, totaling several hundred extended plays. Numerous lively, humorous skits popular with the audience are also included in their repertoire. Thirty-nine troupes have made their appearance during the past three hundred years, of which the most famous were those found in the villages of Nanshuncun, Guojiapo and Linquncun. The String Puppet Theatre of Heyang attained status as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006.

Among the folk string puppet theatre traditions of China is a special form called [String] Pulling Yang Opera (*tiyangxi*) or Yang Opera (*yangxi*) found mainly in Shejianxiang of Yuanbaqu



FIGURE 8: GAOQIANG MUSIC PUPPET PLAY, *HUAZI ENTERS THE CITY* (*HUAZI JINCHENG*)



FIGURE 9: LIN TSAN-CH'ENG (LIN ZANCHENG), DIRECTOR OF THE NEW FU-HSIEN TROUPE OF YILAN, TAIWAN



FIGURE 10: "FLOODING GOLD MOUNTAIN" (*SHUIMAN JINSHAN*) BY THE STRING PUPPET TROUPE IN PINYANG, ZHEJIANG





in Guangyuan, and Mamingxiang of Zitongxian in Mianyang of Sichuan. String puppetry is a component of Yang Opera which is an exorcist *nuoxi* that consists of "Heavenly Drama" (*tianxi*: string puppetry), "Earthly Drama" (*dixi*: mask-wearing ritual drama) and "Flower Drama" (*huaxi*: local Dengxi Operas by human actors). The "Heavenly Drama" involves deities and is consequently performed at the uppermost level of the stage. Thirty-two string-puppet deities of the "Heavenly Drama" appear on the stage ritualistically without enacting specific story lines (Figure 12). In so far as these string puppets are informed by this primitive form of puppetry ritualistically without enacting real plays, they provide for us evidence of its original religious form and are invaluable in our studies of the evolution of Chinese puppetry.

#### GLOVE PUPPET THEATRES

Also known as Cloth Bag Opera (*budaixi*), Within Palm Opera (*zhangzhongxi*), Finger and Palm Opera (*zhizhangxi*), Shoulder Pole Opera (*jiandanxi*) and Gouli Puppets (*goulizi*), Glove Puppet Theatre performers manipulate a puppet in each hand. The date of inception for this form of puppetry is unclear. According to tradition, it originated during the Ming dynasty and has spread throughout

China by the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), when several literary and gazetteer sources made mention of it (Figure 13). Since only one person performs in a glove puppet theatre troupe, it is also called Single Performer Troupe (*dujiaoban*). Due to the fact that this form of puppetry was traditionally performed by itinerant artists who roamed the towns and villages to eke out a living, its connection to religious activities tended to be comparatively weak. It usually enacts historical tales and has been popular among the populace because of the economy in hiring such troupes. They survive in Wuqiao of Changzhou in Hebei, Foushan in Shanxi, Yangzhou in Jiangsu, Qianyang in Hunan, Lingshui in Sichuan, Pingyang and Changnan in Zhejiang and various locations in Fujian and Taiwan where it has been particularly popular. Many of the traditions of Glove Puppet Theatres have been named provincial or national level intangible cultural artifacts.

The most thriving province for Glove Puppet Theatres is Fujian. In southern Fujian, it was found in Quan-

zhou and Zhangzhou; in central Fujian, in Fuzhou; and in eastern Fujian, in Fu'an, Shirong, Fuding, etc.. Fuzhou used to refer to glove puppetry as Head-Like Opera (*xiangtouxì*) and Head-Through Opera (*chuantouxì*), but it no longer survives there. In Fu'an, Shirong and Fuding of eastern Fujian where it has survived, the tradition is referred to as Curtain Opera (*zhangmanxi*). The most influential traditions of Glove Puppet Theatres exist in the forms of the "Southern Style" (*nanpai*) of Jinjiang (Figure 14); Hui'an and Yongchun in Quanzhou; and the "Northern Style" (*beipai*) of Zhangzhou (Figure 15). The latter developed from one-man troupes to those of many performers per troupe and attained a climax in artistry as well as international fame for glove puppetry.

Glove Puppet Theatre also proliferates in the counties of Pingyang and Changnan in Zhejiang. Known locally as "Single-Handed Glove Puppet Theatres" (*dandang budaixi*), more than ten folk troupes survive. Their stages have developed from using curtains to carved wooden structures. They use the local "Storytelling Music" (*shuoshudiao*) and perform extended



FIGURE 11: LOYALTY, FILIAL PIETY AND SAGACITY (ZHONGXIAOXIAN) BY A STRING PUPPET TROUPE IN HEYANG, SHANXI



FIGURE 12: TIYANGXI OF SHEJIAN, SICHUAN



FIGURE 13: PICTURE OF COVERLET OPERA (BEIDANYI TU) DURING THE QING DYNASTY (1644-1911)



serial historical and mythical stories including *Historical Romance of Sui and Tang* (*Sui Tang yanyi*), *Tale of the Expedition to the East* (*Zhengdong-zhuan*), *Tale of the Expedition to the West* (*Zhengxi zhuan*), *Generals of the Yang Family* (*Yangjiajiang*), *Story of the White Snake* (*baishezhuan*), *Tale of Lady Chen Shisi* (*Chen Shisi niangniang zhuan*) on the Goddess Chen Jinggu, etc. (Figure 16). A single puppeteer manipulates the puppets, sings, speaks and plays the musical instruments. They are still frequently hired at temple festivals and private celebrations, and remain a specialty form of theatre in the entertainment culture of the locals.

The Glove Puppet Theatre of Shaoyang County in Hunan consists of a bench and a bundle made of the curtain for its stage. As this curtain also doubled as a blanket for the puppeteer, it was also known as the Blanket Opera (*beiwoxi*). Like the Glove Puppet Theatre of Zhejiang, that of Shaoyang is also a one-man show in which the roles of the puppeteer and musician are combined in one. Employing the music of the local Qiju Opera, the form originated in the Liu clan of Yanwoling in Baizhucun of Jiugongqiaozen. Tradition has it



FIGURE 17: LIU YUZHANG, PUPPETEER OF BLANKET OPERA OF SHAOYANG, HUNAN, AND HIS STAGE

that the founding family of this clan arrived at this locality as refugees during the late Yuan early Ming period, eighteen generations and more than 500 years ago (Figure 17). About thirty-some puppets are used by each one-man "troupe." The puppeteer uses his hands and feet and his mouth to manipulate puppets, play a variety of percussion instruments and sing, speak and blow a bone-whistle. The plays consisted primarily of episodes of *The Three Kingdoms* (*sanguo yanyi*), *Journey to the West* (*xiyouji*), mythical plays, martial plays and comedies, and were immensely popular among the locals. In the past, this form of theatre provided the performers a means to maintain a living in the poor mountainous environs. At

its height, more than 110 "troupes" traveled from its village. Presently, only two "troupes" have survived. The form was designated as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2005.

[Part II of Professor Ye's article begins on page 44]

### PHOTO CREDITS

String Puppet Theatre of Quanzhou-  
Figures 1, 2, 3

Mingsheng Ye- Figures 4, 5, 6, 8,  
10, 11, 12, 16, 17

Puppetry Museum in Taipei-  
Figure 9

*The Art of Chinese Puppetry*  
(*Zhongguo mu'ou yishu*)-  
Figures 13, 15

Jinjiang Puppet Theatre- Figure 14



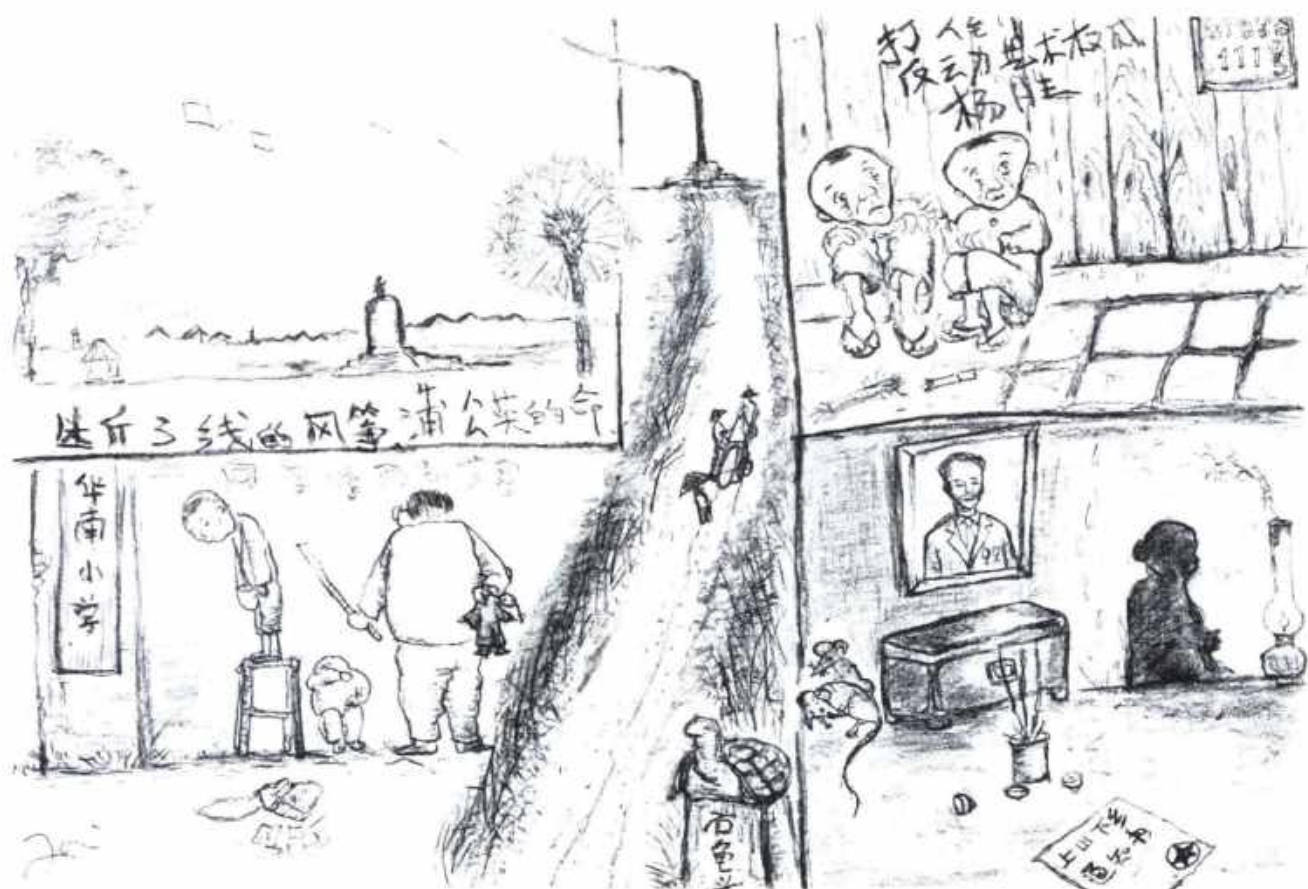
FIGURE 14: LI BOFEN, MASTER PUPPETEER OF THE SOUTHERN STYLE OF GLOVE PUPPET THEATRE OF SOUTHERN FUJIAN



FIGURE 15: YANG SHENG, MASTER PUPPETEER OF THE NORTHERN STYLE OF GLOVE PUPPET THEATRE OF ZHANGZHOU IN SOUTHERN FUJIAN



FIGURE 16: KARMIC RELATIONS (ZAI SHENGYUAN), A GLOVE PUPPET PLAY FROM PINGYANG, ZHEJIANG



This storyboard was drawn by Yeung Fai.

Yeung Fai is a third-generation Chinese handpuppet performer whose family faced hardship, repression, and imprisonment as suspected artists during China's Cultural Revolution. He fled China for other parts of the world— South America, and then Europe.

Yeung Fai finally made his way to the Institut International de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières, France, which has supported his efforts to re-invent traditional Chinese handpuppet technique as a medium for contemporary story telling.

Jianyu Huo has generously provided us with a translation of the text:

1. Chinese words under the kites, upper left of the picture.

断了线的风筝， 蒲公英的命

A kite with a broken line seems as the life of the dandelion.

2. Chinese words in the left of this picture.

华南小学

Huanan Primary school

3. Chinese words on the wall in the left.

向雷锋同志学习

Study from Lei Feng

(see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lai\\_Feng](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lai_Feng))

4. Chinese words in the upper right.

打倒反动艺术权威杨胜

Down with the reactionary artistic authority, Yangsheng  
(a person unknown to the translator).

5. The notice with Chinese words on the floor to the right.

上山下乡通知书

Going and working in the mountainous areas and countryside,  
or

Up to the mountains and down to the villages

(see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sh%C3%A0ngsh%C4%81n\\_xi%C3%A0xi%C4%81ng\\_y%C3%B9nd%C3%B2ng](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sh%C3%A0ngsh%C4%81n_xi%C3%A0xi%C4%81ng_y%C3%B9nd%C3%B2ng))



# AUTHENTIC AND EXOTIC: *German Performances of Chinese Shadow Plays in the 1900s*

Otto Erich Wieghardt interviewed by Jianyu Huo

*Jianyu Huo: Would you please introduce yourself and your experience related to Chinese shadow plays?*

**Otto Erich Wieghardt:** I am now over eighty, but young. I currently live in Berlin. In 1957, a friend of mine, who was a painter, artist, introduced me to Dr. Max Bührmann (1904-1976), while Max was looking for a person with an interest in shadow plays. I had to learn to eat with chopsticks (a joke...), to learn to mount the figures on three sticks in one hand, to move them, and make them to dance. I had to also practise speaking clearly and distinctly. After six weeks I had the chance to help on the stage behind the screen. I become the youngest player in our group. I was lucky to perform Chinese shadow plays from 1957



HANS JOACHIM KEMPER (L) AND MYSELF, c 1960. NORMALLY ONE PERFORMS WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS; WE ARE CLOSE TO THE SCREEN AT THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S REQUEST.

to 1967 in "San Mei Hua Ban Ying Xi" (Three Plum Blossom Shadow Plays Troupe) under the direction of the theater scholar Dr. Max Bührmann.

*JH: As a former performer of Chinese shadow plays, would you please introduce me to the early situation of Chinese shadow troupes in Germany in the 1900s?*



PROFESSOR GEORG JACOB (R) AND MAX BÜHRMANN (C) AS A STUDENT, WITH TWO OTHER STUDENTS, PERFORMING WITH THE SHADOW FIGURES, UNIVERSITY OF KIEL.

**OEW:** Professor Jacob (1862-1936) taught theater at the University of Kiel. He influenced his student Max Bührmann to get together with other interested students to play with the Chinese figures in his own collection.

The Student Group was founded by students at the University of Kiel under the leadership of Max Bührmann. There were twelve students in this troupe including Max Bührmann, Chuan Chen, Anne Marie Brunke, Margarethe John, Gertrud Koch, Wilhelmine Rodewald, Renate Rosenberg, Mary Wermig, Werner Betz, Hermann von Braunbehrens, H. J. Neitzke and Hellmuth Vriesen. On May 26, 1932, the so-called "Student Group" started to perform Chinese shadow plays. They performed "The Borrowed Umbrella" in honour of Professor Georg Jacob's seventieth birthday. The stage director of these students was Max Bührmann and he got help and assistance from Chuan Chen, who also played the bamboo flute. They played five times for audiences at the university.

In 1934, Max founded, together with the most interested students, San Mei Hua Ban Ying Xi (Three Plum Blossom Shadow Plays), a name given by Professor Jacob, as a compliment for

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

its three young ladies: Anne Marie Brunke, Brunhild Lessing. **OEW:** Yes. Max was invited to study and exchange knowledge

ese shadow plays in Bei-  
he invitation was through  
ral Relations with Foreign

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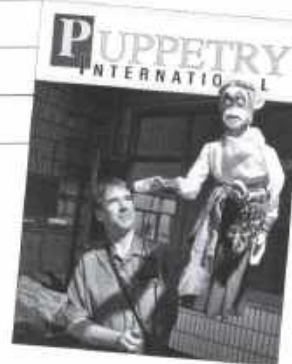
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**w w w . u n i m a - u s a . o r g**

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Museum after Max died.

Who was the troupe's  
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its three young ladies: Anne Marie Brunke, Brunhild Lessing, and Anni Pommerening, who were all German students at the University of Kiel. Professor Ferdinand Lessing introduced them to the audience before the performance. They played five times in Berlin and sixteen times in other places.

Between 1936 and 1951, the theatre was inactive. Professor Jacob died in 1937. The students went their separate ways. After the war, Max got a job as a culture manager in the city of Lüdenscheid (his birthplace). He had Jacob's collection and he remembered Jacob's words: that the figures should be moved in the way that conveyed the sense of each one. In 1951, he made contact with culturally interested people, with whom he tried to start a new group using the old name San Mei Hua Ban.

**JH:** Do you remember the five Chinese shadow plays that the Student Group and San Mei Hua Ban performed?

**OEW:** Der geliehene Regenschirm (Jie Yu San - *The Borrowed Umbrella*), Die weiße Fuchsdämonin (Bai Hu Zhuan - *The White Fox Demoness*), Aus dem Leben des Generals Kutse-i (From the Life of General Kutse-i), and Die weiße Schlange (*The White Snake*).

**JH:** Did the three girls go to China to study Chinese shadow performance or just study from Professor Jacob or Bührmann?

**OEW:** They studied from Professor Jacob and Dr. Bührmann. Brunhild Lessing was the daughter of Ferdinand Lessing and travelled together with him and Sven Hedin to Tibet and China.

**JH:** Did Professor Jacob go to China to study Chinese shadow plays?

**OEW:** No, I don't think so.

**JH:** Did Max go to China to study shadow plays? If so, when and where?

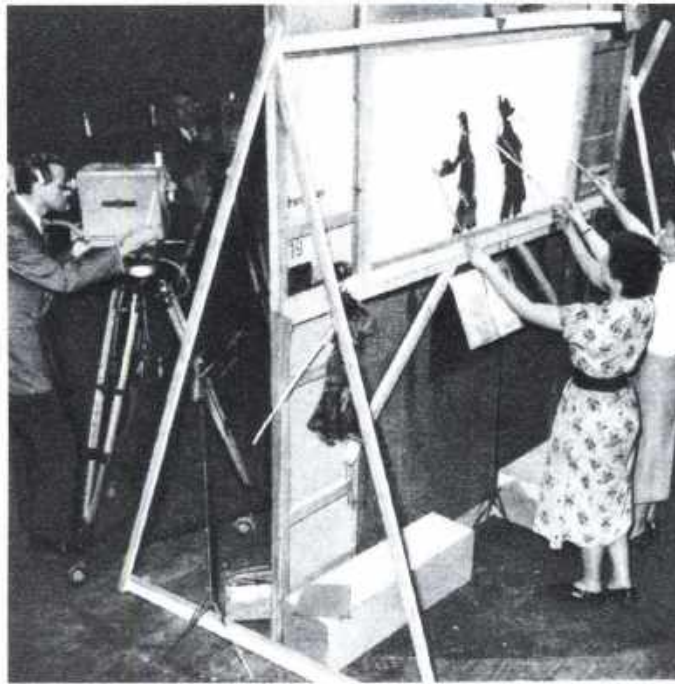
**OEW:** Yes. Max was invited to study and exchange knowledge about the different forms of the Chinese shadow plays in Beijing, Chengdu, and Wuhan in 1957. The invitation was through "Chinese Peoples Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries."

**JH:** So Professor Jacob never went to China, and Dr. Bührmann visited China in 1957. How could they know and teach Chinese shadow plays in Germany in the 1930s?

**OEW:** Learning by doing. Max also got help from the assistant Chuan Chen at the University of Kiel.

**JH:** Did Max perform by using Chinese shadow puppets and manuscripts? If so, where are those puppets and manuscripts now?

**OEW:** Yes, he used the figures from Sichuan (the collection of his teacher, Georg Jacob). Jacob got them from a Manchu prince (I believe the figures were from the time of the emperor Qian Long) and later made a present of them to Max with the agreement that they be used to perform Chinese shadow plays. The manuscripts were translated by the Sinologists Grube, Laufer, and Krebs. The figures were collected in the Film Museum after Max died.



A TV-VIDEOTAPING

**JH:** Who was the troupe's owner when Max performed Chinese shadow plays?

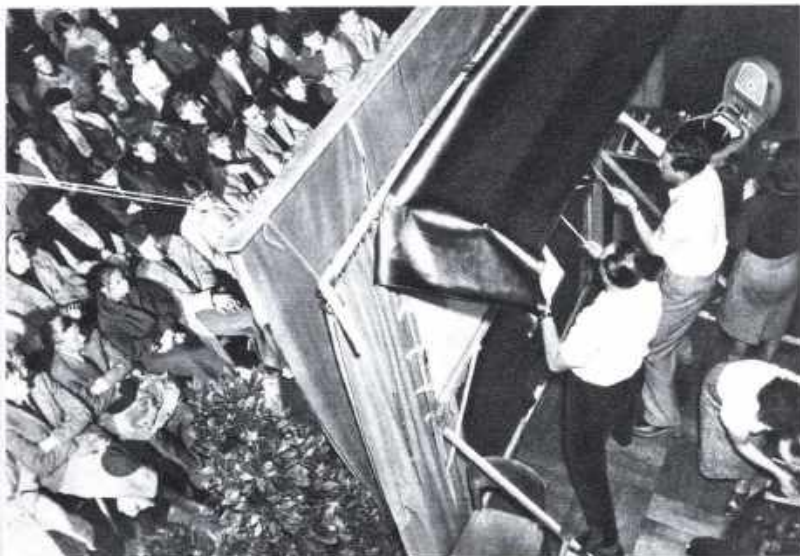
**OEW:** Dr. Max Bührmann, as a private scholar.

**JH:** Did Max also perform other kinds of plays after he started to perform Chinese shadow plays?

**OEW:** No, only Chinese shadow plays. But he also directed German operas.

**JH:** Did Max found his own theater company or troupe? If so, was Max's troupe the first troupe of performing Chinese shadow plays in Germany?

## PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



A PUBLIC PERFORMANCE IN THE LEATHERMUSEUM OFFENBACH

**OEW:** Yes. After the war, Max started to reconstitute his former Student Group in 1951 with some younger friends and artists. This was the first troupe and the only one. He invited me to join the troupe SAN MEI BAN YING XI in 1957.

**JH:** *When and why did Dr Max Bührmann stop performing Chinese shadow plays?*

**OEW:** He stopped around 1970. He died in 1976.

**JH:** *Which museum or individual has Chinese shadow play manuscripts in Germany?*

**OEW:** Perhaps the Ledermuseum Offenbach, Filmmuseum Düsseldorf, and TheaterFigurenMuseum Kiel.

**JH:** *You said that the five Chinese shadow plays were translated by Grube, Laufer, and Krebs. Have you met with the translators? Do you know if they had trouble translating?*

**OEW:** I did not meet them. I am not that old.

**JH:** *Are the manuscripts that Max's troupe used retained now? If so, where are they?*

**OEW:** Max bequeathed the whole collection together with all the manuscripts to his friend Hans Joachim Kemper. I think they are in his hands.

**JH:** *Was Hans Joachim Kemper a performer in Max's troupe? Would you please let me know a little bit about him?*

**OEW:** He was a very intimate friend of Max and performed in Max's troupe longer than anyone else. After Max's death, Hans also visited China. But there were not enough interested and talented people to continue performing, and we missed the spirit of Max too much.

**JH:** *What is the spirit of Max?*

**OEW:** Max was more than a leader of a theater troupe. His spirit means: he was our teacher, our friend, our MASTER ... he pushed us forward when we were down, and he gave us motivation and helped us whenever and wherever he could. He organized our tours, and took care of our private life. He was like a father, especially for his intimate friend Hans Joachim Kemper.



DR. MAX BÜHRMANN DURING A TV SHOW

**JH:** *Did you see the original Chinese version of Borrowed Umbrella?*

**OEW:** Original Chinese versions we did not see. Also, we could not read the Chinese language.

**JH:** *How did you deal with music when Max's troupe performed Chinese shadow plays? Did you use Chinese music or German music?*

**OEW:** For the arias we used Chinese music. When the player was speaking or reciting poetry, the music was in the background. We had them copied from old recordings on our tape recorder and had to insert pauses for the normal speaking parts without music.



**JH:** *Did other troupes perform Chinese shadow plays when Max's troupe played from 1932 to 1970?*

**OEW:** No other troop performing Chinese shadow plays existed in Germany.

**JH:** *Were there other troupes that continued to play Chinese shadow plays after 1970?*

**OEW:** Hans Joachim Kemper asked his friends Ulli Schnorr, Christa Neumann, Dr. Lis Höpker, and Dr. Wilhelm Höpker to help him to explain the shadow plays with short parts in a little performance besides giving a talk to a private audience.

**JH:** *Did you or Max's troupe make any innovations on Chinese shadow plays? If so, why? Were your innovations successful?*

**OEW:** The Chinese players did not let the figures walk, rather they floated through the air instead of going over the ground. Max, who had worked in the theater as a director, said, we need to make this as realistic as possible. We changed that and on the bottom of the screen we attached a bar as a catwalk for the characters, and before that a second bar, which was slightly higher and prevented the figures from slipping. Since the figures' feet had a resistance on the ground, we could bring them into motion by shifting their weight to go more realistically. In addition, we had the cords extend to the shoulders a little bit. That way, we were able to pull off the arm slightly away from the body and turn it into a welcoming or defensive gesture.

**JH:** *Where did Max's troupe perform Chinese shadow plays?*

**OEW:** I remember that we performed in Hamburg, Berlin, Dortmund, Köln, Essen, Düsseldorf, Hagen, Wuppertal, Iserlohn, Stuttgart, Offenbach, Baden-Baden, Tübingen, Würzburg, München, Bamberg and in numerous smaller towns in Germany, also in Switzerland in Zürich, Basel, Winterthur and Genf. We were invited to perform in many museums, universities, cultural associations, and through the Goethe Institute in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Italy, Greece and Turkey, where we could share our experiences with the Turkish shadow player Hayali

Küçük Ali in Ankara. We performed our five Chinese shadow plays more than 195 times.

**JH:** *How did the audiences react when you played Chinese shadow plays in Scandinavia, Italy, Greece and Turkey? Could the audiences understand this art?*

**OEW:** In Scandinavia and Italy the audience mainly expected an exotic experience (funny Germans playing Chinese shadow plays). In Greece and Turkey on the other hand, the audience was interested to compare with their own Karagiossis-(Karagöz-) shadow play culture. In all the performances, the audiences were notified by leaflets in their own language. The lecture was given by Max before the performance, which was also translated by the manager of the particular Goethe-Institute that had invited us.

**JH:** *How did you or your troupe's performances contribute to the broader appreciation of Chinese shadow plays?*

**OEW:** Our troupe certainly provided some information about Chinese culture to our European spectators. It is better for audiences to watch the moving shadow figures performed by our members than to see immobile figures shown in museums. We brought quiet material to lovely performance, gave European audiences ideas about Chinese shadow plays including Chinese poetry, music, popular stories, and dramas.

**JH:** *Thank you for sharing such invaluable information with me. I really appreciate hearing about your experiences and your troupe's performances of Chinese shadow plays in Germany.*

**OEW:** I am grateful you contacted me and gave me the opportunity to recall the good times I had with my friend Max and my experience with an imported art of Chinese culture. Thank you.

Jianyu Huo received her PhD in Chinese literature and drama at Nanjing University. She is a visiting scholar in the Department of Comparative Literature at Harvard and is conducting research entitled Dissemination of Manuscripts and Puppets, Transculturation, and Globalization: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Shadow Plays.



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## MANIPULATORS OF COTERMINOUS WORLDS IN THE BORDERLESS STRANGE TALES OF LIAOZHAI

by Sissi Liu, PhD Candidate in Theatre, CUNY

In a world in which space creates the separation of objects, puppets have a most unique ability of transcending space to destabilize borders, or to form a path between one realm and another. As objects in space, they are the border shifters that are able to manipulate the space of division. In order to disintegrate the border, puppets become the creators of liminal space. They pull space and time out of everyday life to bring together coterminous worlds such as the natural and the supernatural, and the past and the future. That is how these timeless objects, once enlivened, possess unsurmountable manipulative power in blurring boundaries of both time and space in the larger construction of the universe.

In this sense, it is not hard to recognize what an ingenious idea it is to bring together puppetry and *Strange Tales of Liao-zhai* (also known as *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*), the collection of supernatural tales written in early Qing Dynasty China (mostly late 17<sup>th</sup> century) by Pu Songling; “Liao-zhai” is the self-deprecating name of Pu’s study room, literally meaning “studio of idleness.” Not long after its publication in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it became acknowledged as the pinnacle of fiction in the classical Chinese language, and has been paralleled with *Dream of the Red Chamber* (also known as *The Story of the Stone*), the crown of fiction in vernacular Chinese. The book’s 494 tales, divided into 12 volumes, deal with “strange” topics such as the supernatural, paranormal, and the unusual, peppered with folkloric flavors, moralistic messages, and critiques of the bureaucratic structure of the Qing government. Many involve magic performed by shape-shifting fox spirits or Daoist priests, and romantic relations between human beings and ghosts. In the world of *Strange Tales of Liao-zhai*, human and non-human reside in coterminous realms where borders seem to be nonexistent. The book inspired many films and TV series within the Chinese-speaking

world<sup>1</sup>; but to wed it with puppetry, and especially the puppetry of non-human form conceived by Hanne Tierney, is indeed unprecedented and groundbreaking.

Tierney’s adaptation of “Yingning” (or “The Laughing Girl”)<sup>2</sup>, one of the two pieces the performance *Strange Tales* features, is certainly no less than mind-blowing. The story goes like this: Wang, a young scholar, falls in love with a girl at first sight during a spring outing, and falls sick after he comes back home. Wang’s cousin Wu promises to look for the girl for him, and Wang gets better instantly. After a few days, Wang goes on a journey on his own, and discovers that Yingning, the laughing girl he is in love with, lives with an old lady. The old lady tells Wang that Yingning is the daughter of his mom’s sister. But the next day when he brings Yingning home to his mother, he learns from his mother that her sister has long been dead. Yingning later admits that after the death of Mrs. Qin, the sister of Wang’s mother, Mr. Qin had a child with a fox—Yingning is the child. After Mr. Qin’s death, her fox-mother entrusts Yingning to her ghost-mother (the dead Mrs. Qin, also the old lady Yingning lives with). Wang and Yingning properly bury Mrs. Qin, get married, and one year later, Yingning gives birth to a baby boy whose laughter is reminiscent of Yingning.

1. For instance, “*Nie Xiaoqian*” has been a favorite of Hong Kong filmmakers, adapted into *A Chinese Ghost Story* in 1960, 1987, and 2011. “The Frescoed Wall” (also known as “The Mural,” or “*Hua Bi*”) and “The Painted Skin” (or “*Hua Pi*”) have been adapted into Chinese blockbusters in 2008, both hugely successful and followed by sequels in 2011 and 2012 respectively.

2. This piece is the 6<sup>th</sup> tale of Volume 2 in Pu Songling’s 12-volume *Strange Tales of Liao-zhai*.



# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

In Tierney's adaptation, rectangles of Chinese silk brocades, bamboo poles and lanterns turn convincingly into a variety of live characters with expressive gestures and subtle emotional transformations. The performativity of the silk brocades is a very rarely seen theatrical and technical marvel. Connected to an operational panel that is in full view of the audience via an intricate web of hundreds of strings (about 5,000 feet in total), the puppets exquisitely and precisely depict the graceful lady-walk, the rueful longing of a lover, the importunate concerns of a mother, and even the blissful marital consummation—all in the masterful hands of Tierney and two assistants. The borders between human and non-human, and natural and the supernatural, have been inevitably destabilized. The superlative puppeteer also widens the boundaries of her profession through her compelling storytelling and elegant vocal control, which further enable the puppets to develop lives of their own. The light designed by Trevor Brown miraculously blends the coterminous worlds of the natural and supernatural, and the onstage and off. The gorgeous music composed and performed by Jane Wang enhances the other-worldly feel through the use of the invented instrument of space plates.

The other piece is adapted from "A Strange Tale of Pigeons,"<sup>3</sup> which tells the story of a pigeon-loving Zhang's encounter with a mysterious Young Man in White, who takes Zhang to see his white pigeons that are able to not only converse with him but do somersaults and other fancy tricks. At Zhang's request, Young Man gives him two of his white pigeons as gifts. Zhang treats the two pigeons as priceless treasures. Years later, a friend of Zhang's father—a high official—comes to visit. Assuming that he is a pigeon-lover, Zhang gives him the two most precious white pigeons as gifts of good will, and later finds out the official, far from a pigeon-lover, has cooked the pigeons and eaten them. Later that night Zhang dreams of Young Man in White transforming into a huge white pigeon, leading all of Zhang's white pigeons to a faraway place. The next morning, Zhang wakes up to see that all his white pigeons are indeed gone. In distress, he gives away the rest of his pigeons and vows to never own pigeons again. To bring out the mysteriousness of the story, projection designer Hannah Wasileski uses four divided scrims as canvases for animated brush strokes, which effectively recreates a borderless liminal space that Zhang and Young Man in White reside in. Jane Wang's use of toy piano nicely supports that effect.

The performance of *Strange Tales of Liao-zhai* represents the disintegration of borders between the coterminous worlds of Chinese early modern ghost stories and the marvelous non-human puppetry techniques of non-Chinese origin. Thanks to Hanne Tierney, the manipulator of the borderless realms, the puppets are enlivened and have themselves become the creators of liminal space. In fact, the puppets themselves are liminal beings. They are the magical human simulacra, with or without a human form, that traverse seeming oppositions of matter and spirit. They are also manipulators of coterminous worlds of the real and the virtual, of the seen and the unseen, of the human and the non-human, of the past and the future. In this borderlessness they create, they gain access to the human soul.

3. This piece is the 37<sup>th</sup> tale of Volume 6 in Pu Songling's *Strange Tales of Liao-zhai*.



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Images: Performance and the Audience of the Puppet by James Graham  
National Puppetry Conference 2013 Photo by Richard Simeon



# AN UNCOMMON WOMAN AND PUPPET PIONEER

Grant Hayter-Menzies,  
**SHADOW WOMAN:**  
 THE EXTRAORDINARY CAREER  
 OF PAULINE BENTON

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University  
 Press, 2013.  
 203 pp. \$29.95

Grant Hayter-Menzies's new biography is a beautifully woven narrative of the enigmatic Pauline Benton and her unique relationship with Chinese shadow puppetry in the mid-1900s. Benton is Hayter-Menzies' reluctant protagonist; with no recorded lover, children, and few friends, she consciously remained a mystery throughout her life. What was known was her singular passion for China's colored shadows, which drove the American to become China's first foreign female shadow practitioner, and to champion the art form for the rest of her life.

In a thorough survey of her early years, Hayter-Menzies plumbs the question of what made an American woman fall in love with Chinese shadows. No one knows exactly how or where Benton first encountered Chinese shadow puppetry, but it must have been prior to her first visit to China in 1923. That year, Benton visited her beloved Aunt Emma in Beijing, who was teaching mathematics at Yenching University, and demanded that they commission a Chinese shadow puppet performance. Within the confines of her aunt's courtyard, Pauline saw her first live shadow puppet performance. Though she was underwhelmed by the troupe's prowess, the agile shadow figures mesmerized her, and Benton purchased a small set of puppets for herself before returning home. In her own quiet way, she had allowed the shadows to take hold of her.

Pauline's privacy and lack of a public persona require Hayter-Menzies to make assumptions about certain periods in her life. He does a good job of acknowledging this difficulty while still helping us connect together what is known about her. With keen readings of her unpublished manuscripts, and interviews with her close collaborators and friends, Hayter-Menzies begins to bring a clear picture of Benton into focus. Even the images he chooses reveal that Pauline was more comfortable with the shadows than with anything else. In photos with her family she looks distant and uncomfortable, but when posed in her Chinese robe with shadow puppets in hand, she looks warm, open, and at ease.

In the years following her first visit to Beijing, Benton slowly but steadily eked out a unique corner of the early twentieth-century American puppet milieu, capitalizing upon the country's growing

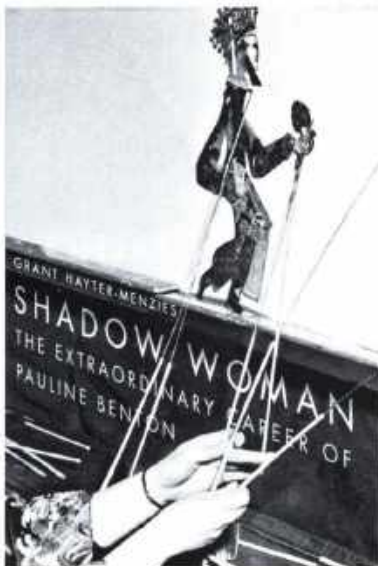


interest in all things Chinese. Although her shy, reclusive nature would seem to have been ill-suited for spearheading America's first introduction to Chinese shadow puppets, in fact it was of little consequence in the face of her devotion to the form. While she continued an apprenticeship-through-letters with a well-known Beijing shadow master, Li Tuochen, she also began to hone her performance skills in universities and smaller cultural venues. Soon, she created America's first Chinese shadow puppet troupe: the Red Gate Players.

Hayter-Menzies is a veteran biographer who has focused much of his previous work on uncommon women of the 1900s who had a common connection to China. Benton perfectly falls in line with this interest. Uncommonness seems to be where Hayter-Menzies finds his strengths: He allows us an empathetic intimacy with Benton that could easily have been rendered as judgment. For puppet people especially, this respect for outliers is much appreciated. Indeed, somewhere in the reading of *Shadow Woman*, I found myself quietly cheering for Benton. I felt as lucky and nervous as Pauline must have felt to have stumbled onto opportunities to perform with her newly purchased puppets upon returning to America from her first visit to Beijing. I cheered her on as she slowly discovered her path to shadow mastery, and accepted her missteps along the way as only natural. And I mourned the Red Gate Players' decline, triggered by the start of the Cold War and China's turn to Communism.

The book is an engrossing glimpse into Beijing and America in the mid-1900s and a fitting tribute to Chinese shadow puppetry's most unlikely heroine. For an art form that still struggles with adaptation, exportation and general popularity, Pauline remains a model for those of us looking to translate traditional forms of puppetry for our own audiences.

— review by Annie Katsura Rollins





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## FROM ÜBER-MARIONETTES TO MANNEQUINS: *Reflections on Craig and Kantor*

Carole Guidicelli, ed.,

### ÜBER-MARIONETTES AND MANNEQUINS:

Craig, Kantor and their contemporary legacies

(*SURMARIONNETTES ET MANNEQUINS: Craig, Kantor et leurs héritages contemporains*).

Lavérune: L'Entretemps, 2013. 510 pp. 35€.

The shape of contemporary puppet scholarship has once more developed in new ways thanks to work emerging from the Institut International de la Marionnette in France, and its publication series “La Main qui parle” (the hand that speaks) founded by Margaret Niculescu and edited by Lucile Bodson. *ÜBER-MARIONETTES AND MANNEQUINS: Craig, Kantor and their contemporary legacies*, edited by Carole Guidicelli, is a bi-lingual collection of essays originally presented as talks at a 2012 international conference of “researchers, academics, and artists from all over the world,” (as the book jacket says) discussing a specific trajectory of modern puppetry from Edward Gordon Craig’s early 20th-century pronouncements on the “Übermarionette” to late 20th-century Polish director Tadeusz Kantor’s brilliant stage performances using mannequins, objects, and actors in a “theater of death” that somehow captured the surreal, nightmarish psychological landscape of Poland (and therefore the West in general) over the past century. The purpose is to look again at these two giants of modern theater and re-examine what they meant to do in ways that can connect to contemporary puppeteers, performance makers, and others who think about theater.

In a way, Edward Gordon Craig has had his greatest historical impact on French theater. He early on rejected his native England as too wrong-headed in matters of the modern stage; and although American puppeteers have always been fascinated and inspired by his claims for the possibilities of puppetry, our colleagues in actors’ theater and drama have by and large been spooked by Craig’s disdain for realism and for acting, and his championing of puppets as (possibly) superior to actors. This has not bothered French critics, who have paid more attention to Craig as a theater visionary whose ideas about what performance could be have happened to come true.

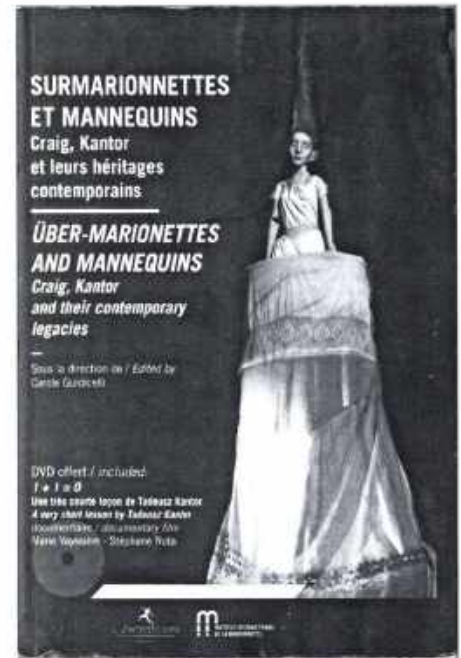
Kantor, who survived World War Two in Cracow, and arrived in the world of theater from his beginnings as a visual artist and Happening maker, had an enormous effect on late-20th-century avant-garde theater with his stark stage produc-

tions—largely in black, white, and grey—performed by a tightly disciplined company of actors whom Kantor conducted quite visibly onstage. These performances

were only rarely seen in the United States, but those who saw them were invariably affected deeply by them.

A 45-minute DVD documenting a 1988 workshop Kantor conducted at the Institut is part of the book, and in a way, it is the best introduction to the material. One sees Kantor at work—quirky, chain-smoking, completely sure of what he is doing—and his cast of western European and American puppeteers (not his Cricot 2 company) is eager to learn his method. His dark, elegiac mood is captured perfectly.

In contrast to that record of Kantor’s burst of artistic intensity, the essays themselves—twenty-two in all—are a mixed lot, ranging from brilliantly incisive analyses of Craig’s theories (such as Patrick Le Boeuf’s fascinating report on what the quirky Englishman really had in mind for his “Über-marionettes”) and Kantor’s dense and oblique productions (Monique Borie’s “The living body and the object-body: an anthropological approach” stands out here), to über-academic essays laced with arcane jargon that, one realizes, often say far less than the author intends. The fact that the trajectory from Craig through Kantor leads away from puppetry per se, and instead into a focus on actors, performance, the body, and objects that are not thought of as puppets, reveals one weakness of contemporary puppetry studies—a desire to disengage from puppetry itself. This stepping away (almost in embarrassment) subtly reinforces the oft-lamented idea of puppetry as







**ÜBER-MARIONETTES AND MANNEQUINS** is extraordinarily valuable not only because it takes performing objects seriously, but also because it has great intellectual gravitas as one more installment in the ongoing discussion among European puppet historians about the art form. The brilliant and deeply missed Eruli (who died in 2012 soon after the conference which produced this anthology), and the assiduous and incisive Plassard have, among others

in their circle, proven themselves to be revelatory writers on the nature of modern puppet and object theater. One might hope that the young scholars and directors featured in **ÜBER-MARIONETTES AND MANNEQUINS** might follow their example by considering not only mannequins and objects, but also puppets themselves as deep sources of ideas and inspiration.

— review by John Bell

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# 17<sup>th</sup> Edition World Festival of Puppet Theatre Charleville-Mézières, France

September 20 – 29, 2013

by Mike Kelly and Alissa Mello

The World Festival of Puppet Theatre, Charleville-Mézières, continues to be the premier international meeting and marketplace for puppet and object theater creators. Founded in 1961 by Jacques Félix, the festival shifted to a biennial calendar in 2011 to accommodate their 50<sup>th</sup> year celebration. This year's theme – "Passage" – brought together stage and street companies from five continents and in addition to its "On" program, included a daily Punch tent in the main square, a mini program dedicated to paper theater, and many gallery exhibitions. It also presented the book fair featuring an event celebrating Philippe Genty's autobiographical book, *Paysages intérieurs*, currently available in French and Japanese. Missing this year were the popular student bar and a large number of unsanctioned performances. Yet there was still more during the ten days than it is possible to actually see.

Although there was an overall theme for the festival, the selection of performances seemed to have little cohesion. Rather, they represented a broad spectrum of puppet and object theater from stage to

street, from traditional to experimental, and included well recognized companies as well as emerging artists. Regardless of where a company sits on this spectrum, the more successful programs seemed to be those that were artistically rigorous, conceptually cohesive, and that thoughtfully used their individual styles and techniques to convey their narratives.

## On The Stage

For us, it was several Dutch companies who seemed to create the most buzz during the event this year with productions by Stuffed Puppet Theatre, Duda Paiva Company and Ulrike Quade leading the charge:

Stuffed Puppet Theatre's Neville Tranter, praised for his darkly powerful solo puppet performances, is on a new mission – to create minimalist plays that retain the complexity and grandeur of his previous works but pack very small to fit into a suitcase. His newest piece, *Mathilde*, squarely hits the mark. With a bare stage, just a few props, and his signature hand

puppets, Tranter weaves a sensitive, heart-breaking tale about the hardships of growing old through the eyes of 102 year-old lead character, Mathilde.

Relative newcomers Duda Paiva and Ulrike Quade presented large spectacle in its truest sense. Duda Paiva's *Bestiaires* is a funny, energetic, and subversive dance/puppetry crossover featuring Greek gods who contemplate love, war, and immortality. Ulrike Quade presented two productions this year: *Antigone* and *Munch & Van Gogh*. Collaborating with choreographer Nicole Beutler, Quade re-imagines *Antigone*, the classic Greek tragedy using traditional Japanese bunraku style puppets in an electric movement piece choreographed to a masterful and gritty urban soundtrack by Gary Sheppard. *Munch & Van Gogh*, set in the afterlife, imagines a conversation about art, life and commerce between the two famous Dutch artists on a prime time TV chat show. Brilliantly designed and featuring dynamic performances by Quade and Cat Smits, this piece further solidifies the Dutch's place as a leaders in contemporary European puppet theatre.

DUDA PAIVA, *BESTIAIRES*





# PUPPETRY INTERN

TEON MAAS, VIA VIA



*Here are a few of the other productions that were outstanding:*

**Ignorance**-by Old Trout Puppet Workshop, Canada – History repeats itself in this hilariously cruel tale about the evolution of happiness. Imagine, if you will, a puppet show created by prehistoric man and performed on a stage fashioned from the corpse of a departed mastodon. Jumping backward and forward from pre-historic to modern times, *Ignorance* is performed with hilarious aplomb by Nicholas Di Gaetano, Trevor Leigh and Viktor Lukawski and with narration by Judd Palmer. It is a dark, satirical and hilarious documentary on the pitfalls of the human race's pursuit of happiness.

**Ouroboros**-Handspring Puppet Company, South Africa – is a love poem chronicling the lives of a dancer and a poet who never seem to find the right time or place to commit to one another. Directed by Janni Younge, the story weaves a tale of lost love and redemption with sumptuous imagery and exquisite puppetry created by Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones, the creative team responsible for the acclaimed puppet direction of *War Horse*.

**Le drame des autres- Les Green Ginger**, France – marks the return of Terry Lee, founder of Green Ginger (UK), to the live stage. He revisits his artistic roots by staging his new show in a traditional puppet booth. Set in a retirement home for aging artists in a dystopian world, Lee weaves an absurd and moving tale about growing old. It is gleefully performed in French but filtered through his decidedly English sense of humor. The production is performed with beautifully constructed hand puppets by Lee and Laurence De Jonge and digital backgrounds designed by Chris Pirie. Note to US festival producers – this show is being translated for English speaking audiences.

While most of what we saw was for adult audiences, two standout children's productions were: *Dénichet, conte merveilleux* and *Mooooooooooooonstres*. *Dénichet, conte merveilleux* is a dark fairytale adapted from

the Grimm Brothers and directed by Ilke Schönbein for Kranewit Theater, Berlin, Germany. Using Schönbein's grotesque aesthetic, the puppets were expressionistic, half-finished monstrosities that riveted the young audience. *Mooooooooooooonstres*, by Label Brut, France, is an original tale about those monsters hidden under every child's bed. The set – a bed, pillows, linens, duvets and one teddy bear – magically transform through the expert manipulation of Laurent Fraunie into a nighttime world filled with monsters to be playfully dispatched by the child in all of us.



ULRIKE QUADE WITH NICOLE BEUTLER, *ANTIGONE*

*In The Street*

Throughout the festival, it is not only the stages and every conceivable indoor space that is adapted for shows. The streets are teeming with commissioned and uncommissioned performances from around the world. Of particular note in this sea of street performances were: Moving People, Compagnia degli Sbuffi, Anonima Teatro, Toon Maas, Le Cyclo Theatre, and Pickled Image. Moving People, directed by Jo Smith, entranced audiences with a poignant short piece about waste, beauty, loss and being engulfed by our own refuse. Anonima Teatro entertained with their short piece La Route, a re-imagined movie style comic chase scene performed by an elephant, a pig and a never ending open road. Compagnia degli Sbuffi made regular turns of Place Ducale with their giant Pulcinella. Toon Maas, master clown turned puppeteer, performed his show Via Via, a wordless contemplation of self for children of all ages. Le Cyclo Theatre presented a meticulous shadow version of Red Riding Hood for small audiences of one or two persons. And finally, Pickled Image's Grandma whizzed through the Charleville streets on her mobility scooter to dispense humorous insults to everyone who crossed her path.

The festival also produced a Punch & Judy Tent. Hosted by La Compagnie Zouak, the tent was open daily with performances by various companies

featuring all manner of Punch and Judy, Polichinelle, Karagoz and Don Cristobal. We were fortunate to catch the outstanding Rod Burnett whose traditional Punch show is a master class of manipulation, filled with the sounds and rhythms of Mr. Punch beating his co-stars senseless to the delight of an audience of all ages. A special late night showing featured troupe La Compagnie Pelele with an expanded version of their 2003 underground festival hit, La Muerte de Don Cristobal.

Despite its scale and sometimes overwhelming number of shows and events, the World Festival of Puppet Theatre continues to be the premier meeting and marketplace for artists and audiences to gather, exchange ideas, book shows, see new and old things, meet with friends and share puppet talk and the inevitable glass or two of Belgian beer.

Mike Kelly and Alissa Mello are founding members of Inkfish, a New York based puppet and visual theater company.



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Above: Dolly Wiggler Cabaret #Calgary - Jen Lynne, Photo: Doug Wong



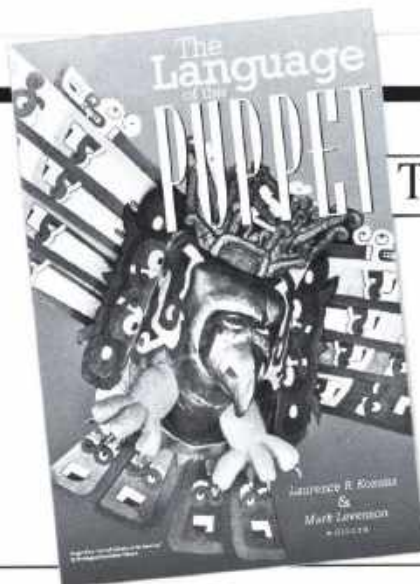
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# FOLK PUPPET THEATRES IN CHINA, PART II

by Mingsheng Ye, Senior Researcher,  
Fujian Provincial Research Institute for the Arts

Translated by Fan Pen Chen

## ROD PUPPET THEATRES

Due to the lack of literary documentation, the origin of rod puppetry is uncertain. But judging from a painting in cave number 31 of the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang in which a young woman playfully waves a puppet (Figure 18), we can deduce that rod puppets were already present during the Tang dynasty. Rod puppetry proliferated during the Song. Evidence of its popularity then can be found in a carved brick discovered in a tomb at Yunyang of Nanzhao in Henan, and in the painting of a porcelain pillow from Qiyuan of the same province. Five literary sources from the Song also mention rod puppetry.

Known also as Head Puppet Theatre (*tu'o'ouxi*), Wooden Head Opera (*munaokexi*), Wrist Monkey Opera (*zhouhouzixi*) and Large Stage Palace Opera (*dadaigongxi*), Rod Puppet Theatre seems to have been created along the Yellow River and Yangtze River, and then spread to southern China and other areas. The name of this form of

puppetry was derived from the use of a central rod inside the body connected to the head and two rods attached to the hands. Analyses of its development historically suggest that it evolved from one-man shows to those of two to several performers; from using short inner rods (hand rods extend from inside the sleeves) to long outer rods (the hand rods are outside the sleeves); from tiny puppet heads without hands and feet to up to human-sized large puppets. Rod puppet theatres peaked during the

Ming and Qing dynasties and thrived throughout the Chinese provinces with the exception of Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Taiwan. Presently they survive significantly at Yangzhou and Rugao in Jiangsu, Wujiao in Hebei, Xiaoyi in Shanxi, Zhouzhi in Shaanxi, Dingxi, Yuzhong, Yongdeng and Huanxian in Gansu, Lingbao in Henan, Nanchong in Sichuan, Shaoyang in Hunan, Shiqian in Guizhou, Zhanjiang and Gaozhou in Guangdong, and Wendeng and Lin'gao in Hainan. I will focus on introducing a few interesting but lesser-known folk rod puppet theatre traditions.

Rod puppet theatres originated from Henan and Shaanxi. We still find folk troupes of this form at Zhouzhi County and Chang'an District in the suburb of Xi'an in Shaanxi. Along with the puppets of Kushuijie at Yongdeng County in Gansu and Tanshangeun at Guantao County in Hebei, those in Shaanxi are "Inner Rod Puppets," with their main rod (central rod), curved arm rods and hands inside their clothing (Figure 19).



FIGURE 18: A TANG DYNASTY (617-906) PAINTING PORTRAYING A ROD PUPPET IN ONE OF CAVES AT DUNHUANG



FIGURE 19: "ZHOU REN ON THE WAY HOME" (*ZHOU REN HUILU*), A QINQIANG STYLE ROD PUPPET PLAY AT XI'AN, SHAANXI



FIGURE 20: "LITTLE PEDDLER" (*XIAO HUOLANG*), A QINQIANG STYLE ROD PUPPET PLAY AT XI'AN, SHAANXI



FIGURE 21: *QIN LIANXIANG*, A ROD PUPPET PLAY PERFORMED AT THE TOWN OF KUSHUI IN YONGDENG COUNTY, GANSU



Puppet troupes in Zhouzhi County and Chang'an District perform mostly historical plays in Qin Opera style. The latter has developed highly skillful technical techniques and also adopted "minor" folk operas such as "The Peddler" (*xiao huolang*; Figure 20).

Rod puppet theatres thrived during mid-Qing in Gansu. At Kushuijie Village of Yongdeng County, Wang Kefu, the head of a fifth generation troupe, has preserved some old puppet heads that suggest their style in the past. Responding to contemporary tastes and aesthetics, the present performing puppets have been enlarged to twice the original size and fashioned after the styles of the local human Qin Opera (Figure 21). Its representative numbers include *Executing Mei* (*zha Mei an*) and *The Flaming Horse* (*huoyanju*); and episodic, highly popular one-act plays such as *Three Facing Each Other* (*sanduimian*), *Meeting at the Garden* (*huating xianghui*) and *Vow Repayment at Fragrant Mountain* (*Xiangshan huanyuan*).

A type of rod puppetry has been popular at the ancient county of Guantao, a location within Handan in the southeastern corner of Heibei that traces its history to at least two thousand years ago. It is situated downstream of the

Yellow River. In the past when the Yellow River used to flood routinely, this form of puppet theatre also provided a means for the victims of the catastrophes to travel and eke out a living. Using short "inner rods," the puppeteers sang Liuziqiang style of music and used a four-stringed violin (*siguxian*). The style of performance was characterized by narrations and sad tunes. It only survives at Tanshang Village in Guantao. The troupes consisted of no more than six performers, including musicians. Popular plays included *The Wise Sister-in-law* (*xiaoguxian*), *Wang Lin Divorces his Wife* (*Wang Lin xiuqi*) and *Gao Kuiju Rushes to Take the Civil Service Examinations* (*Gao Kuiju gankao*). Due to damage perpetrated during the Cultural Revolution, only seven puppets remain and the troupe is presently only able to perform *The Wise Sister-in-law* (Figure 22).

A puppet theatre that still thrives in the Hongjiang region of the mountainous area in southeastern Hunan is known as the Chenhe Rod Puppet Theatre. It is also called the Wooden Head Opera (*munaokexi*) and the Low Stage Opera (*aitaixi*). Due to the fact that its most significant play, *Tale of the Fragrant Mountain* (*xiangshanzhuan*), enacts the

deification of the Bodhisatva Guanyin at Fragrant Mountain after suffering eighteen ordeals in life, this form of puppetry is also referred to by locals as the Low Stage Guanyin Opera. A religious form of puppetry, it is also called the Pear Garden Sect like some of the String Puppet Theatres in northern Fujian. Consisting of about eight performers per troupe, the head of the troupe is a shaman-type priest who performs rituals such as slaughtering a rooster and sprinkling its blood around the stage, offering incense, etc., to exorcize evil spirits and purify the altar before and after the dramatic performance.

This play on Guanyin is not only performed during the three "birthdays" of Guanyin, namely when she was born (nineteenth day of the second month, Chinese lunar calendar), when she took the tonsure (nineteenth day of the sixth month) and when she became a deity (nineteenth day of the ninth month); it is also used to celebrate the birthdays of the local Tutelary and Water Gods. The locals also sponsor its performance for private celebrations and vow repayment at their homes. Considered a realistic reenactment of Guanyin's life, the audience celebrates the various events in the play as they unfold. For example,



FIGURE 22: "THE WISE SISTER-IN-LAW" (*XIAOGU XIAN*) PERFORMED AT GUANTAO, HUBEI



FIGURE 23: THE BODHISATVA GUANYIN, CULTIVATING HERSELF AT THE TEMPLE OF WHITE SPARROW, *THE TALE OF XIANGSHAN* (*XIANGSHAN ZHUAN*), A ROD PUPPET PLAY OF HONGJIANG, HUNAN



FIGURE 24: A ROD PUPPET PERFORMANCE AT SHIQIAN, GUIZHOU





when Guanyin is born, the sponsors would provide bowls of sweet glutinous rice balls for the audience to enjoy; and when Guanyin attains apotheosis, the audience would present gifts and incense (Figure 23). Aside from *Tale of the Fragrant Mountain*, this puppet theatre performs nine historical serial plays such as *Expedition to the East* (*zhengdongzhuan*), *Expedition to the West* (*zhengxi zhuan*), *Rebellion Against the Tang* (*fan Tang zhuan*), etc. Because this popular play on Guanyin is intricately linked to popular religious activities and replete with deities and ghosts, it is typically performed during the day [lest stray spirits wreak havoc at night before they are properly sent away by the master puppeteer-priest]; the other plays are performed at night.

The Low Stage Opera is also found in Shiqian County, Guizhou. Derived from Hongjiang above, this tradition also uses Gaoqiang music. The repertoire includes *Meeting at the Mill* (*mofanghui*) and *An'an Brings Rice* (*An'an songmi*) (Figure 24).

The Rod Puppet Theatres of Sichuan used to consist of three types: Large Puppets (*damu'ou*), Middle-Sized Puppets (*zhongmu'ou*) and Refined Puppets (*jingmu'ou*), which was the smallest

type. Refined Puppets used to be performed by folk troupes in the courtyards of residences within towns and cities. They performed civil (non-military) plays and were distinguished by refinement and delicateness. Middle-Sized Puppets survive as the main form of rod puppetry in the government troupe at Chengdu. Large Puppets are human-sized or even larger and originated in the Ma'anchang of Yilong County in northern Sichuan. Tradition has it that they were brought to that region from Hubei during the early Qing dynasty. Originally family-based troupes, the sole surviving troupe of the Large Puppets is the government troupe of Puppet Theatre of Nanchong (Figure 25), previously named the Large Puppet Theatre of Sichuan. The puppets used to be 1.4 meters high and weighed four to five kilograms. Presently, the Large Puppets are even larger than human size. The troupe performs regularly at a theatre in the tourist town of Mount Emei where it combines the Large Puppet performances with other Sichuan specialties.

Rod puppetry also survives in the Bayu region of Chongqing. Since the 1980s, the Puppet Theatre of Chongqing has moved from rural Chongqing to the city and now performs to great

acclaim for school children, villagers and tourists (Figure 26).

#### HUMAN-PUPPET THEATRE

The earliest Chinese puppet theatre that had both humans and puppets appearing together on stage seems to have been the Rod Puppet Theatre of Lin'gao in Hainan. Also known as Buddha/Deity Opera (*fozixi*), the earliest performers were shaman priests, like the puppeteers of western Hunan. An 1891 Lingao local gazetteer notes, "During festivities, male and female shamans would place wooden puppets on their shoulders and perform plays by singing to each other. They called it exorcizing demons and spirits and performed it routinely." The oldest surviving puppet heads have Kangxi reign (1662-1763) carved into some of them, indicating the existence of puppets by at least early Qing. Traditional troupes employed a set of twenty-four puppets about 60cm to 65cm high.

In contemporary Human-Puppet Theatre, male and female performers appear on stage wearing makeup and donning either opera costume or attractive traditional style outfits. They perform carrying puppets on stage, with the puppets as the main performers (Figure 27). But occasionally, when the puppets engage in a quarrel on stage, the manipu-



FIGURE 25: THE LARGE PUPPETS OF SICHUAN



FIGURE 26: "ZHANG FEI INTERROGATES A MELONG" (*ZHANG FEI SHENGUA*), A CHONGQING ROD PUPPET PLAY



FIGURE 27: HUMAN-PUPPET THEATRE OF LIN'GAO, HAINAN





lators might put the puppets aside and continue the argument themselves before they resume performing with the puppets after the quarrel. The troupes in Lin'gao perform mostly historical plays passed down orally. At least 300 plays have been known. Lin'gao Human-Puppet Theatre has been listed as a national intangible cultural heritage (Figure 28). Presently many government troupes and folk troupes in Guangdong also do performances that sport both puppets and performers on stage.

### IRON-ROD PUPPET THEATRE

Combining the characteristics of Chinese shadow theatre and rod puppet theatre, "Iron-Rod Puppets" is another specialty of Chinese puppetry. Also known as Iron-Rod Opera (*tiezhixi*) and Paper Shadows (*zhuyingxi*), it proliferated in the counties of Shao'an and Dongshan in Fujian, and the counties of Chaozhou, Jieyang and Chao'an in Guangdong. Two theories have been posed concerning the origin of Iron-Rod Puppet Theatres. Traditionally, it was believed that the form evolved from the shadow theatre during the end of the Qing when performers abandoned the paper screens of the shadow theatre stage and created "round-bodied shadow puppets" by using straw bodies and clay heads and at-

taching wire rods to the backs and hands of the puppets. However, I have argued in my book, *History of Puppet Theatres of Fujian*, for a much more ancient origin – that it was the descendant of the Happy Sanlang puppet (*kuaille Sanlang*) of the Song dynasty that spread from Fujian to Chaozhou in Guangdong. Three Song sources mention Happy Sanlang which was made of clay with movable hands and feet. According to the clan history of the Wu Family of Chaozhou known for making clay puppet heads, their ancestor migrated from Zhangpu in southern Fujian to Chaozhou as a refugee during 1237 and brought the art with him (Figure 29).

The Iron-Rod puppet is only 33cm to 46cm high with an iron rod from 33cm to 53cm long inserted perpendicularly into its back. The stage is framed by three bamboo curtains with two to three performers sitting behind it on the floor. The most popular plays include historical romances such as *Executing Pang Hong* (*zhan Pang Hong*), *Xue Rengui's Expedition to the East* (*Xue Rengui zhengdong*), *Exchanging the Crown Prince with the Raccoon* (*limao huan taizi*) and *Journey to the West* (*xiyouji*); and folk tales such as *Qin Fenglan*, *Tale of the Straw Sandals* (*caoxieji*) and *Mrs. Chen Sanwu* (*Chen Sanwu niang*).

Contemporary shows are known for including skillful techniques such as performing sword dances, sporting with fans (Figure 30), lifting vases, spinning plates and carrying clay pots on the heads. The Iron-Rod Puppet Theatre of Fujian and Guangdong are applying for both provincial and national status as an intangible cultural heritage.



### PHOTO CREDITS

*The Art of Chinese Puppetry* (*zhong-guo mi'ou yishu*)- Figures 18, 20, 21

Mingsheng Ye- Figures 19, 23, 24, 29

Guantao County Cultural Bureau- Figure 22

Nanchong Large Puppet Theatre- Figure 25

Chongqing Puppet Theatre- Figure 26

Fan Pen Chen- Figures 27, 28

Chaozhou Longge Puppet Theatre- Figure 30

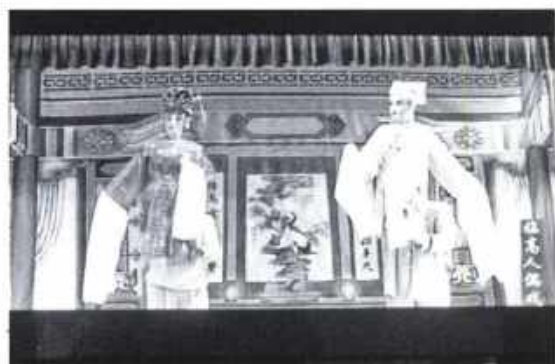


FIGURE 28: HUMAN-PUPPET THEATRE OF LIN'GAO, HAINAN



FIGURE 29: AN IRON-ROD PUPPET OF SHAO'AN, FUJIAN PERFORMS THE STUNT, "SWISHING OPEN THE FAN" (KAISHAN)



FIGURE 30: FAN LIMUA PERFORMED BY AN IRON-ROD PUPPET TROUPE OF CHAOZHOU, GUANGDONG

# SUN WUKONG: *Monkey King and Hero of the Chinese Puppet Theatre*

Bradford Clark, Bowling Green State University

Sun Wukong, also known simply as Monkey, is the hero of the book *Journey to the West*, attributed to Wu Chen-en in the 16th century. It is safe to say that Monkey is the single best-known hero of the Chinese puppet theatre, although his comically flawed companion Zhu Bajji, or Pigsy, is perhaps the best beloved. As the immortal, super-powered hero of the tale, Sun Wukong himself has enjoyed a great following in popular culture. The most acrobatic and entertaining performances of various regional Chinese operas often involve scenes from *Journey to the West*, while the character's adventures have been adapted into many films, television series, animated films and puppet performances, both traditional and contemporary.

Best known in the west through the book "Monkey," a partial translation by Arthur Waley, *Journey* tells of the adventures of Sun Wukong, the "stone monkey" who accompanies the priest Xuanzang (aka Tripitaka) upon his quest to India. The priest seeks to bring Buddhist teachings back to China, and Sun Wukong must defend him from demons and other dangers along the way. Local tales of a magical monkey existed before the publication of the book, and in fact, Monkey is worshipped as a god in some areas, although scholars disagree as to whether Sun Wukong is the same being. (Interestingly enough, there doesn't seem to be a direct connection between China's monkey king and the Hindu Hanuman.)

But it is this version, one of the classic Chinese novels, that has remained in the public imagination. While the book features much action that takes place on the heavenly sphere, it is largely a secular and comic adventure, lending itself extremely well to dramatization. In fact, relatively few sequences are performed in traditional puppetry and opera, making it relatively easy for both a viewer and a performer with a cursory awareness of the source material to follow (or stage) the action. But much of the appeal of the stories comes from their underlying spiritual themes. Sun Wukong, the impulsive, aggressive warrior-hero, embarks upon his own journey of self-awareness, and learns self-control and selflessness along the way. The story is therefore ideal for introducing ethical themes to young viewers, no doubt adding to its popularity.

The widespread popularity of Sun Wukong's mediated performances has affected his portrayal in the puppet theatre, with the cartoon image having been adapted into contemporary designs. (I once complimented a performer on his Monkey puppet and asked if it was a very old figure; he replied that it was relatively new and modeled after an animated cartoon version, intended to please young audiences.) Contemporary Monkey puppets also often reflect a common modern preference for attractive designs, with "sweeter" representations overtaking more grotesque ones.

The character has transcended the boundaries of China; in Japan, the National Bunraku Theatre has presented scenes from *Saiyuki*, the Japanese name for the book. A Japanese cartoon based on the story appeared in the US as *Alakazam the Great*. And puppet companies in the United States have also dramatized Monkey's story (including my own adaptation at Bowling Green State University). While lesser known than many of the European heroes of the European puppet stage, it is quite likely that Sun Wukong enjoys an even wider following in his home country and beyond.

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## THE PHOTOGRAPHS

1. CONTEMPORARY STRING PUPPETS USED IN A SCENE IN WHICH SUN WUKONG BATTLES HIS DOUBLE
2. MARIONETTE HEAD CARVED BY QUANZHOU CARVER JI KUIFANG, NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED AS A BEARER OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE
3. THREE OLDER "JOURNEY TO THE WEST" HEADS FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION: SUN WUKONG, THE PRIEST XUANZANG AND PIGSY
4. CONTEMPORARY ROD PUPPET FROM THE RUGAO PUPPETART TROUPE OF RUGAO CITY, JIANGSU PROVINCE
5. GLOVE PUPPET HEAD FROM A SHANGHAI COLLECTION
6. TOY PUPPETS: (L) SHANGHAI, 1989, (R) CHENGDU, 2012
7. GLOVE PUPPET BY SOLD PERFORMER LIU YONGZHANG, NATIONAL-LEVEL INHERITOR OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE, SHAOYANG CITY, HUNAN PROVINCE. DESIGN IS INFLUENCED BY ANIMATION.
8. SHADOW PUPPET FROM TANGSHAN CITY REGION, HUBEI [FULL FIGURE SHOWN ON OUR FRONT COVER]
9. JAPANESE SAGOJO (SUN WUKONG) PUPPET FROM THE NATIONAL BUNRAKU THEATRE'S "SAIYUKI"

## PHOTOGRAPHS ON THE BACK COVER

10. TRADITIONAL OPERA PERFORMANCE IN BEIJING, 2009
11. SCENE FROM "TRUE AND FALSE SUN WUKONG" BY THE GUANGDONG PROVINCE PUPPET ART THEATER FROM A PERFORMANCE AT THE 2012 UNIMA FESTIVAL IN CHENGDU, SICHUAN
12. QIAO GULI AND ROD PUPPET - SHAANXI, 2009(?). THE CUDGEL IS THE TRADITIONAL WEAPON OF THE MONKEY KING, APPEARING WHENEVER THERE IS NEED AND SPUN IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE THE SKILLFUL MANIPULATION OF THE PERFORMER.
13. IRON WIRE PUPPET, CONTROLLED FROM BEHIND BY HORIZONTAL RODS, AS DEMONSTRATED BY THE JINLONGSHIGE WIRE PUPPET THEATRE IN CHAO'AN AT THE CHENGDU UNIMA FESTIVAL, 2012
14. GLOVE PUPPET HEAD FROM THE CENTER FOR PUPPETRY ARTS MUSEUM, ATLANTA, GA
15. ROD PUPPETS OF THE PROVINCIAL FOLK ART THEATRE, XI'AN (WITH SUN WUKONG SHOWN IN TWO DIFFERENT FORMS, FLANKING THE PRIEST XUANZANG)





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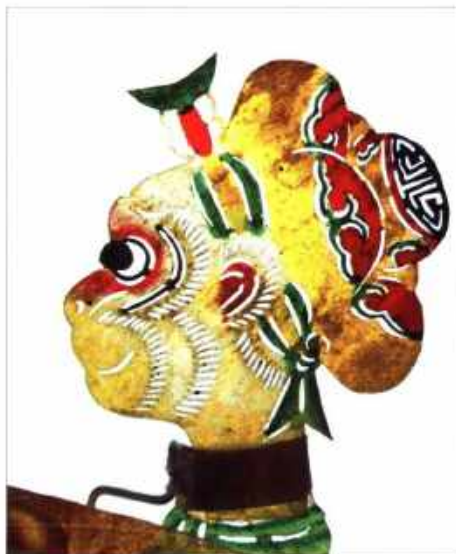
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Monkey King and Hero of the Chinese Puppet Theatre  
Bradford Clark, Bowling Green State University  
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11.



12.



13.



14.



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