

Immaterial Remains:
the (im)possibilities of preserving China's shadow puppet tradition

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A Thesis
In
The Humanities Program

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Humanities – Fine Arts) at
Concordia University,
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

February 2019

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Abstract

Immaterial Remains: the (im)possibilities of preserving China's shadow puppet tradition

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Chinese shadow puppetry is a performance form that dates back over a millennium ago. As one of the most widespread puppet forms in China, shadow puppetry lineages became literal archives of their community's stories with just a few practitioners from each generation charged with retaining the cumulative repository of shared experiences. As modern China and increasingly globalizing forces puts pressure on the circumstances that cultivated this long tradition of shadow puppetry, questions of continuance have been on the minds of the practitioners and their audiences since the early 1900s. If the transmission of shadow puppetry ends, unable to engage apprentices to inherit or find audiences to receive, where will those thousands of years of stories and their ghostly lineage go? This thesis utilizes an apprenticeship research method to follow two main lines of inquiry: (1) what are the particular ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry, a traditional vernacular puppetry form, is resistant to current methods of preservation (2) how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms? Ancillary to this, can creative artists outside the lineage of Chinese shadow puppetry contribute to this endeavor?

The research shows that while current methods for preservation and safeguarding intangible cultural forms, especially puppetry, are enacting some change, the results are mixed and often detrimental to the form they are designed to protect. The goal for this dissertation is to catalyze a re-examination of safeguarding policies and current theories on the (im)possibilities of preserving traditional vernacular puppetry forms in order to posit a new approach to safeguarding that prioritizes (1) apprenticeship, (2) practitioner-driven creativity and (3) performance as the central mode of dissemination. Considering these three tenets is not intended to replace the roster of safeguarding methods currently in place, but adds to them to include necessary elements that have so far not been adequately considered. This thesis hopes to shift the current focus of preservation methods, which prioritizes objects and products, back unto practitioners as central to any method of preservation.

Acknowledgements

Although my name is listed as the sole author of this thesis, it is entirely a group effort. The acknowledgement of my collaborators' many contributions must be made up front, beginning primarily with the participants of my fieldwork in Mainland China. Without them, my own understanding of Chinese shadow puppetry and its growing proliferations would be nascent, at best. Beginning in 2008, these participants have generously given their time, their stories, their energy and effort to bring me closer to the art form's heart. They are listed here in descending order from those who have given the most time and energy to this project:

The Lu Family, shadow puppet makers in Hebei Province; Wei Jinquan, Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe performance master, Shaanxi Province; Wang Tianwen, revered shadow puppet-making master in Shaanxi Province; Wang Yan, one of Shaanxi's top shadow puppet makers; The Longzaitian Shadow Puppet Company, Beijing - especially, Liu Lixin, Liu Weiwei, Wang Yueyue; Qin Laoshi, Yunmeng Shadow Puppet Troupe performance master, Hubei Province; Gao Xingwang, Huanxian Shadow Puppet-making Master, Gansu Province; Tengchong Shadow Puppet Troupe, Yunnan Province; Hanfeizi Shadow Puppet Company, Beijing

I am grateful for my teachers and advisors at Concordia University, including Kathleen Vaughan, Bina Friewald, Darren Wershler, and Sally Cole and my minor area advisor Dr. Kenneth Dean from the University of Singapore. Mark Sussman, my primary advisor at Concordia, was a tireless guide and advocate for this project, without whom I would certainly still be lost in the shadows.

Beyond Concordia University, there were many interlocutors who guided this work both directly and indirectly: Jiang Yu Xiang, Mary Hirsch, Fan Pen Chen, John Bell, Claudia Orenstein, Kathy Foley, Stephen Kaplin & Kuang-Yu Fong, Cariad Astles, Xing Fan, the Association for Asian Performance, Raphaël Fleury and the Institut Internationale de la Marionnette.

This thesis research was supported by generous funding from Concordia University, the Confucius Institute Joint PhD Fellowship and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

This thesis is equally supported by those who support me in my creative and personal life. Their conference, companionship and collaboration kept me buoyed through the entire PhD program. Thanks to Julie Peters Desteract, Joanna Donehower, Joanne Hui, the Lady Docs Dayna McLeod and Natalie Fletcher. Oriane Maubert, Julie Postel and Emeline Rotolo from our time together at the International Institut de la Marionnette residency. Friends Alison Rudy, Eve Yeung, Stephanie Watson and Aveye Alexandres who never forgot to ask how my research was going, and numerous childcare providers without whom this thesis could not have been completed. Thanks, also, to my father, Ron Rollins, for his thorough proof read of the entire thesis.

Lastly, thanks to my parents Patricia Katsura Rollins and Ronald Lee Rollins, who modeled an appetite for life-long learning and inquisition and who provide unconditional support for whatever I choose to undertake. My partner, Yung Chang, who is the loudest cheerleader I've got and my daughter, Ashby Chengpei Chang-Rollins, who keeps me wondering about the future of everything.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	vi
China's Historical Timeline.....	x
Fieldwork Timeline.....	xi
Map.....	xiv
Introduction	
Immaterial Remains.....	1
Chapter One	
Chinese Shadow Puppetry.....	39
Chapter Two	
Shaping the Immaterial.....	71
Chapter Three	
Transmitting Shadows.....	112
Chapter Four	
The (Im)possible Archive.....	144
Chapter Five	
A Continuum of Continuance.....	184
Conclusion	
Safeguarding Ghosts.....	265
Bibliography	272
Appendix	
Research Ethics Certificates.....	284

List of Figures

Permissions: All subjects of photos taken during fieldwork have given verbal and/or written permission for photo usage. Exceptions are noted in figure captions within the text.

Front Matter

Figure Front Matter.1. Provincial Map of China

Introduction

Figure i.1. Leather shadow puppets from *Huaxian*, *Shaanxi* province.

Figure i.2. Provincial Map of China

Chapter One

Figure 1.1. Puppet master *Wei Jinquan* has loaded the shadow puppet troupe's mobile screen and is ready to depart, 2008.

Figure 1.2. Puppet master *Wei Jinquan* drives the tractor through the Shaanxi countryside, 2008.

Figure 1.3. The wedding's festivities have begun with an informal opera performance, 2008.

Figure 1.4. Red trays are stacked with plates and ready to be taken to the awaiting wedding guests, 2008.

Figure 1.5. The shadow puppet stage is nearly finished. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Figure 1.6. The Huaxian shadow puppet troupe in performance. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Figure 1.7. Paper and cloth folders for shadow puppet storage. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Figure 1.8. *Guanyin* shadow puppet figure, cut by *Wang Tianxi* (汪天喜).

Figure 1.9. *The Origin of Shadows*. Shadow puppetry performance at the Montreal Botanical Gardens. Performed by Nicholas-Germain Marchand, Sophie Gee, and Annie Rollins. Erhu music by Vivian Li. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2015.

Chapter Two

Figure 2.1. *Yinyang* symbol.

Figure 2.2. Colored leather shadow figure, Shaanxi province, 2008.

Figure 2.3. *Yutian Zhiyao Xuexiao*, 2008.

Figure 2.4. Yutian's shadow puppet area of the school compound, Summer 2008.

Figure 2.5. Shadow puppet master *Wei Jinquan*, 2008.

Figure 2.6. Shadow carving master *Wang Tianwen* on *Yutian Wenhua's* 2011 brochure.

Figure 2.7. Master cut leather shadow figures. Artist *Wang Tianwen*, 2008.

Figure 2.8. *Yutian Wenhua* Exhibition space, *Huaxian*, *Shaanxi* Province, 2008.

Figure 2.9. Examples of *yinke* and *yingke* cutting styles, 2008.

Figures 2.10. Puppet design feature close ups, 2008.

Figure 2.11. Chinese shadow puppet role types, 2008.

- Figure 2.12. An elderly man and unmarried woman shadow puppet example, Shaanxi, 2008.
- Figure 2.13. More role type examples, 2008
- Figure 2.14. Regional aesthetic styles, 2008.
- Figure 2.15. The caption above simply says, “modern shadow puppetry”, 2008.
- Figure 2.16. Chinese Communist Soldier and Guomindang Soldier, 2008.
- Figure 2.17. Peasant puppet examples, 2008.
- Figure 2.18. Left, Tai’an Shadow Puppet Troupe’s *Turtle and Crane*. Right, Tengchong Shadow Puppet Troupe’s *Turtle and Crane*, 2011.
- Figure 2.19. Members of the Shaanxi Folk Theatre Shadow Troupe rehearse a modern repertory shadow show entitled, *Laoshu* or *Mouse*.
- Figure 2.20. Shaanxi Folk Theatre Shadow Troupe's show *Laoshu* or *Mouse* from in front of the screen.
- Figure 2.21. *There's Nothing to Tell* performance still, 2012.
- Figure 2.22. *There's Nothing to Tell*, performance still, 2012.
- Figure 2.23. *There's Nothing to Tell*, performance still, 2012.
- Figure 2.24. *There's Nothing to Tell*, performance still, 2012.
- Figure 2.25. *There's Nothing to Tell*, performance still, 2012.

Chapter Three

- Figure 3.1. Left to right: *Lu Fuzeng*, *Xu Yishu* and *Lu Tianxiang* of the Lu Family shadow puppet makers, 2011.
- Figure 3.2. *Xu Yishu* paints leather shadow puppet pieces, 2011.
- Figure 3.3. *Lu Tianxiang* at a shadow puppet performance in Luanxian, 2011.
- Figure 3.4. The *Longzaitian* Shadow Puppet Troupe’s rehearsal and performance space just outside the summer palace location in Beijing, 2014.
- Figure 3.5. *Wang Yueyue* and *Liu Weiwei*, 2016.
- Figure 3.6. *Liu Weiwei* performs as emcee in a *Longzaitian* show, 2011.
- Figure 3.7. *Wangyan* watches over me as I progress in my leather carving apprenticeship, 2008.
- Figure 3.8. The leather carving studio at the *Yutian’s Huaxian* branch during lunch break, 2008.
- Figure 3.9. A set of cutting tools (left) and a makeshift leather press made with stool and bricks (right), 2011.
- Figure 3.10. *Wangyan’s* expert hands cut a difficult pattern (left) and a sample of *Wangyan’s* “snowflake” patterning in unpainted leather (right), 2011.
- Figure 3.11. My cutting samples during apprenticeship, between the years of 2008 & 2011.

Chapter Four

- Figure 4.1. *Yutian Wenhua* in *Huaxian* county, Shaanxi province, 2011.
- Figure 4.2. Banners in the entranceway read "we enthusiastically welcome all leaders to visit our park", 2011.
- Figure 4.3. *Yutian Wenhua’s* new courtyard gallery, 2011.
- Figure 4.4. The shadow puppetry building and courtyard entrance façade, 2011.

Figure 4.5. The artist quarters in the back of the compound were untouched by the renovations, 2011.

Figure 4.6. The leather cutting studio is always a buzz with practitioners, new and old, 2011.

Figure 4.7. A new finishing and fulfillment room has been created to help fulfill orders, 2011.

Figure 4.8. *before/ghosts/after* installation stills, 2016.

Figure 4.9. Two of the few shops in the Muslim quarters in 2008 selling shadow puppetry along with other cultural commodities.

Figure 4.10. Machine-made puppets are clearly packaged and priced and are marketed as toys for children, 2008.

Chapter Five

Figure 5.1. Cecilia Wang and Chen Wenjing in the National Chengdu Shadow Puppet Museum's temporary exhibit, 2011.

Figure 5.2. This panel displays dozens of female shadow puppet heads, 2011.

Figure 5.3. These puppets from *Yunnan* are estimated at over 200 years old, 2011.

Figure 5.4. The UNIMA 21st Congress and Festival entrance, 2011.

Figure 5.5. The entrance to the Chengdu Shadow Puppet Museum's UNIMA exhibition, 2011.

Figure 5.6. A collection of beautiful shadow puppet heads of varying male archetypes and regional styles, 2011.

Figure 5.7. The *Luanxian* Cultural Dissemination Center, 2016.

Figure 5.8. Displays grouped by character archetype, 2016.

Figure 5.9. Additional displays showing shadow puppets and their scenic elements posed in various scenes from popular shows, 2016.

Figures 5.10, 5.11, 5.12. Scenes from the large leather cut mural depict local *Luanxian* life, 2011.

Figure 5.13. A diorama of a family of shadow puppet practitioners at home, 2016.

Figure 5.14. The troupe's permanent theatre set up in the restaurant's traditional open-air courtyards, 2011.

Figure 5.15. A behind-the-screen photo of the *Er Kuai* show, 2011.

Figure 5.16. The main troupe members of the *Liu* family take a break from milling dried corn in their courtyard, 2011.

Figure 5.17. The *Liu* family and the residents of Liu Zhazhai have a musical jam session, 2011.

Figure 5.18. A view of *Heshun* Ancient Village's main gate and parking lot, 2014.

Figure 5.19. Inside the main gate at *Heshun* Ancient Village, 2014.

Figure 5.20. A scene from *The Turtle and Crane*, 2014.

Figure 5.21. A scene from *Er Kuai*, 2014.

Figure 5.22. Master *Liu* talks with me about the troupe's end and his lifelong work in shadows, 2014.

Figure 5.23. *Datang Xishi*'s main public square and central building, 2018.

Figure 5.24. A sample of *Datang Xishi*'s architecture, 2018.

Figure 5.25. The entrance to *Yutian*'s *Datang Xishi* branch, 2011.

- Figure 5.26. The performance hall for shadow puppetry and other folk arts from the region, 2011.
- Figure 5.27. Nine shadow puppet shops in the Muslim Quarters, 2014.
- Figure 5.28. The *Tengchong* Shadow Puppet troupe's performance room and gift shop, 2014.
- Figure 5.29. *Fan Weiguo* stands at the front of the classroom, 2014.
- Figure 5.30. The classroom hard at work, 2014.
- Figure 5.31. A student hard at work, tracing the shadow puppet pattern with her pencil, 2014.
- Figure 5.32. *Wang Yueyue* and *Liu Weiwei* in front of Beijing's 101 Middle School, 2016.
- Figure 5.33. The classroom received instruction from *Wang Yueyue*, 2016.
- Figure 5.34. The shadow puppet craft packet for school instruction, 2014.
- Figure 5.35. Students working diligently on painting their leather shadow pieces, 2014.
- Figure 5.36. *Tianxiang* gives earnest guidance to students learning leather cutting techniques on the traditional beeswax boards, 2014.
- Figure 5.37. Young students receive guidance from and perform with local shadow puppet practitioners, 2014.
- Figure 5.38-5.39. Still photos from *Shadows of Love* rehearsals in Beijing, 2011.
- Figure 5.40-5.41. Production stills from *Traktor*, 2015.
- Figure 5.42-5.43. Production stills from *Guizhou en marche*, 2014.
- Figure 5.44, 5.45 & 5.46. Photos from the *Metamorphosis: The Ancient and Present Phases of The Legend of White Snake* exhibition, curated by *Fan Di'an* and *Sun Xuguang*, 2015.
- Figure 5.47. The Longzaitian Shadow Puppet Troupe performs at the Huanxian Shadow Puppet Festival, 2011.
- Figure 5.48. The Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe performs at the Huanxian Shadow Puppet Festival, 2011.
- Figure 5.49. The Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe master *Wei Jinquan* fields questions after his performance at the Huanxian Shadow Puppet Festival, 2011.
- Figure 5.50. *Immaterial Remains* shadow boxes, unlit and lit, 2018.
- Figure 5.51. *Immaterial Remains* performative lecture stills, 2018.

Timeline of Events in China // 1894-2018

This timeline is provided to contextualize the political climate of China within the last Century

1894-95	First Sino-Japanese War
1911	Fall of the Qing dynasty
1912	Republic of China established under Sun Yat-sen
1927	The Nationalists (KMT or <i>Guomindang</i>) and Communists (CCP), led by <i>Mao Zedong</i> , split and civil war ensues
1937-45	Second Sino-Japanese War
1945-49	Civil war between KMT and CCP resumes
1949	CCP is victorious, KMT retreat to Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) is founded
1966-76	Cultural Revolution
1976	<i>Mao Zedong</i> dies, the "Gang of Four" is arrested
1978	<i>Deng Xiaoping</i> becomes the new leader, economic reform and modernizations are implemented, China "opens up" to the world
1982	PRC's population surpasses one billion
1989	Tiananmen Square massacre
2003	<i>Hu Jintao</i> becomes the new leader
2006	PRC takes over the USA as world's largest CO2 polluter
2008	China hosts the Olympic games
2010	China hosts the Shanghai World Expo
2011	50% of the population now lives in urban areas
2012	<i>Xi Jinping</i> is the new leader

Fieldwork Chronology 2008-2016

2008

May-July: Huaxian, Shaanxi Province

Apprenticeship with the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe

2011

March 5th – April 5th: Beijing, Hebei Province, NE China

Met shadow puppet master *Lu Hai*

Studied with Beijing Shadow Show Troupe (Master Lu BanGong)

Studied with *HanFeiZi*, a progressive new company blending old Chinese forms of performance

Met and interviewed the *Zhonghua* Shadow Company (now known as *Longzaitian*)

April 6th – April 25th: Xian, Shaanxi Province, Northern Central China

Met up with *Huaxian* Shadow Play troupe

Apprenticeship with master puppet cutter with *WangYan*

Met with Shaanxi Provincial Troupe shadow puppetry members

April 23th – May 10th: Chengdu, Sichuan Province, Mid-western China

Met with Professor *Jiang* from Sichuan University, Chinese shadow play scholar.

Trip to the Northeastern mountain range of Sichuan to catch a countryside performance of the *Bazhong* Shadow Play Troupe

Visited with the National Chengdu Shadow Puppet Museum; photographed their temporary shadow puppet collection

May 10th-June 1st: Xi'an, Shaanxi Province

Studied with Huaxian puppeteers at the *Yutian Wenyua* location in Xi'an city

Studied shadow puppet performance with Shaanxi Provincial Folk Art Theatre

June 6-9th: Shanghai, Jiangsu Province, Mid-eastern Coast of China

Taught at the Shanghai Theatre Academy, puppet-making workshop with fellow Fulbright Fellow Michael Leibenluft

June 10th-Early July: Beijing, NE China

Continued study with *Zhonghua* Shadow troupe

June 14-21st: Tangshan in Hebei Province, NE China

Practical study and interview with Tianxiang and his father, Master Lu

Visited the Tangshan Provincial Museum

August 2-5th: Second trip to Tangshan, Hebei Province

Practical leather cutting study with Tianxiang and his father, Master Lu

Practical leather painting study with Yishu

Mid-July to Mid-August: Beijing, NE China

Continued study with Zhonghua Shadow troupe for performance and cutting techniques, Beijing style
Re-connected with puppet master Lu Hai

August 16-19th: Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province:

Fieldwork trip to learn about the industrialized market for shadow puppet leather from Wang Cuiluo and Qin Minqiang

Mid-August to End of September: Xian/HuaXian/Weinan and Countryside

Continued study with Yutian Wenhua and Shaanxi Provincial Folk Art Theatre
Countryside performance documentation in HuaXian/Weinan and nearby communities

August 28-September 2nd: Gansu Province

Trip to Huanxian, Gansu province for the 3rd Shadow Puppet and Folk Art Festival
Met and talked with performers and puppet artists from around the country

October 7-17th: Chengdu

Return trip for visual research at the Chengdu Shadow Puppet Museum and the Sichuan University Museum

October 21th-October 29th: Tengchong, Yunnan Province

Practical study with Yunnan cutter Liu An Hui and meeting with Yunnan performance troupe in Tengchong

November 2rd-November 8th: Yunmeng, Hubei Province

Met and worked with puppet master and maker Qin Ligang at his Teahouse in the city

November 8th – November 28th: Beijing

Worked with Taiyuan Puppet Company from Taiwan as they collaborate with Beijing shadow artists

Performance intensive work with Master Liu and the Longzaitian Shadow Troupe

December 1st – 6th: Taishan, Shandong Province

Met and worked with Taishan Shadow Puppetry and Master Fan of the One Performer Tradition

December 6-10th: Xiaoyi, Shanxi Province

Met and interviewed master Wu Haitang

2012

May 18-22rd: Hong Kong

Met with Simon Wong of the Mingri Children's Theatre Company, attended the Mini Festival of World Shadow Puppetry

May 23-27th: Changsha, Hunan Province

Met with the Hunan Puppet and Shadow Art Protection and Inheritance Center of China

May 28th-June 4th: Chengdu, China
UNIMA World Puppetry Festival

June 5-9th: Shaanxi Province

Met with Hua Xian Shadow Troupe, visited a countryside performance, brushed up on cutting lessons with Master Wang Tien Wen and Wang Yan.

Visit with collector Yang Fei in Xi'an city

June 9-14th: Beijing/Tangshan

Visit with the Lu family

November 23rd-December 8th: Taiwan

Worked with the *Taiyuan* Puppet company and the *Lin Liu-Hsin* Puppet Theatre Museum to take a look at their collection, their current project and join them on an educational theatre trip

2013

Sept 13th-22nd: Beijing

Returned to work with the Lu Family of Tangshan

Worked with the Shadow Puppet Hotel's (*Shichahai*) Puppeteer in residence, *Maomao*

2014

May: Huanxian, Gansu Province

Returned to Gansu for an extended research and study period with cutting Master *Gao Qingwang*

June 1-7th: Nanchong, Sichuan Province

Attended the first ever UNIMA Asia Puppet Festival

June-July: Tengchong, Yunnan

Returned to Tengchong to work with the Tengchong Shadow Puppet Troupe

2016

April-June: Beijing and Hebei Province

Returned to the Lu Family of puppet makers in Tangshan

Returned to the Longzaitian company (formerly Zhonghua) in Beijing to observe their expansion

Returned to Luanzhou (formerly known as Luanxian) to see their new shadow puppet museum

July: Shanghai

Worked with Qin Feng, director of the puppetry program at the Shanghai Theatre Academy

Provincial Map of China



Figure Front Matter.1. Provincial Map of China showing the country's 34 provincial-level administrative units: 23 provinces, 4 municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing - listed in red font), 5 autonomous regions (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Ningxia, Xinjiang) and 2 special administrative regions (Hong Kong, Macau). https://www.travelchinaguide.com/map/china_map.htm. Accessed 10 Dec 2018.

Introduction

一口叙述千古事，
双手对舞百万兵

"Thousands of years told by one mouth,
a million soldiers fought with two hands"

-Shen Zhiyu, preface to *Piying* (皮影)



Figure i.1. Leather shadow puppets from *Huaxian*, *Shaanxi* province. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Chinese shadow puppetry is a performance form that dates back over a millennium ago. Originating somewhere in the Northern Central region of the country, leather shadow puppets and their practitioners caught the attention and adoration of their audiences and spread to nearly every province over the next few hundred years. Colored leather figures danced, sang, emoted, collected and communicated a village's happenings by and for its own residents, passing it down through generations, making it a traditional folk form with a long memory. Without literacy, most villagers depended on oral storytelling and performance to educate their community and pass on their history. As the most wide-spread material performance form in China, shadow puppetry lineages became literal archives of their community's stories with just a few practitioners from each generation charged with the cumulative repository of shared experiences.

In a single performance, it is true that the form of shadow puppetry exemplifies "thousands of years told by one mouth, a myriad of soldiers fought by two hands".¹ But looking at its entire lineage of practitioners who constitute such a long tradition, there were actually many mouths that passed down those stories and many hands that fought millions of soldiers. It is the chain of transmission that creates a tradition. As modern China and increasingly globalizing forces puts pressure on the circumstances that cultivated this long tradition of shadow puppetry, questions of continuance have been on the minds of the practitioners and their audiences for some time. If the transmission of shadow puppetry ends, unable to engage apprentices to inherit or find audiences to receive, where will those thousands of years of stories and their ghostly lineage go?

This thesis follows two lines of inquiry: (1) what are the particular ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry, a traditional vernacular puppetry form, is resistant to current methods of preservation and (2) how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms? Ancillary to this, can creative artists outside the lineage of Chinese shadow puppetry contribute to this endeavor?

Through my work as a Chinese shadow puppetry apprentice and creative artist between 2008-2016, my apprenticeship-as-research and research creation approaches to these questions have placed my purview at the ground level, privileging the tacit, the haptic, and the everyday of artistic practices and their milieu. The goal of this thesis is to contribute to the literature on Chinese shadow puppetry and the current discourse on preservation methods regarding traditional vernacular performance forms. My hope is that this work might shift the current practice of preservation methods, which prioritizes objects and products over practitioners, to reposition practitioners as central to any method of preservation.

Found in the Darkness

I'm not sure where I first heard about Chinese shadow puppetry. It was at some point during my mid-twenties as I was aimlessly wandering around Los Angeles, looking for a way to make theatre that didn't follow the commercial formula. I was a recent graduate of an intensive theatre conservatory program and was now trying to reconcile the educational world of theatre and the commercial world of theatre. Frustration had been mounting. Theatre in Los Angeles was not

¹ This quote from Shen Zhiyu's preface to the book *piying* (皮影) is singled out in Lily Chang's thesis "Lost Roots".

what I thought it would or should be. The creative engagement that I had experienced during a semester studying at LaMama E.T.C., one of New York city's founding experimental theatres, was nowhere to be found. This was LA, the home of Hollywood, and the proximity made each theatrical production feel like an attempt to beat cinema at its own game instead of just being what it was: live performance. I began to wonder about the kind of theatre that didn't compete with cinema, didn't have to compete with other forms of entertainment; a kind of performance that wasn't an afterthought or the underdog but a central fixture in a culture and society, part of the complex interwoven fabric of its history.

During these years in Los Angeles, between 2002 and 2006, someone somewhere must have mentioned China's puppet traditions and somewhere within that introduction must have been the mention of their shadows. Funny that this knowledge, which was to forever change the course of my life, initially hit me like a breeze in my sleep - unconsciously. The knowledge that China had a millennium-old shadow puppet tradition went knocking about in my head and heart until it finally cracked open and what was revealed was an irresistible promise of that other kind of performance I had been hoping to find.

Looking back at those years and the slow clarification of the thing that has led me here, writing this dissertation and making an exhibit of my years of work with Chinese shadow puppeteers, it is so easy to see what drew me. China was not a new land for me. Having a beloved grandmother from Guangzhou province whose family immigrated to Hawaii in the early half of the 1900s left me with an appetite for China: the food, the language, the culture, the topography. This appetite commanded I opt out of the standard French language courses offered in high school to take the piloting Chinese courses. It also pushed me to study abroad in Beijing when I was just 16 years old. Those four months of struggling through the steep learning curve of communication in Mandarin, the chaotic maze of one of the largest cities on earth, and the conflict with my own fractured sense of cultural identity left me with deep, deep awe and respect. It also left me belonging.

Since that trip in 1996, I had been hoping to find a way back to see how China and I had changed, to see how we had not. The pressure of the college conservatory years, the transition to adulthood, a persistent lack of funds and a generally distracted focus meant that China returned to a distant daydream for over a decade. Anytime someone mentioned China, though, I was all ears. When China's puppet forms were mentioned, I perked up.

Layered into this intuitive pull towards Chinese shadow puppetry was also a pull towards the manipulated immaterial. My memories of childhood are peppered with intense interactions with shadows. For a time, I was paralyzed by them, believing totally in their autonomous power. I never let go of that belief completely but the terror turned friendly at some point and then their visibility retreated altogether. The change in my thinking was not unique to me but linked to a crucial stage of childhood development and shadows around the age of three or four. Roberto Casati, an Italian social science researcher, consumed by the human cognition of oddities, studied shadows and the effect they've had and continue to have on our human lives. Included in Casati's wide-ranging survey, *Shadows*, is the examination of psychologist Jean Piaget's (1896-1980) work with children in the early to mid 1900s.² While Piaget's overall findings of child psychology remain controversial, Casati focuses his research on Piaget's interviews with children about shadows. Within the subtle questions and the children's inventive answers, Casati surmises that there are five stages of cognition in regards to the immaterial shadow. In stage one, before the age of three or four, a child interprets that dark thing that follows them on a sunny day as a material object. Games are often created to "step on" or "bury" the dark thing until it relinquishes its game of follow, but never to any avail. Pile on the stones and the dark thing appears again; run as fast as you can, but you will never outrun your dark thing; the dark thing ever-faithful to its subject.³

During stage two, beginning at age five or six, Casati concludes that the child begins to comprehend the physical immateriality of this "shadow-thing" (*Shadows* 33), but considers it still limited and attached to the object that casts it. In stage three, around age eight, the relationship between light and shadow begin to take on a directional and geometric aspect. And in the final stage, around age nine or ten, does the shadow truly become the non-dimensional, immaterial darkness that we, as adults, perceive it to be. Shadows are simply the absence of light. At stage four of our human development, the shadows recede into their own darkness. When we "know" what they are, they begin to mesh into the rest of the busy world around us, just part of the milieu.⁴ The knowledge that shadows are the necessary complement to envisioning the three-

² Casati "Shadows" 31.

³ Kentridge "In Praise of" 2-3, Casati "Shadows" 28.

⁴ Casati "Shadows" 33.

dimensional world is lost on us. The knowledge that nighttime is the world-in-shadow is even further from consciousness. There is seeing and there is night, but there are fewer shadows.

Casati's final developmental phase, the phase in which humans move past shadows to focus back on the light indefinitely, is echoed in Plato's well-known allegory of the cave, in his work *Republic* (380BC), which was a foundational text for the Age of Enlightenment.⁵ In the allegory, Plato tells the story of a group of prisoners, held in a cave since birth, and tied so that their view is of a singular wall in front of them. Behind the prisoners is a walkway where people carrying their various belongings pass and behind that walkway is a large fire. The light from this fire casts shadows from the busy walkway, which appear as grotesque and exaggerated shadow amalgamations of the passersby and their objects on the prisoners' wall. As this is the prisoners' only view, they must believe that the shadows they see are "truth" as they know no other reality. Eventually, Plato imagines that one prisoner is freed and the other prisoners, the walkway and the fire are finally revealed. The ignorance of the free captive's prior beliefs reign down. Running up and out of the cave, away from his shackles, the prisoner is further "enlightened" by the sun above ground. The prisoner, humbled by the revelation of his new knowledge, returns to the cave to enlighten his fellow captives but is blinded by the dark after the sunlight. The remaining prisoners take this as a sign of freedom's danger and refuse to leave the cave in order to save them from a similar fate.

By using both shadows and darkness as strong metaphors for ignorance and blindness, Plato created the underpinnings of our continued equation of light with knowledge and truth and darkness with ignorance, ambiguity and malevolence in Western culture. As an increasingly occularcentric species, the prevalence of shadows has continued to either remain invisible or play upon our deepest insecurities. South African artist William Kentridge has used this general perception of shadows as ignorant and malevolent to create work that challenges this. Kentridge uses the medium of shadow and shade in stop-motion films, animations, installations and live performance to once again place shadows at the center of our focus and knowledge making. Kentridge articulates his preference for shadow as a medium beautifully in *In Praise of Shadows*, a keynote address he gave at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 2011. In it, Kentridge traces the historic division between light and dark, beginning with Plato's allegory,

⁵ There is no evidence to suggest that Plato's influence reached China in any significant way. Chinese attitudes towards shadows and light are addressed more thoroughly in chapter 2.

and the deception of their misrepresentation since the Age of Enlightenment. Instead, Kentridge wants to reverse their symbolic meaning, positing that light can never be the medium of absolute truth and knowledge; "All calls to certainty, whether of political jingoism or of objective knowledge, have authoritarian origin relying on blindness of coercion - which are fundamentally inimical to what it is to be alive in the world with one's eyes open" (In Praise of 4). Darkness is the truer truth, the truth that knowing-all is a seduction and a farce. And through their immaterial but significant presence, shadows expose that fragility and hubris and reveal everything else. Shadows are just as true and real and thing-like as the thing that enjoys three-dimensionality - maybe even more so because of what they show to us through their ontological absence.

The truth in shadows and my affinity for China was a combination that was impossible to resist for me. With the knowledge of Chinese shadow puppetry bouncing around in the background of my dreams and thoughts for a few years, it finally reached the forefront in 2007. As I transitioned from the commercial theatre scene of Los Angeles to an MFA program in theatre design with a puppetry focus in Minnesota, I made an overdue return trip to China a top priority.

In the summer of 2008, I cobbled together enough funds to make a trip to China and stay for three months. Trouble was, I had no idea what I was going to do when I got there. My internet searches ("where are the traditional Chinese shadow troupes in China?", "contact information for Chinese shadow master"), not surprisingly, revealed nothing as vernacular artists in the countryside aren't known for their online promotion skills. I was able to connect with a few universities in China, through my own in the states, but they had nothing to tell me either. The only lead I could find was through a friend who had a friend who had met a shadow puppet troupe years before in the deep countryside of Shaanxi. It was enough of a lead for me. I departed for the summer trip before any concrete connections or agreements had been made.

After weeks of waiting in the mega-capital of Beijing, running down broken leads, chasing ghosts, and fumbling communications, I began my journey to the outskirts of *Huaxian* county, *Shaanxi* Province in Northern central China. After a long night on a hard seat in the train, a day of long bumpy bus rides and an quick ride on an illegal motorcycle taxi, I arrived at the appointed place: an old technical school off the side of a country road that looked like it had been repurposed for something. Here, I was supposed to meet my new master, *Wei Jinquan*, who ran the *Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe*. As I waited in the courtyard for my host to arrive, I heard

the clang of a gong, the crash of a symbol and the whine of the *erhu*.⁶ The sound cut through the countryside quiet and hit my ears with force. It drew me in like a trance, like a delicious treasure hunt. I faithfully followed that aural trail and found myself at the entrance of a long, cramped and dark room. The light was so bright, the dancing shadows so alive and the world so immersive, that I was immediately transported. Even standing still, the figures' visage was arresting. It all still felt like a dream: their faces so expressive, their colors so vivid, their humanness so impossibly alive. When I finally came back to myself, I had been irrevocably changed. I spent the rest of the summer with the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe, steeped in apprenticeship and shadow.

From that point on, Chinese shadow puppetry has become the nexus through which I have oriented my creative and academic work. After my initial apprenticeship that summer, I used my training to create translucent leather shadow puppets and perform them with greater agility. I viewed performance in a much different way, less as a way to entertain and more as a way to create an experience that might unite a community. The experience also confirmed my preoccupation with shadows and the immaterial, especially when utilized as storytelling mediums. But these focuses, however important and hard won, soon became secondary. Working closely with the remaining shadow puppet masters in mainland China, it was impossible to ignore the most pressing issue facing any shadow puppet practitioner today: the question of continuance. While shadow puppetry has experienced a number of setbacks in its long history, the last century of political changes, cultural shifts and globalization has pushed it to the brink. From the most well-known shadow puppet carver today to the least well-known shadow puppet assistant, the question of if and how the form moves forward is at the forefront of any discussion.

In the last few decades, there have been a number of researchers and organizations who have focused their efforts on the continuance of traditional vernacular performance forms and even on Chinese shadow puppetry specifically. In China, the most influential organization creating guidelines and policy around preservation endeavors is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, identified by its acronym, UNESCO. In 2003, UNESCO established an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) project, which set out to articulate guidelines for preserving or "safeguarding" intangible cultural forms, such as "oral traditions, performing

⁶ The *erhu* is a two-stringed bowed instrument and one of the few instruments that a shadow puppet band cannot be without.

arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts" (UNESCO Family of Sites "Intangible Cultural Heritage"). This project and its subsequent guidelines for safeguarding intangible heritage mark a significant shift in momentum for recognition and preservation efforts towards performance forms and vernacular art practices in the country. No other organization or effort has had any comparable influence in China.

From 2003 onward, local and scattered safeguarding efforts have mobilized and homogenized under the ICH project, sweeping traditional puppet forms up along with them. The People's Republic of China was the sixth country to sign up with the ICH program in 2004 and continues to push for enrollment of their cultural forms into the program. Chinese shadow puppetry, being the oldest and most widespread vernacular puppet form in the country, has been significantly changed by these efforts within the last 15 years.

Much of the change in safeguarding policies within the last decade has been incredibly positive as so many of the practitioners are still active because of UNESCO and the ICH project. They have single-handedly raised global awareness and the valuation of intangible folk forms and have begun the arduous process of articulating terminology and categories for these diverse forms and their equally diverse needs in preservation. UNESCO and stewards of the ICH project have also been open to academic and practitioner critique, for the most part, shifting language and policy throughout the last decade as the need presented itself. However, as the ICH project is still relatively nascent in its inception and, as my research will show, no policy is a one-size-fits-all when applied to the proliferation of vernacular art forms, there is still much to be considered and changed.

Deduced from my fieldwork and literature reviews, Chinese shadow puppetry differs from the roster of traditional vernacular performance forms, such as dance, opera or drama, in a few unique ways.⁷ Firstly, it is a puppet form, characterized by its utilization of a performing object, a shadow puppet. The usage of performing objects places shadow puppetry on a cusp of sorts - between intangible and tangible. While the performance remains ephemeral and intangible, the puppets endure. Preservation methods, to date, have focused much of their energy on the objects that persist beyond these ephemeral performances, applying preservation theories to the figures

⁷ "Vernacular" meaning something made by and for a given community. The next section provides a more in-depth understanding of vernacular and vernacularity.

that are used on non-performing objects. The puppets are also, overwhelmingly, pushed towards commodification as a quick solution to financially support those who continue to practice. My research shows, however, that commodification beyond its initial phases has had the reverse effect on a practitioner or troupe's livelihood. Secondly, the puppets themselves are not technically what performs. Instead, it is their shadows that are the medium through which the story is told. Because of the immateriality and enigma of this medium, shadow puppetry has long been used for ritual practice (as well as secular) throughout its long history. If the moving shadow, the absence of light, is the medium through which spirits and ritual forces travel, then how might one preserve this immateriality? These two aspects of shadow puppetry make it exquisitely difficult to safeguard and transmit beyond its vernacular.

Where Chinese shadow puppetry is not unique from other traditional vernacular performance forms in China, is in the way the form has been transmitted throughout the last millennium. Apprenticeship has remained the central mode of trans-generational knowledge dissemination for traditional performance forms in China since their inception.⁸ Socioeconomic and geopolitical forces have put pressures on the viability of shadow puppetry's apprenticeship system within the last hundred years and preservation theories and methods have rarely recommended their reinstatement.⁹ This easy dismissal places little import on apprenticeship and represents a misunderstanding of the irreplaceable ways in which learning *in situ* transmits skills and collective cultural knowledge through prolonged proximity, presence and practice with a senior practitioner. Diana Taylor, performance studies scholar and one of my central guides in thinking about performance and preservation, explains,

...Knowledge, albeit created, stored, and communicated through the embodied practice of individuals, nonetheless exceeds the limits of the individual body. It can be transferred to others. While no gestures are performed exactly the same way twice, this does not mean that people do not perform them again and again, often conveying what onlookers imagine as a supposedly stable meaning. (Performance 92)

What looks like a stable transmission of repeatable skills is actually the constantly evolving nature of cultural forms, which are never stable and must respond to current changes within the

⁸ Billet 61.

⁹ The only ICH program that explicitly recommended the continuation of apprenticeship as a means of preservation, the National Living Treasures program, was retired in 2003.

community in which they are practiced in order to remain viable and relevant. The transference of these abilities and the knowledge of how to evolve a cultural form is the epistemological basis of apprenticeship and learning *in situ*. While apprenticeship is not unique to shadow puppetry in China, it is the main element of the traditional form that remains resistant to current preservation methods.

Taylor openly admits that finding an approach towards safeguarding intangible cultural heritage can be "extremely complicated, maybe even irresolvable" (Performance 91). Still, I believe that there are ways to inch closer to safeguarding theories and methods that lesson the paradoxical nature of preserving a living cultural form. The goal for this dissertation is to catalyze a re-examination of safeguarding policies and current theories and ideas on the (im)possibilities of preserving traditional vernacular performance forms in order to posit a new approach to safeguarding that places (1) apprenticeship, (2) practitioner-driven creativity and (3) performance as the central mode of dissemination. Considering these three tenets is not intended to replace the roster of safeguarding methods currently in place, but aims to add to them to include necessary elements that have so far not been adequately considered.

My main motivation for this research is that shadow puppetry remains one of the largest oral and cultural history repositories for the masses of China, who passed down local story and song through each and every performance.¹⁰ Without literacy, which only began in the latter half of the 1900s, the peasant class of China used vernacular performance forms to transmit everything from morality tales to political legends to educational mandates.¹¹ Without a written culture, "embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge" (Taylor "Archive" 21). The existing formal archive of vernacular performance, in museums and in literature, exposes the, "contingent nature of the archive - the way it is shaped by social, political, and technological forces. If the archive cannot or does not accommodate a particular kind of information or mode of scholarship, then it is effectively excluded from the historical record" (Manoff "Theories of the Archive" 12). Shadow puppetry's traditional vernacular performance and its trans-generational inheritance of collective community experiences has yet to be adequately included

¹⁰ Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre" 3.

¹¹ Ibid.

in the archive. My mission is to contribute to shadow puppetry's "archive" in order to ensure its utilization by future generations.¹²

The Traditional Vernacular

China and shadows were enough to have led me to this incredible art form, but there is another aspect of this practice that has become the reason for my prolonged dedication: Chinese shadow puppetry's millennium-old tradition. Within the last 600 years of its transmitted history, it has been primarily performed by local troupes for their own small regions, towns, and villages. Because of shadow puppetry's long lineage and its stronghold in the countryside, it has earned the terms "traditional". But, "as both word and concept, tradition is inescapably ambiguous" (Noyes 234). Dorothy Noyes, an American folklorist and ethnologist, wrote an exhaustive survey of the concept "tradition" and the term's subsequent handling in the academy in her article, "Tradition: Three Traditions". My own impression of "tradition" from my fieldwork aligns me with Noyes' research and her attempt to clarify these terms prompts me to do the same here, as my definition of "traditional" *and* its common misconceptions remain central to any analysis or approach posited towards the practice.¹³

The word "traditional" has been subject to pluralistic interpretations.¹⁴ For some, it seems to be the something we've lost and are looking for; the very anchor that is forsaken when the quest turns towards progress and future. For others the past lays heavy in the word and in the conjuring, as can the burden to those who seek to name it. And for others, tradition is a highly responsive, re-iterated practice that necessarily changes over time, alongside the people who make it. Noyes notes the ubiquitous utility of the word, seeing its usage in nearly every strata of society, and naming "tradition" a "keyword of Western modernity" (234). Ubiquitous usage, however, begets ambiguity and a wild diversity of meaning. Self-reflexive examination of the word and its usage in different fields of academia came belatedly on the heels of the Second World War, a time when colonization and its blindly accepted concepts and terms were under

¹² Diana Taylor uses the term "repertoire" to speak to embodied archives of performance traditions. See *Archive and the Repertoire*.

¹³ I am also guided by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's analysis on the cultural heirarchy of terms "traditional" and "folk" in preservation practices. See "Metacultural" 54.

¹⁴ Williams' *Keywords* is a useful overview of the word and its evolution through time.

intense scrutiny.¹⁵ Even still, it is difficult to shake tradition's most widely accepted interpretation as the burdensome past stunting modernity's growth: "This debate - tradition as an instrument of oppression imposed from above versus tradition as an active force of self-creation organically engaged with the environment - will continue to inform modern scholarship as well as modern politics" (236).

Our modern society has, generally speaking, eschewed the old, the unchanging, the "traditional". In their seminal book, *The Invention of Tradition*, published in the 1983, Hobsbawm and Ranger argue that as a modern society we are less and less traditional by choice: "new traditions have not filled more than a small part of the space left by the secular decline of both old tradition and custom; as might be expected in societies in which the past becomes increasingly less relevant as a model or precedent for most forms of human behavior" (11). In the dawn of the modern era, many believed that a full rejection of what was would be the only true way forward: "tradition is thought inevitably to decline as modernity rises; both cannot occupy a common space...neither traditions nor their bearers are admitted to coevalness with the modern subject" (Noyes 240). Modernity could not succeed with tradition holding it back.

Hobsbawm and Ranger, who argue that much of tradition is an invention, contend that tradition only holds value because it "automatically implies continuity with the past" (1). This valuation, of reference to the past, has incited "inventions" of tradition by myriad groups who may benefit from these new customs, rituals and valuations. Specifically, Hobsbawm and Ranger are working within Western European "traditions" from the last few centuries, citing examples such as the invention of the royal Christmas broadcast tradition in Britain in 1932. Of course, as the past gains new valuation in our increasingly modern societies, there are traditions that could be categorized as inventions, pulled from thin air and immediately embedded in a people's history. In the scope of this thesis, especially regarding how tradition pertains to the transmission of shadow puppetry, the invention of tradition is not designated by its relatively short history or even a particular invention's novelty as a custom, but more so by who has invented the tradition and for what purpose. When communities are given traditions by others or pressured to create traditions for purposes that serve those outside the community, then I categorize those as "inventions". Modern iterations of Chinese shadow puppetry certainly possess inventions within

¹⁵ Ibid.

the tradition along these lines.¹⁶ However it is important to explicate that I do not consider the evolutionary moves communities make to swiftly change, edit, eradicate and remix their own traditions in response to changes in their own societies are inventions, but simply continuations of tradition. Noyes adds that,

...communities themselves continually reinterpret the past for present purposes, staging their culture for themselves and others. This emphasis on conscious manipulation both rejected the old idea of the folk as mindless 'tradition-bearers' and distinguished tradition from such broader conceptions as mimesis, reproduction, and habitus, all terms that still seemed to reproach ordinary people for a lack of self-aware agency. (Noyes 244)

As this thesis sets out to show, mindless mimesis and reproduction has never been a part of the traditional process for shadow puppetry; conscious manipulation and continual reinterpretation by the communities themselves are the form's basis for continuation and transmission.

In Mandarin Chinese, the word for "tradition" is made up of two characters: *chuan tong* (传统). The first character *chuan* (传) means to pass, spread, hand down or impart. The second character, *tong* (统), means interconnected, interrelated, gathered into one or united. These two meanings together, neither of which carry a hint of stasis or repetition, are the basis of my understanding of the word "tradition" in this thesis. Tradition is both a state and an action, connected to those it serves and passed down through generations, understanding that some elements may stay the same while some *must* change in response to the new environment where it is being disseminated. The working definition of "tradition", then, should also be an action: "the transfer of responsibility for a valued practice or performance" (Noyes 233).

Chinese shadow puppetry's centuries-old stronghold in the countryside, among the illiterate peasant masses, has also earned it the term "folk art".¹⁷ The word "folk", in regards to "folk art" specifically, shares "tradition's" ambiguity and also begs clarity here. My usage of the word connotes art made within an established community by that community's members who "create works for the intended use of members of their folk group" (Congdon "Theoretical Approach" 100). Kristin G. Congdon, an art educator who researched the possibilities of incorporating folk

¹⁶ For more on a current survey of Chinese shadow puppetry and its spectrum of traditional invention, see Rollins "A Revolution".

¹⁷ In the vast majority of writings which attempt to categorize Chinese shadow puppetry the term "folk art" is still vastly preferred. See Chang "Lost Roots" and Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre".

art practices into the formal classroom, wrote about the difficulties of clarifying "folk" terminology in the 1980s. Congdon argues that "folk" and "folk art" are too simplistically defined by their relationship to the mode of transmission, stating that "some scholars believe that the learning process must be traditional for the resulting art object to be considered folk art" (Finding the Tradition 95). Congdon and I find this far too reductive a limitation and a residual prejudice from the term "tradition". Traditions are constantly being remade and remixed as is folk art, for many communities are creating and reinventing *as a continuation* of their art forms to respond to present situations and societal changes. Folk art need not be tied to tradition (and tradition need not be tied to folk art). Congdon concludes that "this work, created by and for a given community, is still folk art even if it is displaced within its lifetime" (Theoretical Approaches 100). Gabriel Levine, in a doctoral dissertation on "radical vernaculars", further argues that just as "tradition" has been reclaimed as a verb, so can the concept of "folk art", as "a term that... can be made productive by turning it from a substantive noun into a description of 'something people do'" (20). It is a particular process uniquely developed by a people for their community that designates art as "folk art", more than it is a product of transmission or a geographical locale that designates itself "folk art".

However much the terms "folk" and "folk art" have been redefined, connotations of primitive, untrained and informal, still weigh heavily upon them. In order to resist these antiquated connotations, I have come to prefer the word "vernacular" to "folk", as it also denotes that which is born out of its community for its community or, "native or peculiar to a particular country or locality" (Sayre 146), but unlike the word "folk", "vernacular" carries less unspoken baggage that ties it to tradition, transmission, or a primitive aesthetic. Henry M. Sayre, an art historian specializing in American contemporary art, wrote an edifying article entitled, "Pursuing Authenticity: The Vernacular Moment in Contemporary American Art". While the subject matter is contemporary twentieth century American art, the question he pursues in this work is similar to my own inquiry. Sayre begins by unpacking the term "authentic", which he feels the contemporary art world has used without examination, to identify its origins and its identification. Using modern examples such as graffiti artists in 1960s New York city and their transformation from untrained "authentic" community artists to mainstream contemporary art makers only two decades later, Sayre traces the "authentic" as originating in the *vernacular moment*, the space in and between that which has "come into being outside the institution of art"

and before "commercial exploitation" (150). In my mind, these two points of vernacular art originating "outside the institution of art" and the work being made by and for a given community are much more central to the meaning of "folk" than tradition or transmission. Chinese shadow puppetry, as it had been practiced for over a millennium, before the turn of the 20th century, is a vernacular art form by these categorizations. The form existed largely outside of the institution of art in China (this includes the upper class elite), resisting top-down influence from a central government and dominant discourses, and was mainly practiced by artists from and for their localized communities.

Just like Levine's understanding of the word "folk" as a process not a state, William Garrett-Petts, who uses Sayre's article as his launching point, also understands the term "vernacular" more as a process, rather than a particular product. "The vernacular, then, is not something contained by a work or object; it is, rather, a shared moment where the narrative performance is variously released, rehabilitated, recirculated, and/or re-created" (256). Garrett-Petts, is adamant that this "narrative performance" is "released, rehabilitated, recirculated, and/or re-created" *within* a given community. Like all processes, including traditions, vernacularity depends on change and responsiveness between its artists and communities. Without that change and responsiveness, the art becomes something else entirely.¹⁸

I use the word "tradition" in this thesis to mark "the transfer of responsibility for a valued practice or performance" (Noyes 233) and "vernacular" to talk about a process that is born within, from and out of a given community. Vernacular art is a creative act, performance or object which is created through this process. I may, at times, use the word "folk" in reference to other texts, organizations, or policies that use this term in order not to confuse the terminology. However, it is important to remember that other usages of the term "folk" do not necessary fall within my definition here and as such, I work to clarify those differences within the thesis.

Tacit Methodologies

There are three methodologies that act as beacons for this thesis and are irremovable from its form and content: (1) interdisciplinarity, (2) apprenticeship and (3) creative practice as research. The first beacon is a purposeful interdisciplinarity, pushing this work between disciplines instead of within them. All previous comprehensive studies of Chinese shadow puppetry have been

¹⁸ Garrett-Petts 256.

conducted from within single disciplines: anthropology, East Asian studies, folklore, history, theatre, fine arts, etc.¹⁹ These scholars cover so much of the form and its functions, but there is much that has yet to be explicated from the connective tissue between these disciplinary boundaries. Chinese shadow puppetry, and indeed all performance forms, are interdisciplinary by nature, but most forms of puppetry have been subject to the same treatment: "There is no single, straight trajectory through the literature of puppetry and material performance. That history is told in many ways and through many disciplines - a network of literatures whose connections to each other might not always be obvious yet are always compelling" (Bell "Forward" 10). The aim of looking at Chinese shadow puppetry from between disciplines is to unearth heretofore undetected elements, create new working theories and add them to the growing body of scholarly research on the form.

Officially, this dissertation finds a home within the fields of theatre and performance studies, art education and East Asian studies. Unofficially, many other fields contributed to my thinking and sensitivities, most notably performance studies, folklore, anthropology, cultural studies, and museum studies. Where appropriate, I point to the fields and disciplines of contributing authors in order to situate their influence upon this thesis. Without the ability to toggle between and dwell amongst these rich and stimulating bodies of literature and knowledge, more of my blind spots (and disciplinary blind spots) would have remained, my original assumptions unchallenged and my theories disciplined. The widely interdisciplinary nature of this thesis aims to contribute to these respective fields in its own unique way, while also hoping to create a pathway between them.

The second methodology is apprenticeship. This research methodology has developed slowly over the last ten years of fieldwork and academic study and is a combination of apprenticeship epistemology and participant observation methodologies. Practically speaking, my research methodology looks, sounds and feels like an apprenticeship: long hours spent in close proximity with a "master" and colleagues in a rigorous embodied learning and practice mode.²⁰ And

¹⁹ Jiang Yuxiang in folklore, Fan Pen Chen in East Asian Studies, Berthold Laufer in Anthropology, and Lily Chang in History.

²⁰ The term 'master' has historically been attributed to men only and is a contested term. While the majority of practicing shadow puppet artists in China today are men, due to a ban on women practitioners through the Ming and Qing Dynasty, there were women practitioners in the urban centers during the Song dynasty and likely in the more remote areas throughout the form's long

alongside this literal apprenticeship in craft and performance, I am also conducting a prolonged, proximal, observational method of ethnographic research - participant observation. In other words, where more formal methods may utilize formal interviews or written questionnaires, I take in direct and indirect daily interactions over months and months of time; where one might take pictures of the designs and patterns of the puppet designs, I am carving them over and over again until they live with my corporeal memory; where one might rely solely on published texts about the form's history, I also rely on oral histories and storytelling passed down to me by practitioners and community members of the form. My apprenticeship method of practice and ethnography privileges the haptic, tacit, embodied, non-verbal, and non-propositional exchanges between collaborators and stand in opposition to top-down modes of knowledge dissemination.

Beyond the lessons that I received in-practice during my apprenticeship, many scholars have influenced the shape and formal articulation of this methodology, namely Jean Lave, Trevor Marchand and Dwight Conquergood. Jean Lave, a well-known anthropologist who studied apprenticeship in the late 1900s, was one of the first proponents in the field to validate "situated learning's" irreplaceable pedagogy.²¹ Lave initially began her research in the late 1970s by studying the arithmetic knowledge of Liberian tailors in apprenticeship, learning through every day study in their master tailor's shop. She compared these findings with decontextualized formal learning classrooms in the same area and found that not only were the math skills acquired during apprenticeship absolutely comparable to that learned within a formal classroom, but their skills were actually *more* applicable beyond the context that decontextualized learning.²² Additionally, Lave elegantly explains the comprehensive transmission of knowledge occurring in every routine motion and gesture in the apprenticeship experience, including both social and collective community knowledge.²³ Lave has not only highly influenced my understanding of how apprenticeship transmits cultural practices and performance traditions, but also how acting

history. However, I continue to use the term 'master' here, as it is the closest approximation in English for the term used in China, *Dashi* (大师), and within this thesis denotes the highest-level of practitioner within a generation.

²¹ See Lave's *Situated Learning*.

²² See Lave and Wenger's *Situated Learning* and Lave's *Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice*.

²³ Lave "A Comparative Approach" 182.

as an apprentice-researcher, I am consciously and unconsciously apprehending much more than just craft knowledge.

While Lave's articulation of apprenticeship's irreplaceable pedagogy has highly influenced my validation of apprenticeship as a legitimate method of ethnography and learning, Trevor Marchand's work as an apprentice-researcher has been the model upon which I've honed my own apprenticeship method. Marchand is a trained architect and builder turned apprentice-researcher of vernacular building methods in various locales throughout the globe. In my mind, Marchand's writings best articulate how the apprenticeship method differs from the standard ethnographic participant-observation and how it can effect learning and research outcomes:

Throughout my fieldwork I have employed an apprentice-style method. In other words, I train and labour over long periods with communities of craftsmen, and establish a solid rapport with my fellow workers. In this exchange of 'toil' for 'ethnographic knowledge' (as well as craft skills), my physical contribution offers me privileged access to my co-workers' practices and their expertise. A regular schedule of long hours, and engagement in what are often repetitive manual tasks, permits repeated observation leading to a more detailed understanding of both artisan techniques and the modes of communication involved in teaching and learning skills. As remarked above, most on-site communication is non-propositional, and relies more immediately on an intercourse of visual, auditory and somatic information. This coerces me, as researching participant, to become corporeally and sensually immersed in daily work activities with my colleague-subjects, allowing for reflection upon my own learning, mistakes and progress, as well as the pains and pleasures that accompany physical labor. ("Muscles, Morals" 248)

While conducting my own Chinese shadow puppetry apprenticeship, I am also rewarded for long hours of toil with rapport and communion. Over time, I am also steeped in vernacular "modes of communication" and have learned to prioritize corporeal and sensual sensitivities to guide what is otherwise a nearly non-verbal activity. Touching back to Lave here, Marchand also points out that what is most unique about the apprenticeship positionality is that through practice and "immersion in a learning environment...[the work] structures the practitioner's hard-earned acquisition of social knowledge, worldviews and moral principles that denote membership and status in a trade" (246). Prior to my first summer of apprenticeship, I had only understood "informal" modes of learning in regards to craft and performance practice transmission, I did not also understand that they greatly changed how the rest of the learning context was received, for apprenticeship includes "learning their skills while learning about their learning and their lives" (Making Knowledge S8).

Chinese shadow puppetry is a performative vernacular tradition, which has been transmitted from generation to generation through apprenticeship for over 1000 years. In order to more completely understand just what occurs during that transmission process, I feel an apprenticeship research method is crucial for,

Crafts – like sport, dance and other skilled physical activities – are largely communicated, understood and negotiated between practitioners without words, and learning is achieved through observation, mimesis and repeated exercise. The need for an interdisciplinary study of communication and understanding from the body is therefore underlined". (Marchand "Muscles, Morals, Minds" 245)

This "understanding from the body" is crucial to validate this non-verbal, non-propositional learning mode and what it transmits between generations. Without it, it is too easy to view the craft and its performance as simplistic, easy or primitive.

The published canon of Chinese shadow puppetry research differs from my research in this way: it is not presented from the position of the practitioner and therefore their work is not prioritized within the texts. Historical events in the form's history, close readings of archived textual documents, major political events that changed the course of traditional puppetry, the objects that come to life in performance - these are the common subjects of study.²⁴ Valorizing the work the practitioners are doing, in the workshop, performance and in their daily lives, is long overdue. While some texts do cover some of the craft practice, many liken the skill involved to that of an afternoon craft activity.²⁵ Of those texts that give a slightly more in-depth description of the craft practice, the activity reads as simplistic, basic and repetitive, certainly not something that could be embedded within the meaning-making process of the art itself.²⁶ Certainly, much of this oversight is unconsciously done, for by pure observation alone, the non-verbal tacit practice and transmission of Chinese shadow puppet craft and ritual is nearly "invisible". Additionally, to date, there have been no academic researchers (in North America, Europe or China) studying the form through practice or apprenticeship.

The historic lack of focus and understanding of Chinese shadow puppet practitioners and the embodied practice within the literature is also partly due to an over-arching issue of the

²⁴ See Fan Pen Chen, Lily Chang, Jiang Yuxiang, Zhang Dongcai, Zhang Shaorong.

²⁵ See Liu Jilin, Genevieve Wimsatt.

²⁶ See Pauline Benton, Benjamin March.

Academy itself. Dwight Conquergood, a performance studies scholar and a proponent of performance-as-method, often writes about the damaging scriptocentrism within western institutions of learning: "What gets squeezed out by this epistemic violence is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, covert - and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out" (Performance Studies 146). The genesis for this thesis is the belief that the "embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured" and improvised elements of Chinese shadow puppetry have not been adequately studied or recorded, even if a complete explication remains (im)possible.

While not speaking directly to a method of apprenticeship, but to a general approach of performance as model and method for research and intervention, I believe Conquergood would agree that the two methods are part and parcel. Performance (and apprenticeship)

...struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice. This embrace of different ways of knowing is radical because it cuts to the root of how knowledge is organized in the academy. The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: 'knowing that' and 'knowing about.' This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: 'knowing how', and 'knowing who.' This is a view from the ground level, in the thick of things. This is knowledge that is anchored in practice and circulated within a performance community, but is ephemeral. (146)

My view as apprentice, from the ground level, in the thick of things, day after day, has guided my every step in the thesis - or, I should say, my teachers and colleagues have facilitated my "knowing how" and "knowing who". My proximity to them is my starting point and my constant barometer for this work. At every stage, I have checked any working assumptions or conclusions against their beliefs and realities and made significant changes as a result. Therefore, the relative invisibility of the practitioners and their central role in the form in previously written archives is deeply problematic: it perpetuates an erroneous view of traditional cultural practitioners as passive and/or unnecessary to a form's perpetuation,²⁷ it severely underestimates the irreplaceable knowledge at work in the daily "embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised (and) coexperienced", and has absolutely contributed to their categorical lack of support among

²⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett comprehensively covers the issue of "passive" practitioners of heritage in "Metaculture".

safeguarding policies now in place.²⁸ An apprenticeship research method, then, is my chosen research methodology to combat this trend and fight for the reinstatement of practitioners and their work as central to the creation and perpetuation of traditional performance forms.

The third methodology that anchors this work is research-creation (RC) or creative practice as research. Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) definition of research-creation (*recherche-cr ation*) is:

...an approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms). ("Definition of Terms")

My daily work in apprentice and my creative artistic projects created in tandem with my ethnography are used as experiments and investigations into existing questions surrounding Chinese shadow puppetry. While the medium, form and audience has varied greatly, my creative work is all produced around a certain theme: what are the unique qualities of a form that is traditional, vernacular and immaterial (shadow-based) and what are the unique methods we might use to rethink "preservation" as it pertains to Chinese shadow puppetry.

Artistic research methodologies such as research-creation, practice-led research or arts-based research, are all purposely resistant to a singular methodology. "For students, researchers, and artists in the (research-creation) community, the terminological open-endedness of this category of research often results in the creation of new methodologies unique to a practitioner's work, rather than a solidification or inscription of (research-creation) as a paradigm" (St. Hilaire 25). Instead, these methods point to a process of working through creative practices and artistic creation to produce research rather than a defined method of how that exactly happens.

Although my creative work has been expressed through multiple mediums, performance remains central to how I think and orient myself to the work and the world. In Dwight Conquergood's highly referenced book *Cultural Struggles*, he articulates three main modes for performance: "(1) as a work of *imagination*, as an object of study; (2) as a pragmatics of *inquiry* (both as model and method), as an optic and operator of research; (3) as a tactics of *intervention*,

²⁸ For more on the invisibility of the practitioners in heritage preservation methods, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Metacultural Heritage".

an alternative space of struggle (Performance Studies 152). In my work, performance has certainly been all three: an object of study, a model and method of inquiry and a tactic of intervention. My research creation work is largely consumed with the third category, struggling with (im)possible questions that the practitioners do not have the space or freedom to ask in their own spheres. Conquergood's understanding of how performative creations from research function within academia mirrors my own:

A number of performance studies-allied scholars create performances as a supplement to, not substitute for, their written research. These performance pieces stand alongside and in metonymic tension with published research. The creative works are developed for multiple professional reasons: they deepen experiential and participatory engagement with materials both for the researcher and her audience; they provide a dynamic and rhetorically compelling alternative to conference papers; they offer a more accessible and engaging format for sharing research and reaching communities outside academia; they are a strategy for staging interventions. (Performance Studies 152)

The goal of my creative work, made in dialogue with my ethnographic research and literature reviews, is to stage an intervention within the current discourse of preservation theory for intangible cultural heritage and vernacular performance forms.

For the thesis, both the small daily creative acts in apprenticeship learning and the larger artistic projects conducted throughout my research tenure were essential to my inquiry and the resulting conclusions. Through creative performance, craft endeavors, and "hands-on form of theoretical engagement" (Chapman and Sawchuck 21) founded upon my experiences in situ, I was able to continue my apprentice practice beyond China, hypothesize better research questions, detect inaccuracies in my assumptions and, most importantly, begin to explicate all that is transmitted through the dissemination of Chinese shadow puppetry from one generation to another, through the main learning mode of apprenticeship. The culmination of these creative projects have all employed shadows as their main performative medium and they all aim to address questions of preservation and continuance in the face of immateriality, ephemerality and tacit transmission. The new knowledges these projects produce, catalyzed by tacit methodologies, "...could not be addressed without engaging in some form of creative practice" (6). For me, the convergence of creation and research doesn't just open up new ways of looking at topics and subjects but has actually unearthed new topics to study and theories to pose.

My work as a creative artist will always run concurrent and convergent with my formal research and to include this process of knowledge-making in the final exegesis is both ethically and epistemologically essential. My work cycle always includes (though not always in this order) hands-on engagement>theoretical hypothesis>practical application of theory in artistic creation>conclusion/newly revised theoretical hypothesis>. Therefore, a narrative apprenticeship experience, a remembrance of tactile material engagement and a presentation of selected creative projects are scattered throughout this thesis to highlight key moments in my creative research cycle of knowledge making. I echo Kathleen Vaughan, artist and researcher who uses textile as a medium for knowledge making and who has written extensively about the relationship between her art practice and research, when she wrote about her own artistic process amongst her thesis work as, "part and parcel of what I understand to be the role of the artist within academia and within society: to demystify the creative process by being accountable for creative and scholarly choices, and for the ways that they are directed towards the world" (9).

Interdisciplinarity, apprenticeship and creative practice as research are all methods that anchor this thesis. They are beacons that have guided my work in all areas and often worked in tandem, converged and then separated again when necessary. The three methods all query, trouble and reshape entrenched research modes and trends within formal institutions of learning. They are also methods that re-position the body as central in the learning process, for "the knowing body has, for too long, been underestimated, undervalued and misunderstood, in part because of the limits of language for describing and objectifying 'what it is we know how to do'" (Marchand "Muscles, Morals, Minds" 266). And they are also methods that have made this study of the (im)possibilities of preserving Chinese shadow puppetry possible.

Apprenticeship and Fieldwork in China

The materials to support this thesis research come from a variety of avenues and methodologies, but rely most heavily on my own experience as a traditional shadow puppet apprentice and exchanges with Chinese shadow puppet artists, scholars, collectors and organizational leaders between the years of 2008-2016. Over the course of those eight years, I've spent over three years of combined time living and working in China. The experiences I've been fortunate enough to have with the shadow puppet community during that time are too numerous

to be surveyed here, but are listed in detail in the front matter of this thesis.²⁹ To give the reader a sense of the breadth and depth of the fieldwork and apprenticeship, and the generosity of participants, I will highlight the most important collaborators and experiences here.



Figure i.2. Provincial Map of China, https://www.travelchinaguide.com/map/china_map.htm. Accessed 10 Dec 2018.

During my initial trip in 2008, I remained in the Huaxian region of Shaanxi province, but on all subsequent trips I purposefully expanded my geographical purview to include nearly all

²⁹ See page xi in the front matter of this thesis.

provinces with active shadow puppet traditions.³⁰ *Hebei, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Shandong, Gansu, Yunnan, Sichuan, Hubei, Zhejiang*, nine provinces in all, were extensively visited between the years of 2011 and 2016. During research trips, I prioritized apprenticeships with traditional troupes and practitioners over all other research sites, methods and subjects. In apprenticeship mode, I worked with the practitioners and troupes, morning until late afternoon, and often spent evenings and off-days with them for social gatherings or on performance duty.³¹ In very remote villages and troupes, I usually stayed with the families in their homes, but tried to keep the visits short as many families won't accept monetary compensation but the financial burden of hosting a foreigner can be significant. I endeavor to offset this burden by bringing copious gifts, which cannot be refused. When I am not in-province or in-country, I keep up with the artists through *weixin* (微信) (wechat) and other preferred methods of social media in China.³²

My apprenticeship in *Huaxian, Shaanxi* province has been the lengthiest of them all, occurring on and off during the entire eight years span between 2008-2016. This study was conducted entirely under the tutelage of puppet making and performance master *Wei Jinquan* and his most accomplished apprentice, *Wangyan*, who was a rarity in the craft as a young woman. Through these two teachers, I was introduced to the entire form from studio to performance, traditional to commercial, and folk to political - learning well that these terms never presented a binary, but a spectrum. We have shared countless hours in each others' company and they continue to have an enormous influence on my creative and scholarly work.

In Hebei province, I was fortunate enough to meet the *Lu* Family puppet makers in 2011, who reside just outside of *Tangshan* city, a few hours east of Beijing. Since the 1970s, *Lu Fuzeng* has been mastering the art of shadow puppet creation and has enlisted the help of his wife, *Xu Yishu*, and his son, *Lu Tianxiang*. Together, they are one of the last families of master puppet makers in the country. They have opened their home to me on countless occasions and through our friendship and work relationship they have supported not only an apprenticeship but additional fieldwork trips around the area, participation in their endeavors to bring shadow puppetry to local schools and access to the *Luanxian* museum collection.

³⁰ The provinces of *Heilongjiang* and *Qinghai*, as well as Taiwan, are not included in this study.

³¹ A far more detailed account of my apprenticeship experience anchors chapter three of this thesis.

³² *Weixin* (or "wechat" in English) is, by far, the most popular used social media platform in China.

In the city of Beijing, *Liu Lixin* took me in as a performance apprentice in the *Longzaitian* Company whenever I was in town. His spirit and enthusiasm for teaching this tradition to the company while also updating the performances to accommodate a modern audience as inspiring. Master Liu is also, hands down, the most deft performance master I have seen to date, in any shadow puppet tradition. Seeing his shadows in motion truly made me understanding the impact that the immaterial medium has in ritual performance.³³

Lastly, the *Tengchong* shadow puppet troupe of *Yunnan* province in Southwest China has been a necessary counter to the mainstream research and data from the Northern Central and Northeastern lineages of shadow puppetry. Master *Liu Yongzhou* and his apprentices and family members, *Liu Ankui*, *Fu Guangguo*, and *Zhao Quiju* have hosted me on several occasions to study their unique shadow puppet carving method and their singular situation splitting time between serving their village in the countryside and performing for tourists in the city. Their wildly changing circumstances between the years of 2011 and 2016 were essential to my understanding of heritage and preservation policies' complex effect of the livelihood of traditional troupes.

While my focus has always been continuing apprenticeship study, between residencies I spent time visiting with the extended community that has influenced and participated in the form, which includes academic researchers and programs of higher learning, governmental bureaus and policy makers, local ministers of culture, commercial markets and producers, and museums and private collectors - among others. In China's institutions of higher learning, *Jiang Yuxiang*, retired folklore professor from Sichuan University and China's original shadow puppet scholar, has been the most generous guide, not only to myself to but to a generation of researchers before me. Fan Pen Chen, who is responsible for the most significant histories on Chinese shadow puppetry in English, was greatly supported by Professor Jiang and his vast knowledge base of the form as it was practiced in the late 1990s. Professor Jiang, who was introduced to me by Fan Pen Chen, was the first scholar in post-Revolution China (1980s) to begin researching and conducting fieldwork on the vernacular shadow form. His extensive fieldwork canvased much of mainland China for dormant or newly practicing troupes after the Cultural Revolution and lays the groundwork upon which much of my current data can be compared against. While in

³³ For a short video of Master Liu teaching performance technique, visit <https://vimeo.com/30224778>.

Chengdu, Sichuan province, Professor Jiang guided me through his own seminal text, *Chinese Shadow Play* (中国皮影), connected me to the then-in-progress National Chengdu Shadow Puppet Museum (the world's largest shadow puppet collection), as well as allowed me to tag along during fieldwork trips he conducted as Director of Sichuan province's Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee.

While Professor Jiang has introduced me to China's scholarly approaches to shadow puppetry, Professor *Qinfeng*, from the *Shanghai Theatre Academy*, has introduced me to professional performance schools' attitudes towards traditional puppet forms in China. As director of the *only* shadow puppet program in higher learning on the mainland, Qinfeng was instrumental in conveying how shadow puppetry has been interpreted within the walls of a formal institution of learning, one that aims to prepare their students for employment in the modern world of performance upon graduation. Qinfeng's observations of and conflicts with the existing curriculum greatly enlightened my understanding of the issues of preservation through formal education.³⁴

To get a pulse on the foreign non-governmental organizational (NGO) perspective on Chinese shadow puppetry and the current methods being employed to safeguard it, I visited the East Asian office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2014, which is - by far - the most influential organization shaping preservation policy in regards to traditional forms in China today. Additionally, I attended many puppetry and cultural festivals, large and small, that featured "traditional" Chinese puppetry, including the humongous 21st International UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette) Festival and Congress in *Chengdu* (2012) and the first-ever UNIMA-Asia Festival in *Nanchong* a year later (2013). Whenever I found myself in a provincial capital, I also connected with the large governmentally-funded provincial theatre troupes, in order to examine just how traditional forms were being preserved, updated and adapted for modern urban audiences under a governmental purview. I cultivated a long-standing relationship at the Shaanxi Folk Art Troupe and learned so much from artistic director *Liang Jun* and his partner *Liang Yunru*, who is a master rod puppet performer, about the role of provincial theatres in modern China.

³⁴ Qinfeng's observations are greatly expanded upon in chapter four.

My favorite fieldwork trips to make between the arduous stints as a working apprentice were to visit collections of shadow puppetry. Beyond the aesthetic treasure trove they presented me, the collections told a complex story of love, privilege, regionality and political history. Of the many I was fortunate enough to view, *Yangfei's* private collection in *Xi'an*, was by far the most inspirational. Yangfei was a singular collector as is his collection. His obsession with the form started in his childhood, witnessing the traditional performance first-hand and falling in love with their dancing immateriality. Although he felt he had no artistic skills and could never serve as an apprentice, he made collecting the best pieces of the Shaanxi region his life's work. He could identify the work of individual puppet makers and possessed a number of rare specimens of *huipi* (灰皮), a smoking process that when applied to leather made it thinner, stronger and more translucent than any other. When Yangfei passed away suddenly in 2013, many of the practitioners in Shaanxi province felt a deep sense of loss, as did I. Yangfei's wife, *Li Xuwen* and daughter *Yangrong* are continuing his mission with dedication.

Wherever I traveled, I paid close attention to the burgeoning commercial world of Chinese shadow puppetry between 2008-2016. Through markets in Beijing, Xi'an, Shanghai, and Tengchong, I was able to conduct extensive research that developed my skills to differentiate between new and antique shadow puppets and hand-cut or machine-made figures. *Zhou Shufei*, shadow puppet dealer at the famous *Pangjiayuan* antique market in Beijing, was especially forthcoming in our discussions of the market and clarified that the introduction of fake antiques had been greatly skewing the value of shadow puppets since 2010. At the other end of the production line, I am grateful to *Qin Minqiang* and *Wang Cuiluo* who allowed me to conduct an extensive fieldwork trip to their commercial leather industry in the outskirts of *Shijiazhuang*, Hebei province's capitol city. The leather industry began industrial production of translucent leather hides in 2008 for the burgeoning machine-made shadow puppet market, which signaled a shift in shadow puppetry's status as living art form to heritage.

More details of these and many other visits and the findings they provided are scattered throughout the thesis where appropriate. It is important to state again that although many collaborators and places did not make it into this particular exegesis, their influence upon the work is no less diminished. I am grateful for the incredible dedication of time and energy it took for each of these participants to teach me, talk with me and keep me in their company.

Accompanying my apprenticeship and fieldwork between the years of 2008-2016, I have processed my inquiries and understanding through a creative performance or project. When I returned from my first apprenticeship experience in 2008, I was immediately compelled to create an itinerant shadow puppetry tour in my then-hometown of Minneapolis, Minnesota. I was desperate to work through my newly formed questions of performances by and for a community, public spaces as stages and shadow as performance medium. The tour was entitled *After Sunset Shadow Shows* and toured the city in 2010 and 2011. After those two years of giving shadow performances to my community in the dark of night, I had formulated new sets of questions and these questions propelled me back to China for research on a Fulbright Fellowship in 2011. Beginning in 2011, my creative projects ran concurrently with my research, sometimes even performing in the sites I was working in such as the *Hutong Bike Tour*, a mobile shadow show I pedaled through the historical alleyways of Beijing's Hutong neighborhoods. Sometimes these projects were produced back on my home soil, for my own community, in North America, such as the full-length shadow play called *There's Nothing to Tell* (没有什么可说). These creative projects were my "hands-on form of theoretical engagement" (Chapman and Sawchuck 21), which informed and enlightened whatever current hypothesis I was working on and often provided answers where fieldwork and apprenticeship or scholarly writings could not. I have chosen five of these projects which highlight a stage of this research and they are presented in tandem with corresponding chapters to reinforce the presence of creative work in my methodologies and explicate the discoveries made therein.

The experiences of all of these apprenticeships, encounters, and creative projects are my primary data set for this dissertation and this data set has been recurrently processed through extensive reviews of the relevant academic literature, intensifying for the duration of my PhD degree, which began in 2013. The durational nature of this work, conducted throughout ten years time, has meant that there have been numerous cycles of apprenticeship>fieldwork>creative projects>scholarly research, though not necessarily in that order. These four points have linear and web-like intersections, each presenting a new facet to a complex subject. Wherever I draw conclusions or call upon a general set of Chinese shadow puppet examples within these chapters, it is based on this depth and breadth of interdisciplinary work that spans the years between 2008-2016.

A Complicated "Site"

While my work in China has been extensive in some regards, in China's long history it is but a moment - and a quick one at that. Perhaps in no other country would a dissertation of fieldwork be so quickly out-of-date than in China, especially in recent decades. For, "indeed, in terms of speed and scale and sheer audacity, China's urban revolution is off the charts of Western or even global experience" (Campanella 15). Thomas Campanella, an urban planner and scholar, prefaces his entire book, *The Concrete Dragon: China's Urban Revolution and What it Means for the World*, with the impossible rate of change in China. Indeed, most books on modern China are cognizant to emphasize this point. This rate of change is in direct contrast to China's cultural history of nearly 5000 years, which remains in ghostly fragments in the swiftly modernizing country. Due to the speed of change, it was necessary for me to include a number of periodicals and popular publications as sources for this thesis as the quicker turn-around in the publishing cycle often means that the findings in these articles, from reputable publications, are more relevant and "true" to the current state of China.

It is important to also emphasize that this thesis is a time capsule, capturing only a snapshot of a traditional form as it navigates a transition to modernity between the years of 2008-2016. The uniqueness of this time cannot be overstated. Evan Osnos, who was most recently the China correspondent for the *New Yorker* and an adept writer on the complexity of the country, writes, "In the early years of the twenty-first century, China encompasses two universes: the world's newest superpower and the world's largest authoritarian state" (Osnos 7). These two universes have created binaries that confound any observer:

China today is riven by contradictions. It is the world's largest buyer of Louis Vuitton, second only to the United States in its purchases of Rolls-Royces and Lamborghinis, yet ruled by a Marxist-Leninist party that seeks to ban the word *luxury* from billboards. The difference in life expectancy and income between China's wealthiest cities and its poorest provinces is the difference between New York and Ghana. China has two of the world's most valuable Internet companies, and more people online than the United States, even as it redoubles its investment in history's largest effort to censor human expression. China has never been more pluralistic, urban, and prosperous, yet it is the only country in the world with a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in prison. (Osnos 5-6)

The speed and scale at which the country and its contradictions have intensified, confound attempts at generalizations or summations of any kind, even if those generalizations are unavoidable when talking about China as a whole.

Another difficulty in generalizing about China is that not all its inhabitants are "Chinese". As Mair and Bender, two of academia's leading sinologists, write in the introduction to their anthology of "Chinese" folk literature,

"By 'China', we mean a pluralistic China - a nation of many differing peoples whose more than 1.3 billion citizens live within borders of land as culturally varied as it is geographically diverse. The government of China officially recognizes fifty-six major ethnic groups... The largest of these groups, consisting about 90 percent of the population of China, is called the Han... This huge majority ethnic group, however is a modern construction and can be divided into many smaller regional subgroups. Particular markers of difference, still prominent in some rural areas, include foodways, folk costumes, customs, lineage descent patterns, architecture, farming practices, and - not least - linguistic features". (3)

In this comprehensive study of Chinese shadow puppetry, I must use the words "China" and "Chinese" at times, but these terms are used as geographic markers and not ethnic distinguishers as my study includes a majority of regions where shadow puppetry is currently active. Wherever I can provide specific examples to combat the generalizations, and feel them necessary, I do. However, the most problematic usage of these generalizing terms is in the very title of my thesis and throughout the dissertation: "Chinese shadow puppetry". While there are certainly enough similarities between the diverse strains of shadow puppetry that have developed throughout nearly every small village, town and region in China to draw some generalizations, there are also so many differences. Wherever the term "Chinese shadow puppetry" is used, it is often used to differentiate it from other forms of shadow puppetry outside the country. When "Chinese shadow puppetry" is used to talk about shadow puppet lineages and iterations within the country's borders, the generalization implies the inclusion of *most* lineages of shadow puppetry in China, but probably not all. Exceptions are everywhere, especially including a wide and meandering diaspora of the practice beyond China's official borders. And things are changing constantly.

China's many languages and dialects are as diverse as its roster of artistic forms. There are nine dialect groups, of which Mandarin is spoken by the vast majority, and up to 200 varying dialects within those groups. My language abilities in Mandarin, deemed China's official language by the Republican Government (1932CE), and ability to communicate with

practitioners beyond our predominant non-verbal method of transmission through apprenticeship are limited. My abilities understanding heavy dialects are, like many native Mandarin speakers, inappreciable. When I first began apprenticeship in 2008, my Mandarin abilities were also negligible, just some cobbled together utterances that I could remember from my high school Chinese classes and my four-month study abroad program in 1996 during my Junior year of high school. I could certainly get by, but I could not express my own feelings or ask questions beyond surface subjects. Additionally, China's many dialects, some completely unintelligible even to native Mandarin speakers, were lost on me. Luckily, in the Shaanxi region, the dialect is just a slight variance of standard Mandarin.

When I returned to China for a comprehensive study in 2011, I had taken it upon myself to learn more Chinese with a dedicated language partner and some self-guided book study. I could get by with more ease, I understood a bit more of the daily conversation and my fluency with cultural and artistic subject matter was passable. When possible, I hired a translator to travel with me into areas with difficult dialects, such as when Cecilia Wang accompanied me to the mountain region in *Bazhong*, Sichuan. Often times, I depended upon the children of practitioners to translate dialects into Mandarin for me as nearly everyone born after the Communist Revolution (1949CE) was taught Mandarin in school, even if they continued to speak their local dialect at home. These methods of translation were spotty and not ideal, but were the only methods available to me at the time as limited funding prevented either intensive language study or full-time translators.

Throughout the last seven years, I have worked independently on my language abilities, sometimes taking classes (both at Concordia University where I leveled-out and with the Confucius Institute in Montreal) and worked up to an intermediate reading level and upper-intermediate speaking level. This ability allowed me to conduct my own interviews during my latter trips. Although I do not consider myself fully fluent in Mandarin, the basis of my research methodology in physical apprenticeship as well as my prolonged relationships with practitioners does help to fill in the gaps. Whenever possible, my translations and interpretations are checked again in the daily action and interaction of the studios, the performance spaces and within the homes of my collaborators. Given the overall complexity of the language and the likelihood of the reader's unfamiliarity with Mandarin, I have chosen to italicize the first usage of proper names in Mandarin in this thesis to alert the reader of the switch in language.

A Narrative Argument

The style of this thesis includes my own personal narrative as apprentice, artist and ethnographer, for artistic and methodological reasons. "I think it is fairly clear that personal narrative persists alongside objectifying description in ethnographic writing because it mediates a contradiction within the discipline between personal and scientific authority, a contradiction that has become especially acute since the advent of fieldwork as a methodological norm" (Pratt 32). Of late, scholars from the field of anthropology have been advocating for a literary turn, including Mary Louise Pratt, Ruth Behar and Clifford Geertz. Behar, paraphrasing Geertz, says, "ethnographies are a strange cross between author-saturated and author-evacuated texts, neither romance nor lab report, but something in between" (Behar 7). Influenced by these and other scholars' reflections on the practice of writing ethnography, I include my own narrative, character, positionality and self-reflexivity within this thesis to both minimize the "impersonal description in ethnographic writing" (Pratt 28) while also hopefully humanizing the practitioners and explicating the complex nature of the relationship between us.

My own narrative arc from naive apprentice to self-reflexive practitioner also hopes to better elucidate the invisibility of many central issues and topics - namely, tacit learning, traditional ritual craft practices, and immaterial performance. As a theatre maker, I am always storytelling, whether it be a short shadow performance on the back of my bike or a PhD thesis for at their core, they are all stories we weave.

The thesis title conveys the complexity of "preserving" living forms with its play on the word "impossible" by dividing it visually so that the reader also sees "possible" within it, for while I am intent on pointing out what does not seem to be working in the current theories of preservation for intangible cultural heritage, I am also intent on finding what may work better. The shape of the thesis body loosely follows a parallel chronological order of Chinese history beginning from the turn of the common era and my own trajectory of research between the years of 2008-2016. This thesis does not exhaust these histories, but traces important markers to support a path to the final conclusion. Again, I have opted out of a regionally specific shadow puppet account and instead opted into a more general and comprehensive study of Chinese shadow puppetry, giving specific examples that support the hypothesis wherever possible or needed. At the start of each chapter, I have placed a short exploration of corresponding Chinese words that emphasizes the chapter's subject in order to keep the reader within the place space of

China and to interject the thesis with further cultural context. The beautiful characters also add a visual element of Chinese culture that is important to include, although I try and steer away from fetishizing their pictographic basis.³⁵ These sections are not intended to acquaint the reader with the complex Chinese language nor do they necessitate any linguistic expertise, but instead highlight places where languages and their differences can exemplify cultural incongruences

In an effort to answer my first research question, "what are the particular ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry, a traditional vernacular puppetry form, is resistant to current methods of preservation?", the thesis examines shadow puppetry's history in China as a vernacular form, the peculiarities of performing objects and shadows, and how these elements are irreplaceably transmitted through the traditional apprenticeship. This examination produces my theory of the three tenets necessary to safeguard any traditional vernacular performance form: (1) the continuance of an apprenticeship system, (2) practitioner-driven creativity in response to community, and (3) performance as the central mode of dissemination. Next, I survey current mainstream preservation methods and projects alongside creative work inspired by the form from artists both within and external to the apprenticeship lineage of Chinese shadow puppetry. Comparing both intentional "preservation" and artistic projects that utilizes elements of the form, including my own creative work, I work to answer my second research question, "how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms? Ancillary to this, can creative artists outside the lineage of Chinese shadow puppetry contribute to this endeavor?" I do not conclude that all instances of creative work that utilize elements of Chinese shadow puppetry can or should be considered acts of preservation or part of the traditional lineage, but that artists who place themselves within the traditional learning system of apprenticeship may have the possibility to contribute to the form's lineage through creative projects.

To build up to the final chapter, wherein I propose the three tenets of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, which places apprenticeship, practitioner-driven creativity and performance as the central mode of dissemination as crucial to any policy or effort in safeguarding, I work through a variety of material, pulled from a diverse array of disciplines, all of which remains

³⁵ For further reading on western fetishization of Chinese characters and pictographic theories, see Hansen's "Chinese Ideographs and Western Ideas" and McDonald's "Getting Over the Walls of Discourse".

necessary to fully flesh out the ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry exquisitely resists current methods of preserving traditional vernacular performance forms. The first three chapters are oriented around my first research questions, (1) what are the particular ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry, a traditional vernacular puppetry form, is resistant to current methods of preservation? And the last two chapters utilize the findings in the first three chapters to answer the second research question, (2) how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms? Ancillary to this, can creative artists outside the lineage of Chinese shadow puppetry contribute to this endeavor?

In the first chapter, I relay the ghostly history of Chinese shadow puppetry and its many origin legends. The traces that remain of those legends in today's cultural vernacular point to the primary function of the form as a ritual medium that communicated for and between souls of those past and present. These customs of performance and craft, which have been entrenched for generations, continue their importance even if their conscious impact has long been forgotten. These customs are also part of what make the form of Chinese shadow puppetry so elusive to today's preservation methods. In chapter two, I flesh out an ontology of darkness and shadows and configure the ways in which shadows and ghosts in China are often synonymous, which means that Chinese shadow puppetry isn't just figuratively representing ghosts in shadow puppet performances - the shadows truly *are* the ghosts. This sentient darkness becomes the medium through which a lineage of collective memory is communicated and illustrate another elusive element when the form is pushed towards preservation. Both of these chapters also present the relevant historical context surrounding Chinese shadow puppetry in order to discern reasons for its current state of decline.

In the third chapter, I mine the tacit ways in which this tradition of object performance with darkness and shadows is transmitted through the apprenticeship process. Proximity, presence, and practice over time with practitioners who have done the same with their teachers for generations is the best way to continue such a ghostly lineage. I disprove conventional notions of apprenticeship as a mindless and repetitive task of mimesis through my own personal experience and practitioner interviews, while also showing that creativity is the inevitable result of an apprentice practitioner who remains responsive to their community and environment. This responsiveness to community and circumstance is manifest in artistic creativity and a keystone in my definitions of "traditional" and "vernacular". This chapter demonstrates the centrality to

understanding the irreplaceability of apprenticeship in any safeguarding method concerned with transmission to future generations, especially including apprenticeship's lessons in somatic, cultural and creative knowledge.

In chapter four, I present the ways in which the traditional, the vernacular, the immaterial and the tacitly transmitted are resistant to the traditional archive of "things". Additionally, I articulate the ways in which puppetry complicates the binary of tangible and intangible as part ephemeral performance and part persistent puppet object. A discussion of existing preservation policies and methods begins here, including an examination of UNESCO and its influence on Chinese shadow puppetry specifically within the last ten years. This focus on UNESCO is not, as Diana Taylor says, "intended as (purely) a critique of UNESCO," but instead to examine, "the organizations' leading role in trying to negotiate international accords makes it an important case study in elucidating the challenges of safeguarding the 'live'" (Performance 93).

In chapter five, I use a host of fieldwork case studies to illustrate the myriad ways in which the expected "extinction" of Chinese shadow puppetry has triggered archival impulses that have manifested in today's most common preservation methods. In the first part of the chapter, I examine the main formal methods of safeguarding, including museums, tourism and festivals, cultural commodification and formal education and compare them to aspects of apprenticeship in order to identify the gaps in method. While at least one of the three tenets is present within each method, they are never present as a set, most often the practitioner-driven creativity in response to community is non-existent. The second half of the chapter presents recent collaborations between modern creative artists and traditional shadow puppet practitioners to identify ways in which these encounters and projects can enlighten transmission efforts by encouraging traditional practitioners to remain creative and responsive to current contexts, unlike most of the formal methods of safeguarding. The chapter concludes with my own artistic encapsulation of my own creative projects tied to this thesis, an exhibition entitled *Immaterial Remains*, which was created to contrast and compare existing theories and methods of safeguarding with the elusive nature of shadows, performance and vernacular practices.

In conclusion, I re-present my theory of the three tenets necessary to safeguard any traditional vernacular performance form: (1) the continuance of an apprenticeship system, (2) practitioner-driven creativity in response to community, and (3) performance as the central mode of dissemination. My hope is that upon engaging with this dissertation the reader is left with a

sense of Chinese shadow puppetry in practice, its performative particularities, an understanding of the issues it now faces in preservation and the (im)possibilities for its future continuance.

Chapter 1: Chinese Shadow Puppetry

皮影戏

(**pi-ying-xi**)

shadow puppetry

When I was getting back into my Mandarin Chinese language studies during my first summer of apprenticeship in Shaanxi province in 2008, the progress was slow. I would pick up new vocabulary words only every now and then, resurrecting my high school Chinese abilities word by word. Part of the difficulty of simply "picking up" Chinese aurally is its mono-syllabic spoken structure: each character represents *one* syllable and many of these syllables sound the same, even have the same tones. Which means that without a certain level of language ability or grasp on context, the listener can too easily confuse. For example: 疑点 (*yi dian*) which means doubtful and 仪典 (*yi dian*) which means ceremony, sound exactly the same. You can only be absolutely certain of *which* characters are being referred to by looking at the written character or by conversational context. Thousands and thousands of words and phrases have an aural duplicate and it is up to the listener to determine which one it is. Often, you will see two people in conversation tracing invisible characters out on their palms to clarify which character they are referring to. If native Mandarin speakers often get confused, imagine the possibility of miscommunications for the non-native speaker.

Some phrases, however, are unmistakable. Their uniqueness is a relief to those of us learning by listening. Within a few days of my first trip back to China that summer, I quickly apprehended the word for shadow puppetry because it has no duplicate, no aural twin and it was

of great importance to me: 皮影戏, pronounced *pi ying xi*. Even when shortened to just *pi ying*, as it often is, there is still no other word in Mandarin that uses those two syllables together to make meaning.

The first character, 皮 *pi*, means leather, skin or wrapper. The second character, 影 *ying*, means shadow. And the third character, 戏 *xi*, means to play or a dramatic play performance. Put together, *pi ying xi* literally means leather-shadow-play. Even with no duplicate, when I am asked what I'm doing in China by random strangers, taxi drivers or other new acquaintances, people puzzle when I say "*pi ying xi*." Oftentimes, they assume I'm researching *pin yin* (the roman phoneticization of Mandarin) as so many foreign students are in China solely to learn the language. "No", I have to insist, "*pi ying xi*!" Even with no aural twin, the frequency of usage has become a thing of the past. Context comes into play here. Who would study *pi ying xi*, let alone a young foreign woman? Everyone knows the term, is familiar with its long history as a folk art, but few these days have rarely seen a live performance. When I sense that I have still not made myself understood, I write the invisible characters out on my palm for clarity. "Oh!" They exclaim, "*pi ying!!!*" This confirmation of understanding is almost always followed up by a story or remembrance of their encounter with the word in question. Of my casual survey of strangers that I've had this conversation with over the last nine years of fieldwork, probably numbering somewhere in the low hundreds, only a handful have ever seen a traditional performance live. The rest had heard about it from family elders or seen it profiled on CCTV³⁶. Everyone I speak with, however, has retained something about the practice through cultural osmosis: a legend, a famous shadow character, a story, a festival. No one is unfamiliar with the term. Knowing that shadow puppetry hasn't been performed in earnest since the early 1900s, the persistent knowledge of the form amongst the general public is a testament to its universal historical importance.

In order to dig into my research question of how we might improve our preservation approaches to traditional vernacular performance forms, particularly *piyingxi*, it is imperative that I introduce the form to the reader, filling in the gaps from other recorded histories and highlighting particular singularities that, I argue, make the form exquisitely resistant to

³⁶ CCTV is an abbreviation of China Central Television, which is the state-run television broadcaster with over 50 channels - the vast majority of television programming in the country.

preservation methods. This chapter works through a brief history of Chinese shadow puppetry, including its origin legends, and illustrates how the performance lives within the history of its community. Through a narrative retelling of my experiences at two very different village performances, the latter half of this chapter attempts to convey that the embedded importance of such a long lineage of storytelling and its role in ritual practice is activated *through* performance. The traditional lineage of story and storytelling and the ritual aspects of the form are part of what builds such an enduring traditional and important vernacular form and should be considered in any effort towards continuance.

Beginning with Legends

Chinese shadow puppetry's origins are impossible to confidently pinpoint.³⁷ The lack of clarity amongst historians stems from a dearth of written documentation on vernacular performance forms and a contested definition of when Chinese shadow puppetry became an "officially" recognized art form. But, amongst the practitioners, they are not bothered with a lack of facts and instead rely solely on the origin legends that have been passed down orally for over a thousand years. Of the many shadow puppetry origin legends that remain in the local vernaculars, the most persistent and wide-spread is a tale that has been told to me by troupes as far reaching as *Shaanxi*, *Hebei*, *Yunnan*, *Gansu* and *Hunan* province and is the most referenced legend in Chinese and non-Chinese sources.³⁸ The story takes place a long, long time ago during the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), a dynasty which is still considered a peak in China's history as the nation sought and won great territorial expansions, centralized the state and established a monetary system throughout the country. The period was so great, in fact, that the majority ethnic group in China, the Han, were named from this time period.³⁹

The legend weaves the tale of Emperor *Han Wudi*, the Han dynasty's seventh and greatest emperor, caught in the throws of heartsickness after the sudden death of his favorite concubine, Lady *Li*. In the depths of his despair, Emperor Wudi forgets about his duties as an emperor. Out

³⁷ For a thorough historical account of Chinese shadow puppetry's possible origins, see Fan Pen Li Chen's *Chinese Shadow Theatre* and Lily Chang's "Lost Roots".

³⁸ See Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre" 22, Benton 2, Alvin Cohen 83; Chang "Lost Roots" 16, Jiang "Chinese Shadow Play" 2, March 12, Zhang "Characteristics of Chinese Shadow Theatre" 9.

³⁹ Mair and Bender clarify China's 90% ethnic majority by explaining that the group named the Han, "is a modern construction and can be divided into smaller regional subgroups" (3).

of pure desolation, he refuses to leave his quarters, he refuses visitors and soon, he refuses even food and drink. A roaming wizard, seeing that the country is in danger of running to ruin without the emperor and spying an opportunity for employment, realizes he must devise a way to revive the emperor.⁴⁰ The wizard takes to the garden courtyard to ponder a solution while pacing up and down the courtyard's length. The day is sunny and bright, a pure contrast to the emperor's dusty and dank interiors. He is lifted for a moment by this brightness and loses his thoughts while watching the children playing near the garden wall. In a moment of suspended thought, the wizard is caught by a likeness, a feeling, a spirit. On the garden wall are vibrant, dancing shadows, cast by the children and their parasols. The sun's bright light, and the lively shadow dancing within it, mesmerizes the wizard long enough that he forgets what he is there for. Not soon after he has regained his presence of mind, an idea is born.

The clever wizard entices the emperor to exit his quarters that night, baited with the promise of seeing his departed beloved. "But how?" the emperor asks. "You shall see", the wizard answers. At dusk, the emperor makes his way to the courtyard under the rising moon and seats himself in front of hung silk. A fire lantern is lit behind the screen. Soft music begins to play. The wizard appears behind the scrim of silk and with a silhouette of Lady Li, torn out of a dried leaf, he throws her dancing shadow effigy onto the screen.⁴¹ To and fro, Lady Li sways to the soft lilt of a distant melody. The wizards' recreation is so masterful, the spirit of the departed concubine so lifelike, that the emperor is revived and inspired to rule again, returning often to the courtyard at night to catch a glimpse of his long lost love. Emperor Han Wudi ruled prosperously for total of 54 years, which is a record that would not be broken until 1800 years later during the Qing dynasty. The formalization of shadow use for ghost-calling practices among the popular religions concretized the common-held belief of the shadow as enigmatic spirit medium throughout China and forever linked any emergent shadow art form with ritualistic roots.

The tale I spin here is my own concoction, combined from the many versions I have heard through years of fieldwork. The first time I heard the Han Wudi legend was during my 2008

⁴⁰ The term used most often used for the wizard character is *fangshi* (方士) or "wizard", but has sometimes been interpreted as "advisor" or "shaman".

⁴¹ Among other variations, Benton cites other mentions of materials used such as dried fish skin or wood, page 5.

apprenticeship in Huaxian, Shaanxi province in China. Master Wei Jinquan patiently stumbled through the story with me, my poor Mandarin skills slowed his telling, and still the ending was moving. I have heard the Han Wudi tale, with varying details, from nearly everyone I've worked with and each practitioner has their own crafted version of the Han Wudi legend, also culled and fused amongst the many they've heard over time.

The Han Wudi origin legend does not mark the beginning of shadow puppetry as a fully formed artistic practice, but certainly relates a decisive moment of shadows being manipulated for ritualistic purposes - a conjuring of sorts.⁴² In 1080CE, *Gao Cheng* is credited with the first textual mention of this Han Wudi legend and shadow puppetry as art form in *The Origin of Things*:⁴³

It has been said that shadow theatre began during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty. After Lady Li died, a wizard from the *Qi* state named *Shaoweng* claimed he could bring back her soul. The emperor missed her and ordered Shaoweng to do so. Shaoweng then put up an illuminated piece of screen and had the emperor sit behind another. Through the screens, the emperor saw an image just like his lady. This was the origin of shadow shows we see today. (Cheng Chapter 9)

The authority of *The Origin of Things* text in China goes far in impressing this origin legend as *the* origin legend. In 2006, when I first went looking for information on shadow puppetry, I collected many examples of the same tale, similarly truncated.⁴⁴

As with all vernacular iterative forms of performance, wherever, whenever and however it is encountered, minute details change. The Han Wudi legend differs every time I hear it or read it, such as the impetus for the wizard's great idea or the material that the wizard uses to conjure Lady Li's shadow varies between leaves, fish skin and carved wood. But the core narrative

⁴² The vast majority of sources support the claim of Chinese drama's (puppet forms included) roots in shamanism and ritual practice, save Regina Llamas' *A Reassessment of the Place of Shamanism in the Origins of Chinese Theater*, in which she does not actually refute the linkage, but concludes that the details of this influential relationship cannot be confidently traced.

⁴³ *The Origin of Things*, or *shiben* (世本) is considered the Chinese encyclopedia of origins, the first volumes of which date back to the Han dynasty (206BCE-220CE). Gao Cheng (高承) was a contributor in the Song dynasty with his volume, *shiwu jiyuan* (事物紀原) (1080CE).

⁴⁴ See <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/focus/shadow-puppetry.htm>;
<https://internchina.com/chinese-shadow-puppetry/>.

remains the same: Han Wudi is rendered heartsick by the sudden loss of his favorite concubine but happily revived by the conjuring of her ghostly apparition through shadow. The impossibility of landing on a singular legend narrative is in this way not frustrating but inherent to the ghostly nature of legends themselves: shadows of what cast them long ago.

Jiang Yuxiang, whom we met in the introduction, published the seminal text *Chinese Shadow Play* (中国皮影) in 1991. The text is a combination of comprehensive fieldwork and historical research and is rightfully referenced in all subsequent Chinese scholarly reviews of shadow puppetry as the foundational text. In his book, Jiang points to Daoism as a tide changer in Chinese belief and a catalyst in the world of Chinese arts, when it introduced the notion that all humans have a singular spirit that will never die.⁴⁵ Daoist, "the native religion of China" (Helle 71), and later Buddhist practitioners, performed rituals during the Han dynasty to connect the living with those in the great beyond, with ritual practitioners utilizing simple silhouettes as soul representative and conduit.⁴⁶ However the idea of ghosts and souls that never die actually predates Daoism as a "primordial concept in human society that came into being long before any of the formal belief systems were formed" (Poo "Imperial Order" 295). The ghost was so important and widespread amongst all social strata that preceding philosophies and religions such as Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, were forced to incorporate ghosts into their belief system.⁴⁷

In documents that predate *Gao Cheng's* account by nearly a millennium, placing them around the turn of the common era, the Han Wudi legend is recounted in its entirety, save the wizards's deft shadow puppetry.⁴⁸ Instead, the "ghost" of Lady Li simply appears and the emperor is revived. Some scholars have used this example to discount the legend as genesis for shadow puppetry, but as an artist who has a personal sense of shadows as ambassadors to the unknown, I find it even more compelling.⁴⁹ The links between "ghost" and "shadow" in the language are numerous. Of the Chinese words that represent ghost, no less than seven out of eleven of these

⁴⁵ Jiang "Chinese Shadow Play" 2

⁴⁶ Zhang "Characteristics of Chinese Shadow Theatre" 1

⁴⁷ Poo "Imperial Order" 295.

⁴⁸ Cohen, Alvin P. 86

⁴⁹ While nearly all scholars have mentioned the Han Wudi legend, all have made it clear that the legend should not be conflated with fact. Alvin P. Cohen and Jiang Yuxiang have made specific remarks as to the original legend's retelling and used this mention of 'ghosts' not 'shadows' as proof of its non-relation.

phrases have the character for shadow (影) within them.⁵⁰ The appearance of the word "ghost" instead of "shadow" in these text translations could be as simple as a translator's choice of words. Additionally, "to the Chinese the shadow is particularly meaningful, and has been so since ancient times. To them the shadow is a true image of the person and is considered one of its souls. As its 'shadow soul', it follows the person into the hereafter" (Korner 5). Even if shadows were not present in the Han Wudi legend, the ghost and the shadow are so closely tied that the idea of depicting a ghost or spirit *with* shadow shortly after hearing this tale is not far fetched.

Beyond the legend of Han Wudi, many more origin legends have circulated, though not as widely. Just as the practice of Chinese shadow puppetry formed into distinct regional styles, so did their oral histories of how the form came to be. An alternative origin legend in Shaanxi province is that of Mr. Zhou. Mr. Zhou was a self-conscious duke who insisted on telling stories from behind a screen - when audiences complained of having nothing to look at, Mr. Zhou lit a lantern and just like that, Mr. Zhou was represented by his shadow self.⁵¹ Another tale from the same region tells the story of a Han dynasty concubine who used the shadow of a torn leaf on a paper window screen to enrapture her young and furtive son. Another cites a clever general who uses a shadow army to protect a vulnerable city under siege. The shadow that possesses a communicative spirit, a medium between worlds, an art form so moving one can be brought back to life - these are the important messages of these origin legends and the reason why they, and not the factual historical accounts, persist in popular historical memory.

Chasing Ghosts

Tracing Chinese shadow puppetry's history from origin legends onward is to chase ghosts. The shadows left few traces throughout their early years. Fan Pen Chen, renowned Chinese shadow puppet scholar and professor of East Asian studies at SUNY Albany, has done the heavy lifting for me here. Chen's body of work between the late 1990s up until now have been focused almost entirely on Chinese shadow puppetry and its history. Chen's tome, *Chinese Shadow Theatre: History, Popular Religion and Women Warriors* surveys historical document, librettos

⁵⁰ Specifically, 鬼影 *guiying*, 阴魂 *yinhun*, 阴灵 *yingling*, 叠影 *dieying*, 魅影 *meiying*, 影痕 *yinghen*, 残影 *canying*.

⁵¹ Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre" 21.

and shadow puppet performance, all alongside a long resume of fieldwork to draw an exhaustive map of the art form's trajectory from ancient origins to modernity. I lean heavily on Chen and Jiang's work here in order to stitch together a history of the form during the dynastic period.

Chinese shadow puppetry developed from Daoist ghost-callings and scattered dabbling to widespread popularity in the Song dynasty (960-1279CE), with an arresting performance of *Three Kingdoms* (三國 *sanguo*) in the nation's then-capitol of *Bianjing* (present day *Kaifeng*), *Henan* province.⁵² In order for the form to have achieved artistic greatness as documented by the first written record in Song dynasty, both Jiang Yuxiang and Fan Pen Chen conclude that the form had already been evolving for the few hundred years prior. This places the beginnings of Chinese shadow puppetry as a formal performance form somewhere within the Tang dynasty (618-907CE), which stationed its capitol in Chang'an (present day Xi'an) and was known as the golden age of Chinese culture.

During the Tang dynasty, Buddhism becomes a more integral part of Chinese daily life. "Buddhism was...instrumental in transforming the Chinese imagination. Stories of Buddhist origin became many of the most widely known and popular tales in the Tang dynasty. To spread the faith, monks would show pictures and tell stories to audiences of illiterate laymen" (Ebrey "History of China" 122).⁵³ Buddhist stories and *sujiang* (or sometimes called *bianxiang* or *bianwen* "mandala illustrations or texts"), a form of narrative ballad singing conducted in Buddhist temples, became rich source material for shadow puppetry's later shows.⁵⁴ Performances in the Tang dynasty were likely to have been contained within the Buddhist temples for shamanistic rituals and as accompaniment to *sujiang* or other forms of storytelling.⁵⁵ While the term "shaman" is a controversial and colonial creation that is rife with generalizations,⁵⁶ I continue its usage here because it has been adopted into Mandarin as *samanjiao* (萨满教) (*sa-man* being an alliteration of sha-man) and it is an important role to touch

⁵² This Song dynasty shadow performance was the first record of any formal shadow theatre, also noted by *Gao Cheng* in *The Origin of Things*.

⁵³ For a beautiful survey of painting and performance throughout cultures, including China, see Victor H. Mair "Painting and Performance".

⁵⁴ Jiang "Chinese Shadow Play" 5, Chang "Lost Roots" 19.

⁵⁵ Chang "Lost Roots" 19.

⁵⁶ The term likely originated in Siberia, but through Western research and exoticization, the term was then used as a generic and misunderstood label for anything "mystic" and "eastern" or "indigenous".

upon in any discussion of shadow puppetry's ritualistic past. Because the term is a colonial one and controversial due to its over-generalization, it is important to clarify its meaning here as, simply, "a communal leader chosen and trained to work for the community by engaging with significant other-than-human persons" (Harvey 1).⁵⁷ As is evident in the persisting Han Wudi origin legend, shamanistic ritual was a practice that touched many facets of Chinese life, even the Emperor's quarters, and is generally agreed to be the starting point for all Chinese theatre and drama forms.⁵⁸

With the country's unification between north and south coupled with economic prosperity and a reinvigoration of the educational system and urbanization, the fledgling art form found enough support by the end of the Tang dynasty to begin its trajectory towards a heyday in the Song dynasty (960-1279CE).⁵⁹ Before the mid-1900s, "China was a two-class society with its population divided into the urban and rural sectors" (Ren "Urban China" xiiv). The growing urban areas were a catalyst for shadow puppetry's newfound secularity and popularity as were the *washeguolan* (瓦舍勾栏) theatres.⁶⁰ This public outdoor stage that emerged in the Song dynasty acted as venue for any manner of non-temple-based performances. Secular shadow puppet performances alternated with operas and musical performances to entertain the urban intellectual audiences and used the increase in demand to innovate and expand the form: the first introduction of scripts used in performance, sunlit daytime performance, women in troupes and an imperial invite to perform at the palace.⁶¹ The increase in performances also led to a demand for better and better puppet craft and for the first time in history, we see shadow puppet-making enter a legitimate guild format.⁶²

After a near century of decreased activity in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368CE) due to stricter control of cultural activities by the ruling Mongols, Chinese shadow puppetry, along with most other forms of public entertainment, was pushed out of the public urban sphere and the

⁵⁷ For more on the issues surrounding shamanism and its history within the academy, see Alice Beck Kehoe, *Shamans and Religion*.

⁵⁸ Llamas 93.

⁵⁹ Xu "New Cultural History" 297.

⁶⁰ Jiang "Chinese Shadow Play" 9; Zhang "Performing Techniques" 4.

⁶¹ Chang "Lost Roots" 15-23.

⁶² Two guilds were formed: *The Society of Parchment Painting* and *The Society of Shadow Carving*. See Chang "Lost Roots" 23, 104; Zhang "Performing Techniques" 4; Jiang "Chinese Shadow Play" 9.

popular *washeguolan* theatre. Finding their art form no longer celebrated within the city, shadow puppetry's practitioners migrated to the countryside, taking their art practice with them. It is during this shift that the form becomes primarily a folk art form - made by and for the people of a given community. Shadow puppetry activity bounces back in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644CE) with gusto.⁶³ The country is once again under Chinese rule and flourishes from international market demands. The urban areas south of the Yangzi River explode in population and enable the country to expand and overtake what is now the Southwest region in China. This expansion brought shadow puppetry with it and introduced the form all the way to western *Yunnan* around the 1700s.⁶⁴

With the expansion to the countryside and the change of capital cities from *Nanjing* to *Beijing*, the Ming and Qing dynasty (1644-1911CE) was a time for cultivation and perfection. With a few centuries under its belt in most regions on the mainland, shadow puppet performances quickly became a fixture in nearly every village community and fully developed its current distinct regional styles. Performances served everything from temple rituals and festivals to secular entertainment. Shadow puppetry's activity extended as far west as *Yunnan*, *Qinghai*, *Gansu* and as far east as *Liaoning* and *Jiangsu* province, making it one of the most widespread folk arts in Chinese history.

Beyond the country's borders, Chinese shadow puppetry developed alongside other rich traditions of shadow puppetry in East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Europe. Indonesia, Malaysia and India have cultivated long lineages of shadow puppetry and, like China's tradition, are uniquely tied to ritual practice and vernacular traditions and just like China's origin legends, true origins of each form will only ever be a hypothesis.⁶⁵ Theories of China's influence on and by other traditions is also unclear, but it is certain that there has been cross-pollination of ideas and aesthetics throughout these form's long histories, as indicated by overlapping story texts and aesthetic particularities, such as translucent leather used in India's

⁶³ Jiang "Chinese Shadow Play" 10.

⁶⁴ The oldest original shadow puppets from *Yunnan* are 400 years old and are currently housed in the collection of the Chengdu National Shadow Puppet Museum.

⁶⁵ In the opening to VanNess and Prawirohardjo's definitive book entitled *Javanese Wayang Kulit*, they confirm origin points for any of these long-standing shadow traditions is impossible. Page 1, 8, 9. For a more thorough comparison of shadow traditions, see Chen "Shadow Theatres".

tradition.⁶⁶ Newer traditions of shadow puppetry, originating around 1500 CE or later, have flourished in Turkey and Greece, there serving as a largely secular and satirical social commentary.⁶⁷ France adapted a form of shadow puppetry in the late 1700s, via Italy, that was named "Ombres Chinoises" or, literally, Chinese shadows. While the French form of shadow puppetry varies from the Chinese tradition in a number of ways, mainly that their shadows are opaque, the name honors the form's likely origins.

In Performance

A few weeks after I arrived at my apprenticeship in the summer of 2008, I was invited to join the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe for a local nighttime performance. Since my arrival, I had only been allowed to quietly observe daily rehearsals and perform menial tasks in the studio. Even without direct participation, my days were busy. I had hardly had time to think about the performances I hadn't been seeing until this invitation came through. It was with little expectation, then, that I mounted a rickety tractor loaded with long spans of slim logs a few hours later. I sat in the back, on those thin logs, and did my best not to tumble off. The smell of burnt motor fuel cut through the crisp air of early summer as we wound our way in and around dirt roads and mountain pathways. The chug of the tractor's motor drowned out any of the nature sounds that surrounded us. As was usual in China's northern central belt, a heavy atmospheric haze lay between us and the northern mountain range, made up of pollution from nearby industries and dust from the region's dry, red earth. The haze turned much of the scenery into a beautiful Chinese painting: distance could be measured by the saturation of color, the furthest mountain ranges nearly disappearing into the grey sky. Bumping heartily along a dirt road, we drove slowly for over an hour to reach the troupe's performance site by late afternoon.

⁶⁶ The textual basis of Indonesia's *wayang kulit* shadow tradition is India's Ramayana and the Mahabharata, indicating strong ties to India's hindu and buddhist religions.

⁶⁷ See Metin And's comprehensive book on Turkish shadow puppetry, Karagoz.



Figure 1.1. Puppet master *Wei Jinquan* has loaded the shadow puppet troupe's mobile screen and is ready to depart, 2008. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.



Figure 1.2. Puppet master *Wei Jinquan* drives the tractor through the Shaanxi countryside. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

When we arrived, we were greeted by the host family who had ordered this shadow performance for their celebration. As was customary, shadow puppet performances in the countryside were either commissioned by local temples and governments for festivals or by individual families who were hoping to have a shadow puppet performance accompany a milestone of life: a birthday, wedding, house-raising or house-clearing, and even funerals.⁶⁸ The troupe was invited to bless a marital union this particular evening. The wedding ceremony, which in Chinese custom is not a belabored event, had already transpired. What was left was the fun part: eating, chatting, speeches, music, entertainment and the exchange of *hongbao* (红包) or, literally, *red envelopes* with gifted money tucked inside.



Figure 1.3. The wedding's festivities have begun with an informal opera performance. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

⁶⁸ Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre" 69, Chang "Lost Roots"109



Figure 1.4. Red trays are stacked with plates and ready to be taken to the awaiting wedding guests. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Not long after we were seated, the home's host and the bride's father came back to formally welcome us again. As was customary, he offered Master Wei cartons of cigarettes and bottles of *baijiu* (白酒) and stayed to catch up awhile.⁶⁹ They were not strangers, the Master and our host. Over the years, I gathered, Master Wei had gotten to know everyone in the surrounding villages through his vocation. Soon, food was piled high on our own table and we gorged on the delights - specialties rarely splurged upon in a rural household except for a wedding celebration, such as seafood, whole duck and fancy mushrooms.

After the troupe had satiated themselves appropriately, they rested awhile with cigarettes and thimble-sized shots of *baijiu*. The sun was setting faster now, dusk would soon be upon us. Without explicit direction, the lower members of the troupe excused themselves and, as I

⁶⁹ *Baijiu* (白酒), or white liquor, is a 52% alcohol-by-volume Chinese liquor made from sorghum that gets its name from its clear appearance. *Baijiu* is by far the most prevalent alcohol in China and often used as currency or to curry favor in any transaction.

shadowed them, began to set up the stage on the dirt road just outside the host's home. Using nothing but rope and gravity, those slim logs I rode with were quickly erected into a four-walled theatre, large enough to seat six. Navy blue fabric was hung on the outer edges to discourage light spill from the setting sun, lanterns and (now) cell phones and electric outdoor lights. Then, the white *yingchuang* (影窗) or "shadow window" screen was hung directly in front, strung tight with rope. Lastly, a single light was hung just behind the screen at mid-height. When tested, its bright white light blasted the darkening country road, exposing the harsh edges of benches that had been set up for the audience and a few curious bystanders who had grown tired of eating and drinking and had come to watch the set up.



Figure 1.5. The shadow puppet stage is nearly finished. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Slowly, as the troupe tied the final knots on the stage and laid out the evening's shadow puppets, the wedding crowd made its way to the dirt road. The very young and the very old were assisted by everyone else, still chatting away with the energy of the party. Then, from behind the

screen, an unmistakable crack of the *zhuban* (竹板 bamboo clapper) called the noisy crowd to attention. I, too, straightened myself on the bench where I was sitting: finally, the show was about to begin! The *erhu* cut through the clatter and pulled us into the world of the show with its familiar melody. Within moments, the screen came alive with a single shadow figure wearing an intricately carved gown, accompanied by the storyteller's voice in a long, delicious narration. We were all present. We were all watching.



Figure 1.6. The Huaxian shadow puppet troupe in performance. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

From the Ming dynasty to the late 1800s, this context for a shadow performance was the most common one.⁷⁰ Shadow troupes primarily serviced their own village and a few surrounding towns with performances they had developed during downtime from agricultural work. Troupes with unique talents, such as an exceptional puppet manipulator or an especially gifted singer,

⁷⁰ While private performances in wealthy homes did occur in prosperous cities such as Beijing, the majority of shadow puppetry's activity was supported by these commissioned shows within the home or the village temple. For more, see Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre" 83-96.

could expand their serviced territory and increase their commission rate. In regions where shadow puppetry was extremely popular, such as Shaanxi or Sichuan province, competition for paying audiences inspired multiple troupes per region and drove progress and innovation. Better and better performances drew increased audience attendance. These areas were even able to support full-time shadow puppet troupes.

Even though Chinese shadow puppetry has been deemed one of the most widespread folk art forms in the country, its vast regional differences makes generalizations tricky.⁷¹ From play content to troupe size to musical styles and aesthetic design, each village or troupe developed their own idiosyncrasies over time. The subject of these shadow performances ranged widely between adapted novels, national tales and local myths. The troupe's proximity to urban centers, especially a capitol city at the time, greatly influenced their subject matter. The closer a troupe resided to an urban area, the more likely they were to be literate and politically minded, which meant more national stories about the emperor and his conquests and the utilization of Chinese literature.⁷²

Most troupes range in size between three to seven members, which usually include one puppeteer, one singer/storyteller and at least one musician.⁷³ In smaller troupes, the puppeteer and singer/storyteller is one and the same performer; in larger troupes, these roles are separate and the puppeteer is often able to employ a puppet carver to make the troupe's shadow figures. Some troupes additionally employ a puppeteer's assistant, usually an apprentice, who is paid with food and lodging in exchange for menial labor and training when time permits. There is often a core roster of musicians (usually between three and five) and the rest come and go as their schedule permits. From my experience with traditional troupes, it is the puppeteer and singer/storyteller that act as artistic directors of the troupe, curating shows for commissioned performances, conducting rehearsals and managing finances. Any apprentice who wants to continue on to the role of "master" will have to master all of these skills and either wait until their master has died to subsume their troupe and regional practice or find an unclaimed territory

⁷¹ Benton Exhibition catalogue 8.

⁷² My own fieldwork examples of this phenomena are plentiful, including the remaining troupes of Shaanxi, Shanxi, Hebei, Hubei, Shandong, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan.

⁷³ Lily Chang writes that most shadow puppet troupes have five to ten members. This difference in troupe size we experienced could certainly be due to the universal decline of troupe activity between the years of 1982 and 2008.

to begin their shadow puppet practice. The content of shadow puppet performances can be anything from popular Chinese literature (such as *Sanguo* one of China's five great novels), to local tales and everything in between. Fragmented scenes from long, popular stories were common along with morality tales, romance stories and even sex education.⁷⁴ Even though some stories and subjects were shared throughout shadow troupes in China, "there is no concept of an authentic text, only various versions; nor is there anything of dramatic construction in a sense that Aristotle would have approved, the little, if anything, of the development of characters" (Ward 22). With such a wide array of stories offered by a given troupe, it is impressive that most shadow puppet performances were improvised.

Although the scripts of such plays are not prescribed in the same way as plays found in more codified theatre forms such as *Kunqu* (Kun opera) and *jingxi* (Peking opera), the codes, formulas, and conventions are so familiar to the performers that they are able to create organic theatrical presentations despite improvisations and variations. Indeed, the shadow plays in Shanxi (and around the country) used to be performed wholly from memory. Flexibility and adaptability are built into such performing arts. (Chen "Temple of Guanyin" 66-67)

Shadow puppet performances were all improvised with only rare exceptions in certain communities where there was a literate puppet master and even then the scripts are not word-for-word documents but skeletal sketches of the play and its storyline. The Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe, who had no scripts or textual documents to reference, boasted a canon of nearly 250 stories in their repertoire.

After an hour of listening to enchanting music and watching the Huaxian troupe improvise their indescribably beautiful colored shadows before the wedding crowd, I grew sore from sitting on my hard wooden bench. I got up to stretch myself, which revealed a view of the entire shadow puppet stage as it sat with purpose in the dark road. There was a quiet flurry of activity from the young in the crowd just behind the stage that I hadn't noticed before from my position in the front. It seemed as though all the audience members aged three to twelve had found a way to entertain themselves by crawling in and out of the raised stage to watch from within and below. The puppeteers seemed accustomed to this as there had been no disturbance to the performance quality thus far, no errant shouting from behind the screen. Dozens of kids flitted in and out,

⁷⁴ When I worked in the Lin Liu-Hsin Puppet Theatre Museum's collection in Taiwan, I was shown a set of these shadow puppets for sex education.

angling for another turn as soon as their current one had ended. Emboldened by my own burning curiosity, I disregarded the average age suggestion for this spectator perspective and got in line with the rest of them. Whether out of deference or curiosity, the children graciously gave me my first turn by dispersing the line immediately. I resisted, but they wouldn't hear of it.

As I crouched down and scuffled along the dirt into the center of the enclosed shadow puppet stage, I felt as though I was entering a secret lair. Coming from the dark and cool night air, the sweltering and luminous interiors of the puppet stage were as otherworldly as anything. The air smelled strongly of baijiu, cigarettes and sweat and I could hear above the performance oration that there were several smaller conversations going on between musicians - even, occasionally, with the leaders of the troupe. Even Pauline Benton, the first American artist and practitioner to work with Chinese shadow puppeteers in the early 1900s in Beijing, observed this casual professionalism. "Some performers seem very nonchalant during a performance, sipping their tea, wandering off for a smoke, and seeming to have plenty of time to chat with any of us whom curiosity has led to take a peek backstage" ("China's Colored Shadows"16). Benton was one of the few outside observers who took note of things that were happening beyond the shadow screen, probably because she herself became a practitioner. Benton was the first American and woman who worked with shadow master *Li Tuochen* in Beijing in the early 1900s. What started as a hobby turned into a life mission. After a short apprenticeship, Benton went on to found her own *Red Gate Players* Chinese shadow puppet company in America and toured extensively, generating a decent fan base and even performing at the White House.⁷⁵ In her later years, Benton amassed a sizable collection of shadow figures, both found and commissioned. My approach to Chinese shadow puppetry mirrors Benton's in a few ways: we were drawn by a deep respect and love for the form, we worked as practitioners before writing and research and we see the mission for continuance as a question for all culture makers, not just for the academics and institutions. Indeed, we are so alike that in her biography, *Shadow Woman: The Extraordinary Career of Pauline Benton*, author Grant Hayter-Menzies names me as her successor. I consider her a ghostly mentor in the best sense and I imagine Benton would have gotten in line with me that night at in the countryside.

⁷⁵ The Red Gate Players were invited to perform for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in December 1936. As mentioned by Grant Hayter-Menzies "Shadow Woman" 87.

From my view beneath the stage, I was able to observe a whole host of actions that remain hidden to the outside observer. Without words, the puppeteer, the singer/storyteller and their group of musicians are constantly communicating through non-verbal gestures, cueing one another through improvisational sections, scene changes and transitions. Using head nods, foot stamps and occasional side glances, the elegance with which the troupe moves through an improvised performance could leave an uninitiated observer to believe otherwise. This type of communication was not evident during the rehearsals I had observed, likely because the troupe was working through short sections at a time, finessing movement and choreography more so than they were perfecting the coordination of every performance component.

As I watched from my spot, I noticed the host of the wedding visit the troupe from the opening at the stage right side of the screen and ply them with more bottles of baijiu. I would learn later that in addition to a monetary commission, all hosts entreat the favor of a shadow puppet troupe with other gifts and offerings, cigarettes and booze being of high value. It was a reminder to me that the shadow troupe was there to bestow a blessing upon the wedding union and the better they performed, the better the blessing would be. It was in the host's best interest to keep his invited troupe happy and performing. Not an hour into the performance and it was clear the troupe was happily tipsy from these frequent gifts.

I felt a small hand swat my leg. Clearly, my turn was up and I had ungraciously forgotten to volunteer my own removal. I popped down to my knees again and crept backwards out into the black. The children looked at me expectantly, wondering what I thought of the experience. "*Feichang hao,*" I said. In a word, Fantastic. They smiled and wasted no time scooting under the benches for another peek at the action within.

After a few more rounds watching the show from inside the stage, I retreated to my hard wooden bench again. It felt good to sit. I was offered tea and snacks by a neighbor and took them with gratitude. At the three hour mark in the performance, the audience demographics had shifted in my absence. Where the initial crowd was everyone who had attended the wedding, now there were mostly young adults and the elderly. The parents had, I figured, taken their small children to bed. I peeked and, sure enough, the crowd of children from behind the stage had dwindled to just a few.

The night wore on and the shadow players continued to perform. At hour four, the young adults had left and some of the parents had returned to join their own parents. At hour five, just

the elderly remained. They talked with one another as the shows transpired before them, commenting often on stories and characters: "Oh, I never liked him!", "Isn't she beautiful?", "Watch out, he's coming for you!", and laughing at each others' comments. The familiarity with which they spoke of the characters, the plays and amongst themselves gave this hour of the performance an entirely different feel. The collective memory of this audience was deep. They had seen these plays, these characters and even these exact puppets for decades as shadow puppet collections are passed down from master to son through the patrilineal line.

The shadow figures, gay phantom actors of the screen, give to the country people their outlet both for creative work and amusement, and bring them into close contact with China's long history, her legends, religions, and heroes of the past. The more times they can see an old familiar play, or even one scene of a popular favorite, the better the people like it. (Benton 21)

It was true that the only audience members to watch the night's six-hours of performance in its entirety was the 65+ demographic. They had seen more shadow puppetry than anyone else in the crowd and they stayed until three am in the morning when the shadow puppet troupe finally persuaded the host that a sufficient blessing had been bestowed upon the newlyweds and it was time to head home. The audience packed up their seating, dumped out their tired tea leaves onto the dirt road and started their short walks back to their respective homes. Their candid commentary on the shadows and their performance faded slowly until they were swallowed by the darkness and the night. From what I could hear, Benton was right: the more times they see a play, the more they like it and this crowd had been watching shadow puppet shows for a long, long time. The impact of retellings and reiterations within a community is fundamental to a vernacular practice and strengthened through generations, into the traditional. But what is even more challenging in any effort to preserve Chinese shadow puppetry is its basis in ritual practice, which is linked to its medium of shadows.

More Real

During the early weeks of my first apprenticeship with the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe in Shaanxi province, I remember thumbing through their trunk of shadow puppets during a rehearsal break. Running my hands over the worn but sturdy leather and drinking in the designs from up close was a way to ease the exhaustion of working and communicating in a foreign

context all day long. The figures were stunning. Of the hundred or so that the troupe had on-hand for this rehearsal session, so many resembled archetypes that I had seen dancing on the screen during their practices: the brave young man, the young woman with a long braid, the red-faced warrior, the Tang dynasty Emperor, and clowns - so many clowns. Each puppet was carefully tucked within a multi-pocketed folder made with thick layers of paper that absorbed the leather figures' moisture when in storage.



Figure 1.7. Paper and cloth folders for shadow puppet storage. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

On this particular day, when the troupe made motions to resume their rehearsal, I made motions to pack up my side project. The folders were closed and placed, one by one, back into the trunk. While putting everything back in its place, I noticed the corner of a smaller figure, peeking out from a flat built into the ceiling of the trunk's top. I tugged on the corner. Out came an un-jointed leather carving of a woman with long, flowing robes. Very uncharacteristic of Chinese shadow puppet design, she was facing forward and both eyes were visible instead of the usual one-eyed profile. She looked oddly realistic compared to the highly stylized Shaanxi style shadow puppets I had been looking at a moment ago.

"Who is this?" I asked.

"*Guanyin*," master Wei replied.

I admit I had to look her up.



Figure 1.8. *Guanyin* shadow puppet figure, cut by *Wang Tianxi* (汪天喜).

Guanyin (观音) is a bodhisattva and one of the most popular in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.⁷⁶ Translated into English, she is known as the "goddess of mercy."⁷⁷ A local shadow puppet origin legend in Shaanxi province tells the story of Guanyin's visit in ancient times, a visit wherein she prophesied a disaster would strike the region and in order to save the townspeople, she created a show with shadows to lure them to safety.⁷⁸ There are other such tales of her heroic mercy in the Northeast of China and, just like in Shaanxi, her deeds have secured her a place among the shadow puppeteer's origin legends.⁷⁹

When asked, the troupe members confirmed that they did not identify as Buddhists, nor did they actively perform any Buddhist rituals. But, don't ask them to leave Guanyin at home during a performance. They wouldn't hear of it. While they didn't seem to be able to articulate why it was important to carry Guanyin with them at all times, it was certain that it was important to do just that. Custom was custom, why question it?

"Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called 'twice-behaved behavior'" (Taylor "Archive" 3). I would add here that in addition to performances being vital acts of transfer, so are the rituals *of* performance. Konrad Lorenz, an ornithologist who has extensively studied the behavior of birds, discovered that there is little difference between animal and human behavioral patterns. While including an animal behaviorist in a humanities thesis, even an interdisciplinary one, might seem out of place, it is imperative to connect the unconsciously born and practiced social behavior that slowly becomes custom and then ritual for this is the untraceable path that shadow puppetry in China and many performative ritual forms have followed. It is most certainly the reason why Lorenz's work is included in Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman's performance studies anthology, *Ritual, Play, and Performance*, which works to articulate the connections between ritual and performance.

In his article, *Habit, Ritual, and Magic*, Lorenz artfully traces a developmental path from instinctual human behavior to habit to custom and ritual. Humans' instinctual behavior develops from our instincts to survive and over time, as these instinctual behaviors have proved mostly

⁷⁶ Chamberlayne "Development of Kuan Yin" 6; Chen "Temple of Guanyin" 70.

⁷⁷ *Guanyin* is short for *Guanshiyin* (观世音) which literally means "she who hears the sounds and prayers of mortals", Chamberlayne "Development of Kuan Yin" 47.

⁷⁸ Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre" 78.

⁷⁹ Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre" 79.

right or wrong, they become entrenched as certain habits; some habits of which have more certain outcomes (by avoiding certain predators or threats, regular travel routes are established) and some of which have less certain outcomes ("knocking on wood" to ward off bad luck).

All these phenomena (habits) are related. They have a common root in a behavior mechanism whose species-preserving function is obvious: for a living being lacking insight into the relation between causes and effects it must be extremely useful to cling to a behavior pattern which has one of many times proved to achieve its aim, and to have done so without danger. If one does not know which details of the whole performance are essential for its success as well as for its safety, it is best to cling to them all with slavish exactitude. (Lorenz 27)

The "slavish exactitude" that Lorenz mentions is exactly what has kept *Guanyin* cozily nested in the Huaxian shadow puppet troupes' trunk over the years. She could be left behind, but why tempt fate? She had, seemingly, protected them thus far. Master Wei, who comes from a long line of shadow puppet masters, inherited this habit-turned-ritual from his own father, which marks, "the moment when the human being no longer acquires the habit for himself but learns it from his parents by cultural transmission" (27). Protective instinctual behavior becomes habits, which become customs, which become rituals - rituals that are then passed on to successive generations. At some point, the custom or ritual may have been transmitted through so many generations that its origins are forgotten or unconscious or even unnecessary. If I may rephrase Diana Taylor here, "*rituals* function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity from ghosts long since gone, through repeated and reiterated customs." The transmitted memories handed down are shadowy at best, what remains important and connective are the rituals.

Roy A. Rappaport, folklorist and ritual performance researcher, defines "ritual" as "understood to be a form or structure, that is, a number of features or characteristics in a more or less fixed relationship to one another" (249). These signs in fixed relationship to one another become learned codes to signify beyond the "here and now, may not be material, and, as in the case of transcendent deities, might not even be thought to exist within the space-time continuum" (251). The customs and rituals that signify something beyond the "here and now" within the context of shadow puppetry and its performances are vast: from the quiet custom of keeping a carved leather figure of *Guanyin* tucked away in a trunk to cultivate good fortune and show homage to the Goddess of Mercy to the performance itself as a ritualistic act of bestowing

blessing or communicating with deities and the beyond - such as a performance to bless a wedding.

Lorenz tells us that all of these inherited customs and rituals, received through cultural transmission, are necessary for a stable and peaceful community even if they have long since lost the memory of their initial origins. Everything we do is conditioned, consciously or not, by layers upon layers of these transmitted customs present in our everyday, everywhere.

Any human group which exceeds in size that which can be held together by personal love and friendship, depends for its existence on these...functions of culturally ritualized behavior patterns. Human social behavior is permeated by cultural ritualization to a degree which we do not fully realize for the very reason of its omnipresence. (30)

Through multiple generations of transmission, it is easy to lose track of the original impetus for the behavior (ritual) and even harder to become conscious of its purpose once it has become a habitual custom. With over a one thousands years of history, those who participate in any Chinese shadow puppetry performance are only partially aware, if at all, of the culturally transmitted ritual significance of the experience. If Master Wei was aware of the personal important of Guanyin, he made no indication of the impact of her presence.

Importantly, the ritualistic aspects of the form, however buried, do not diminish its ritual basis or the impact it has on its community. In fact, this very unconsciousness is what Richard Schechner deems necessary to still consider the art form ritualistic rather than theatrical; "knowing what the ritual does is a very important step in the development of theatre from ritual" (Schechner "From Ritual to Theatre" 201). Chinese shadow puppetry, especially when performed in countryside villages, is still deeply ritualistic.

Adding to the obfuscation surrounding the consciousness of shadow puppetry's ritual functions is Chinese popular religion, as it circulates among the masses. "Since this popular religious culture is not institutionalized and systematized, its expressions of spirituality are highly varied, loose, and polymorphous" (Chen 60). In practice, it feels much more like customs of habit than the more conscious rituals of formal elite religions such as Confucianism, Daoism or Buddhism. "Localized belief systems, some rooted in the very ancient past, include animism, shamanism and ancestor reverence. These beliefs find local expression in a multitude of forms that are often a synthesis of elements of several belief systems" (Mair and Bender 179). Kenneth Dean, a renowned scholar with a focus between Chinese popular religion and ritual practices,

concludes that as an aggregate of elements from China's elite religions and philosophies mixed with local rituals and rites, China's local popular religion "resists definition" (Dean 338). The "polymorphous" and syncretic nature of this religion is what allows an origin legend from Daoism, a patron deity from Buddhism, play subjects that entrench Confucian values, and a deeply local visual and aural aesthetic.

The Daoist practice of ghost-calling, alluded to in the Han Wudi legend, is still embedded in the rural performances today. "Shamanist illusionism, with its ventriloquism and escape acts, seeks to break the surface of reality, as it were, to cause the appearance of a super-reality that is 'more real' than the ordinary" (Kirby 148). The "more real" is not an exaggeration. I have seen villagers truly moved by performances, performances they have seen a dozen times. The rough monotony of peasant life in China means any festival or occasion to break the drudgery is given zealous focus. To mark a passage of time, a milestone, another year, another harvest, the shadow puppet shows served up life as the villager's knew it but distilled, purified and ritualized. These moments of "super-reality" linger long after the shows end and the villagers return to their regular everyday lives, anointing all with a sense of greater service to their family, community and beyond.

Ritual Remains

Later during that first summer of apprenticeships, the Huaxian shadow puppet troupe took me to another performance. I rode in the back of the tractor again and as we pulled up to our destination, I could see dozens of people all dressed in white. Gorgeous structures of colored paper and banners had been stationed all along the road, ending in a bursting display at the home's front archway. Attributing white to weddings, I was soon humbled to learn we had arrived at a beloved patriarch's funeral.⁸⁰

The air was somber, but not without a steady stream of chatter and a large meal with baijiu to break the sobriety. The incense was so thick that it masked the cigarette smell. Visitors rotated from the food tables through the fog of incense to the makeshift shrine, which was piled high with candles, more incense, photos, offerings and even more colorful paper sculptures. Paper

⁸⁰ In China and much of Asia, the color white is associated with ghosts and deaths and therefore the color of funerals. For an in-depth description of colors and symbology of China as used in performance, see Ward "Not Merely Players".

money was always kept burning in a small fire on the floor near the front. Families brought paper replicas of worldly goods that the departed may need in the great afterlife: money, food, cars, even cell phones. The paper effigies awaited their turn at the side of the burning altar.

Intermittently, as the troupe and I ate our early dinner, a long and inordinately loud wailing sound was heard. A middle-aged woman had positioned herself at the foot of the altar and was *koutou*-ing alongside her piercing wails.⁸¹ After another few minutes of what seemed like punishing emotion, she popped up, seemingly unaffected and returned to her place at the meal. Master Wei, judging from the puzzled look on my face explained, "she's paid."

"Paid to what?" I asked.

"Paid to cry," he said.

Here, then, is the perfect example of E.T. Kirby's example of shamanistic practices as "more real" than real. The paid crier is there to cry for the rest of the guests. They are allowed and encouraged to channel the well of emotions that come from a relation's passing and openly voice their individual cries into one, collective wail.⁸² The louder and longer they wail, the "more real" the suffering is expressed and the more cathartic the emotional distress is for all. Even I, a stranger to the deceased, felt a pressure valve being released every time this ritual was performed.⁸³

Shortly after the paid crier had finished a particularly rousing session and without any conspicuous signal, the shadow puppet troupe began to ready themselves. In what seemed like minutes, they had set up their screen and were ready to turn the light on, just as the sun was setting. The guests ambled out of the main doorway and out into the dimming street. There, we sat to watch a performance that blessed the deceased and released his soul from suffering (*chaodu* 超度).⁸⁴ The night's performance was a scene from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the very same story that was used in the first recorded performance of shadow puppetry in the Song dynasty. *Three Kingdoms*, as the title is often shortened to, is one of China's four great

⁸¹ To *koutou* (叩头) literally means to "knock head", which implies a kneeling bow so deep that one knocks their forehead on the floor.

⁸² I purposely use the gendered pronoun 'she' here as the vast majority of paid criers are women.

⁸³ The role of paid crier developed from the ancient Chinese belief that no tears and low attendance at a funeral means the deceased was unloved. In an interesting theatrical twist to this role, it is often fulfilled by an out of work performer.

⁸⁴ Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre" 92.

novels, and in this instance was narrowed down to the scene in which a death and spirit sacrifice occur.⁸⁵ In the act of watching their present reality reenacted with miniaturized, shadowed figures, the audience seemed to let their guard down. The side conversations picked up, the children became rowdy again and the puppeteers proceeded to get tipsy off the hosts' gifts. The experience was not unlike the show I had witnessed at the wedding a month prior.

Even if shadow puppet performances and their connection with shamanistic ghost-calling practices lives on a subconscious strata for its participants, this anchor for the art form remains its anchor. From the days when shamans were puppeteers to the present day where puppeteers are conduits for ritual practice, the act of casting shadows to communicate beyond the "here and now" remains the same.⁸⁶ Barbara E. Ward, a social anthropologist who researched Chinese society with a focus on performance, observed that even in formalized Chinese opera, the "evidence is quite clear that in the eyes of at least some of those present these are not merely elaborate entertainments with overtones of cosmic symbolism, but also offerings, and the audience is not only human but divine" (Ward 25). Generations of cultural transmission have slowly diminished the explicit ties between the shadow and the beyond as the aesthetics of the Chinese shadow performance have changed, but the belief of shadows as the medium between worlds has not.⁸⁷

The dissimilar performance contexts, between a wedding and a funeral, explicated and confirmed the primary and unchanging role of shadow puppetry as ritual function in village society. In addition to that irreplaceable ritual function, today's shadow performances in the villages prolong a millenium-old habit of going to shadow puppet shows with the rest of one's locality and sharing stories and experiences that transform people into communities. "Much performing among communal peoples is... part of the overall ecology of society" (Schechner 197). The ritual aspects of Chinese shadow puppetry's vernacular importance is an aspect of the form that is greatly diminished or extinguished when it is transformed by efforts to preserve or

⁸⁵ China's four great novels (*Outlaws of the Marsh*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*) published between the 14th and 18th centuries, are considered of the longest and oldest novels in the world and the peak of China's rich literary tradition.

⁸⁶ For more on comparisons between the puppeteer with shaman, see Stalberg "China's Puppets". For more on equating the actor with shaman, see Ward "Not Merely Players".

⁸⁷ For further information on this embedded ritual aspect in the Chinese marionette theatre tradition, see Ruizendaal 346.

safeguard. These ritual roots, explicit or not, are inextricably linked to Chinese shadow puppetry, as indicated by its most persistent origin legend, and should be considered when creating policy to carry it forward and transmit it to future generations.

The Origins of Shadows

My own preoccupation with the Han Wudi origin legend, as indication of the ritual potency of shadows in performance, has also endured. Every time I hear the tale, I am again entranced by shadows, their connection to the beyond, and their storytelling prowess. Over the years, when anyone outside the tradition has asked me, "what is Chinese shadow puppetry like?", I find it much more effective to tell this legend than to tell them *about* shadow puppetry. In 2015, when I was commissioned to create a shadow puppet performance by Emilie Cadieux, director of cultural activities at the Montreal Botanical Garden, I immediately knew that as an informed researcher and practitioner, questioning the possibilities of transmission and preservation of shadows, I wanted to return to this original legend in shadow. Cadieux requested a performance for the famous Chinese garden, to be performed in the courtyard after sundown as part of their fall festivities. Knowing I was creating a Chinese shadow puppet show for an audience who likely had no idea what it was, this legend was the best way to contextualize as it was performed. What better way to convey the power of shadows than through their own origin story with themselves as the medium!



Figure 1.9. *The Origin of Shadows*. Shadow puppetry performance at the Montreal Botanical Gardens. Performed by Nicholas-Germain Marchand, Sophie Gee, and Annie Rollins. Erhu music by Vivian Li. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2015.

At the outset of the creative process, I had to first disassemble the legend, idea by idea, character by character - it was a sleuthing of sorts. Even after many close readings, just like the majority of enthusiasts, my preference for the Han Wudi origin legend was undeniable. Was it the romance? The mystery? Did it touch upon something we have all felt, in the sentience of some shadows? Was it that we wished we, too, could conjure our lost loved ones through a

flickering absence of light? The creative process helped me distill the legend's themes down to the shadow's inherent sense of enigma, sentience and connection to the beyond.

Every night, as the performance reached its final climax, Nicholas Germain-Marchand manipulated the emperor's shadow figure into his own shadow courtyard and I answered with the giddy wizard, nervously tripping to control what was behind the miniature shadow screen set before him. In one small inch of hand-cut leather, a miniature effigy of Lady Li's appears, dancing to the soft music. The emperor, entranced, dances with her small shadow form while, above her, Lady Li's enlarged ghostly profile appears and hovers above the entire scene. She is the only participant with a steely gaze and sure mission. Looking through her own miniature shadow as conduit may be her one and only glimpse of the world as she once knew it - and she's not going to waste it. We leave the audience with this last image: the emperor in awaited reverie, the shaman satiated with success, and Lady Li hovering patiently over them all, humming with the realization that she's been seen. Creating this performance showed me that the legend is not just a story of love lost and found, but a story of shadows as conduit of the human spirit and a medium between worlds. The legend is a moving account of shadows' spiritual power in China; a power that can, figuratively and literally, bring someone back from the brink. It was an educative experience in the tricky act of contextualizing and disseminating a living vernacular performance form and humbling to add our own retelling to the lineage of thousands that have come before us.

Ritual Roots

This chapter introduced Chinese shadow puppetry's origin legends, its ancient history, and the formalization of shadow use for ritual practice, which concretized the common-held belief of the shadow as enigmatic spirit medium throughout China and forever linked any emergent shadow art form with ritualistic roots. This explication of the shadow as shamanistic medium is one of the aspects of shadow puppetry in China that makes it resistant to current methods of preservation and safeguarding. In the next chapter, I continue this inquiry of what makes Chinese shadow puppetry exquisitely resistant to current theories and methods of safeguarding by examining the immaterial shadow in China, the shadow figures themselves, and the recent history that has influenced the trajectory of the form through the last hundred years.

Chapter 2: Shaping the Immaterial

影

(ying)

shadow

In Chinese, *piyingxi* (皮影戏) has no aural twin. *Leather-shadow-play* only ever means just that. These characters have been uttered in this combination since at least the Song Dynasty.⁸⁸ But what about these characters individually? What about the singular nature of these characters might change the meaning of the composite word? A closer look at *pi* (皮) reveals that it doesn't always mean leather. Instead, the word, in conjunction with other characters, generally means an outer layer of something. If you place an animal character in front of it, it denotes "leather", such as in *niupi* (牛皮) or cowhide. but you can just as easily put a fruit or vegetable in front of the character and the meaning changes to "peel". *Xi* (戏), as well, has a few changes in meaning depending on what you place beside it, but in general it denotes "play" for both a performance or for sport. Both *pi* and *xi* are relatively straightforward in translation.

⁸⁸ The preferred material changed from paper to leather during the Song dynasty (960-1276CE).

Ying (影), however, is a character that proliferates in meaning. By itself, the primary meaning of the character *ying* means shadows, the absence of light. Additional meanings include "reflection" or "trace": for example, in *huguan ta ying* (湖光塔影) or "lake with the reflection of a pagoda in it" and *zhijin ye mei jian tadeying* (至今也没见她的影) or "I haven't seen a trace of her yet".⁸⁹ Meanings "shadow", "reflection" and "trace" are similarly linked in the English word "shadow".

But, in combination with other characters, *ying* takes on a plethora of additional meanings in Chinese:

Ghost in *yinghen* (影痕) and *guiying* (鬼影);

Influence: *yingxiang* (影响)

Trace in *yingji* (影迹), *yingji quanwu* (影迹全无) (disappear without a trace);

Movies/film in *dianying* (电影), literally 'electric shadows';

To take a photo/projection in *sheying* (摄影);

Photocopy in *yingyinben* (影印本);

Holograms in *quanxisheying* (全息摄影);

Radiation/xray machines in *shexian sheying* (射线摄影);

Mirror image (reflection) in *fansheying* (反射影).

This list of words and meanings that *ying* lends itself to is nowhere near exhaustive. What links these seemingly disparate words (including those that are unlisted) is not the dictionary's definition of *ying*. Through holograms, reflections, ghosts, projections, filmic images, copies and traces, *ying* in its wider usage represents the entire catalogue of the immaterial in both concept

⁸⁹ The English word for shadow comes from the Greek root, *Skia*, which also means trace.

and image. Shadow puppetry is the many millennia-old practice of harnessing the elusive qualities of immaterial image as storytelling medium.

This chapter examines the shadow more deeply, clarifying Chinese cultural attitudes towards shadows and darkness and the immaterial as performance medium. Woven amongst this examination, I continue to present Chinese shadow puppetry's history, picking it up during the 1900s and continuing through the Communist Revolution (1949CE) and Cultural Revolution (1967-1977CE) to present the impact of these changes upon the vernacular form of shadow puppetry. Following chapter one's introduction to shadow puppetry in ritual and performance, this chapter also looks more closely at the exquisitely carved leather figures created to cast their powerful shadows and clarifies that the shadow that performs technically passes *through* these figures and can only be activated *through* performance. This clarification between the puppet and its shadow becomes central in the latter half of this thesis when I examine the preservation methods currently enacted. Each of the three strands within the chapter (shadows, modern history, puppet craft) pulls out another unearthed thread from within the fabric of Chinese shadow puppetry's vernacular and traditional form and highlights aspects of the form that contribute to its difficulties in preservation.

China's Shadows

During my apprenticeship in 2008 and again during my Fulbright fellowship in 2011, when I canvassed nine provinces and worked with a wide collection of practitioners, a universal ritualized custom presented itself. The leather shadow figures, which are (most often) made of 11 separate pieces, are strung together into two final pieces: the body, with articulated arms and legs and control rods, and a solitary head. The two sections are put together for performances and performances only. The head is deliberately removed again for storage when the shadow figures are put away at night. When I questioned this practice, the answer was simple: no one wanted to risk a shadow puppet's autonomous independence for who knows what mischief they would get into when left to their own devices.⁹⁰ When further pressed, practitioners explained that it wasn't the leather figures that possessed their own autonomy, it was the trace of soul that remained in

⁹⁰ Although Chen does not mention the superstition, she remarks on their removable heads; "Temple of Guanyin" 64. Chang, also, while noting the feature of removable heads, only notes the practical usages of such a design; "Lost Roots" 51.

the leather figures long after the performances were through. This "soul trace", carried through the medium of shadow, not the figure itself, was the believed source of shadow puppet sentience. Removing a shadow figures' head during storage was seen as an effective way to disable this soul trace until called upon again in performance.

Shadow as metonym for soul is evident in China's shamanistic practices that have used shadows as a ghost-calling medium to connect the living with the beyond since at least the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). Beyond shamanistic ritual, or perhaps because of it, a universal belief in shadow-as-soul pervades:

To the Chinese the shadow is particularly meaningful, and has been so since ancient times. To them the shadow is a true image of the person and is considered one of its souls. As its 'shadow soul', it follows the person into the hereafter. Even today, mourners avoid letting their shadows fall into an open grave, lest they be buried. (Korner 5)

In practice, serving as a conduit in performance after performance for myriad souls, the practitioners believe the puppet figures continue to embody the characters they depict. When the translucent leather figure performs a character, they become a sort of permanent passageway between the character's spirit and the real world and with each performance a trace of the spirit (shadow) is embedded. The shadow puppet is a conduit for, a receptacle of and a ghost itself. For this reason, the shadow puppet has been designed as two pieces in order to easily dissemble them after usage. This custom of separating shadow bodies from shadow heads after performances runs along the same lines as the custom of keeping Buddhist goddess Guanyin nestled in the shadow puppet trunks: the instinct to protect the troupe has become habit which has become ritual, which has become custom.⁹¹ Even if a troupe does not articulate just how the superstition works or if it works, you won't find a troupe who stores their figures assembled.

The shadow figures are embedded with the story and soul of that which passes through them during performance, but it is not the shadow figure which connects directly with the audience, it is its shadow. What the human and non-human (spiritual) audience watches, from the front of the screen, is not the performing object but the shadow that object casts.⁹² The shadow figure is mediated by the light from behind and the screen in front and, even when pressed directly to it,

⁹¹ For a reiteration of Guanyin and her customs see this thesis, chapter 1, page 61.

⁹² Deities are in 'attendance' at most ritualistic and liturgical performances in Chinese shadow puppetry.

the shadow figure always appears as its shadow, obscured and essentialized through light and fabric. In Chinese shadow puppetry, the shadow lives and affects both in relation to the casting shadow figure and also independent from it - related but not necessarily connected. Stephen Kaplin, a shadow puppet practitioner and scholar who co-founded *Chinese Theatre Works* out of New York, explicates this autonomy through his experience in performance:

While an affinity for sacred discourse is found across many genres of traditional puppetry, shadow theatre differs fundamentally from other forms of puppetry performance because it is not the performing object upon which the audience attention is focused but on the object's image as it appears projected onto a translucent screen. The physical object and its projected image pull apart as the puppet figure is moved away from the focal plane. (92)

Kaplin calls this the "object-image gap" (92). This aspect of the performing shadow, that which is connected with its originating object but also ontologically separate from it, is an important clarification of Chinese shadow puppetry and its comprising elements. Both the material puppet figure and its shadow must be considered when discussing preservation methods for the form.

The belief of a shadow's ontological autonomy and sentience (separate from the human or its casting object) is illustrated in the multiple but related definitions of the character ying (影), or shadow, as well as the custom of careful puppet storage. Chinese cultural attitudes towards shadows is one that reflects a regional affinity throughout most of Asia.

In Western culture...the way they think about shadow boils down to an understanding of the relationship among light source, screen, and projection wall. But certain non-Western cultures seem to prefer a conception of shadow as an object animated by a life of its own; they attribute various powers to shadow and they consider shadow to be an image of the soul.⁹³ (Casati 21)

In Japanese novelist Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's famous aesthetic essay on shadows and darkness, *In Praise of Shadows*, he offers a reading of Japanese culture that highlights the opposition of these attitudes.

The quality that we call beauty, however, must always grow from the realities of life, and our ancestors, forced to live in dark rooms, presently came to discover beauty in shadows,

⁹³ Casati is referencing the wall in Plato's allegory of the cave here.

ultimately to guide shadows towards beauty's ends. And so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows - it has nothing else. Westerners are amazed...their reaction is understandable, but it betrays a failure to comprehend the mystery of shadows. (18)

And yet, when we gaze into the darkness that gathers behind the crossbeam, around the flower vase, beneath the shelves, though we know perfectly well it is mere shadow, we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquility holds sway. The "mysterious Orient" of which Westerners speak probably refers to the uncanny silence of these dark places. (20)

But what produces such differences in taste? In my opinion it is this: we Orientals tend to seek our satisfactions in whatever surroundings we happen to find ourselves, to content ourselves with the things as they are; and so darkness causes us no discontent, we resign ourselves to it as inevitable. If light is scarce then light is scarce; we will immerse ourselves in the darkness and there discover its own particular beauty. But the progressive Westerner is determined always to better his lot. From candle to oil lamp, oil lamp to gaslight, gaslight to electric light - his quest for a brighter light never ceases, he spares no pains to eradicate even the minutest shadow. (31)

While Tanizaki's text doesn't speak directly to shadows as puppetry, his essay illustrates a cultural disposition of Japan, as well as East Asia and Southeast Asia, to seek and revel in darkness and shadows. It is no wonder, then, that the longest histories of shadow puppetry come from China, India and Southeast Asia.

Concurrent with China's millennium-old history of shadow puppetry, India, Indonesia and Malaysia have cultivated long traditions of shadows as storytelling mediums. Although there are theories about how these forms may have influenced each other throughout the years, "neither consensus nor proof of direct influence among many of the oldest traditions can be authenticated (Chen "Shadow Theatres" 26)." It is more interesting, then, to note that all shadow traditions in Asia have significant links to ritual practice, far outweighing the ritual connection to other puppet forms in most cases. Shadows in Asia are commonly linked to souls, the other, and the unknown.

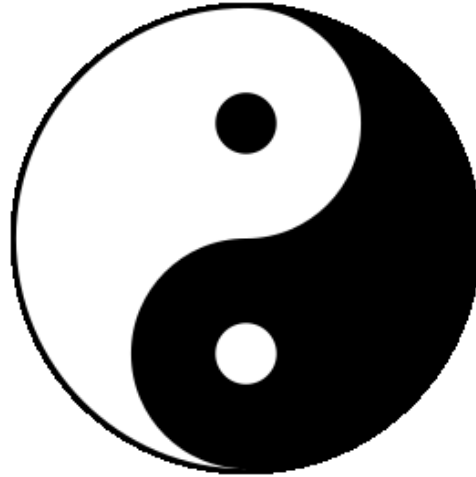


Figure 2.1. *Yinyang* symbol. Wikipedia.com

In China, in addition to examining the many meanings of *ying*, the most illustrative concept of cultural attitudes towards shadows, darkness, and its relationship with light is *yinyang* (阴阳). *Yin* (阴) (the black swirl in the yinyang symbol) represents dark/shade, the moon, the feminine, and the negative principle in nature; *yang* (阳) (the white swirl in the yinyang symbol) represents light, the sun, the masculine, and the positive principle in nature. Yinyang is one of the most recognizable symbols of China and has persisted from the Han dynasty (206BCE-220CE) through to contemporary society. Together, yinyang is most commonly interpreted as "being or comprising opposite and especially complementary elements" ("Yin-Yang"). Robin R. Wang, professor of philosophy and Asian Studies at Loyola Marymount University, compiled an exhaustive examination of yinyang and its symbolism in her book, *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture*. Wang insists that yinyang is less about opposites and more about tension and dynamism that connects two opposing and dependent forces and that this relationship between the two catalyzes change, transformation, mutual resonance, mutual support and, ultimately, harmony and balance. One side is never prioritized over another. Beyond the common understanding of relational opposites, one of the driving underlying concepts of yinyang is its "correlative cosmology", which stipulates that, "an event or action happening or performed in one domain affects corresponding factors in another domain. This cosmology is not based on linear causality between distinct entities, but rather on making a connection between entities and phenomena" (Wang 4). So, not only is the relationship between opposites generative

and transformative, it is also communicative between domains and phenomena. Shadow puppetry, so very dependent on the interplay between light and shadow (among other opposing forces) and a tool to communicate between this world and another, is a perfect summation of the complex principles at play in the symbology of yinyang.

“Colored” Shadows

Thus far, I have been talking about the kind of shadow and darkness that is the absence of light. These shadows and dark spots that enjoy autonomy are created by opaque objects that block light's every attempts. China's shadow puppets, however, challenge the theories and practices I've laid down in one key way: they are not opaque.



Figure 2.2. Colored leather shadow figure, Shaanxi province. Artist unknown. Courtesy of the *Huaxian Yutian Wenhua* shadow puppet museum. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

In the opening to Pauline Benton's unpublished manuscript, she writes:

China's artistic achievements, wrought at the height of the glories and splendors of her past, in the depths of her trials and tribulations, have long received homage from the civilized world. Slowly, patiently, working and toiling, her people have created, their minds always close to those vital springs from which genius flows, and have given to mankind a great heritage of Beauty. Where else could we expect to find the union of two such opposite and imaginative ideas as *colored shadows*? We of the West, fettered as we are with dictionary definitions and scientific facts, would be prone to dismiss them as mere words, combined because they struck someone's fancy but utterly incompatible actualities. (1)

China's shadow figures are unique in this way: they appear colored when performed in front of the light.⁹⁴ Benton's observation of the oxymoronic nature of colored shadows and their "incompatible actualities" is a refrain I've heard myself over the years. Whenever I introduce Chinese shadow puppetry to new audiences through workshops or lectures, the most common response I receive is a disbelief about the shadows' colors: "Isn't a shadow supposed to be black?", "You can see the color when its behind the screen!" Any audience's disbelief in colored shadow figures is partially due to a common misconception that shadows are "black" (opaque) or that shadows themselves carry the color through. The shadow's "color" isn't actually anything. It's nothing. This changeability of nothingness as perceived by the human eye means it often appears in relation to whatever is the positive space around it. If the predominant color outside the shadow is white, the shadow often appears as black. If the predominant color outside the shadow is, say, red, the shadow often appears as red's complementary color green. It is the light that carries the color through the obfuscated shadow.

Adding to the confusion of colored shadow figures is another common misbelief that leather (*pi*) is opaque. Chinese shadows puppets weren't always made from leather. Prior to the Tang dynasty (618CE) and during that dynastic period of growth, shadow figures were cut from opaque paper.⁹⁵ But by the Song dynasty (960CE), the preferred material had shifted to leather. Donkey, sheep, goat, pig or cow; whatever animal was native to a particular region of China became their source for leather shadow puppets. Although the learning curve of mastering leather carving and painting is far more taxing than that of paper, a finished leather shadow

⁹⁴ Indian, Turkish and Greek shadow puppets are also made with translucent leather.

⁹⁵ Chang "Lost Roots" 45.

puppet lasts generations longer.⁹⁶ It is also, when lit from behind, ethereally translucent. Lisa Kronthal, director of conservation at the American Museum of Natural History, was tasked with pioneering preservation techniques on the museum's Chinese leather figures in 1999. Kronthal describes the initial process wherein the special shadow puppet leather is made: "The wet skin...is rubbed and scraped, first with a stone, then with bamboo, until it is thinned to translucency. Often the hide of a young animal or a hide that has been split or skived is used for part of the figures that require greater translucency" (Kronthal 6). Such thin and translucent leather, with color added, acts as a colored gel for the light, which is another mode through which the puppets convey meaning.

As an apprentice of leather hide preparation for shadow puppetry, I can attest to the laborious process of rubbing, scraping hair and sinew and pounding until paper thin. But, the effort produces a translucent material irreplaceable by any means:

The resulting parchment makes a marvelously rich and varied shadow image that is tinted warm ochre or russet depending upon the animal from which it came and the skin's thickness. Its organic irregularity makes it quite different from man-made materials, such as vinyl, acetate or poly-carbonate plastics, products of industrial manufacturing whose utterly uniform molecular structure and surface smoothness results in a sheer, even transparency. (Kaplin 94)

In traditional shadow figure design and cut outs, the leather's translucency as well as this "organic irregularity", lends a living quality to the puppet. Small variations in texture make the light that passes through the material dance when moved. With China's colored shadow figures, what distinguishes the figure is not necessarily that the leather is translucent and therefore produces colored shadows, but that this living light must pass *through* the performing object in question in order to project these brilliant colors. It is important to remember that these brilliant colors are *not* a show of light but a show of shadow, shade, of light obscured. The light comes to the screen transformed and changed, literally having passed through something to become something else: a shadow. This would seem to be an oxymoron, made of "incomparable actualities", but China's colored shadows are the natural embodiment of yinyang, a testament to

⁹⁶ In talks with the Chengdu Shadow Puppet Museum, they confirmed that their oldest shadow puppet specimen was over 400 years old.

the impossible binary of light and shadow, autonomy and dependence, materiality and immateriality - an exercise in perception.

Darkness on Display: Yutian 2008

The passageway where light becomes shadow, the Chinese shadow puppet figure, is where I have focused most of my creative and academic study. What lingers with me longest after watching a performance is not the music or the scenery or the stories. What lingers with me is always the shadows. The projected shadows that are celebrating, weeping, pleading, dancing and battling colored shadows leave traces behind my eyelids. Every time I closed my eyes I can see them, feel them. I didn't know this was the specific pull for me when I started my Huaxian apprenticeship in 2008, but I came to that realization towards the end of that summer when I found myself spending inordinate amounts of time in the little exhibition space just above the rehearsal room in the Huaxian shadow troupe's working quarters. Panel after panel of glowing emperors, empresses, warriors, clowns, elderly men and women, monsters, all waiting for their chance behind the screen.

The Huaxian troupe rehearsed and lived in a humble technical school campus that had recently been reclaimed after years of abandonment. The grey cement buildings were originally erected by the government in a nationwide push for educational efforts in the deep countryside sometime in the 1980s.⁹⁷ The campus was unattractive but impressive, boasting two huge main classroom buildings, a number of side studios with a large cafeteria and kitchen, a gym that doubled as a performance space and even a slew of student and teacher dormitories towards the back. Due to rampant urbanization between 1995 and the present day, most of the country's rural communities were in flux, leaving many of their communities and their institutions underpopulated. Prior to the market reform period after the Cultural Revolution had ended (1977), China's urban population hovered around ten percent.⁹⁸ In 2010, 50 percent of China's population resided in cities.⁹⁹ China's wave of rural to urban migration has been the largest recorded in

⁹⁷ Both elementary and adult education was pushed in a grand attempt to reduce illiteracy nationwide (I. E. "Education in Communist China" 264). Between the years of 1949 and 1959, the number of elementary students nationwide nearly quadrupled from around 24 million to 90 million (Chen "Elementary Education" 102).

⁹⁸ Ren "Urban China" xiiv.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

human history with approximately 160 million citizens moving from the countryside to urban centers between 1990 and 2010.¹⁰⁰ Another 250 million are projected for 2025.¹⁰¹ This particular school, located about 20 kilometers from the closest town of Huaxian, had closed down less than a decade prior to my arrival.



Figure 2.3. *Yutian Zhiyao Xuexiao*. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, Summer 2008.

¹⁰⁰ China's last census was conducted in 2010, which provides the most concrete data. Projections of current statistics can be obtained by companies such as Statista and more current academic publications of fieldwork.

¹⁰¹ Johnson "China's Great Uprooting".



Figure 2.4. Yutian's shadow puppet area of the school compound. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, Summer 2008.

In 2005, a local for-profit company, *Yutian Wenhua* (雨田文化), purchased the use of half the school's campus. After its humble beginnings in the small town of Huaxian, the company became one of the biggest cultural commodities company in the province, specializing in Shaanxi cultural specialties such as black pottery, re-created Tang dynasty pottery and, of course, shadow puppetry. The generally accepted history of shadow puppetry in China acknowledges Shaanxi style, and in particular the countryside east of the capitol city *Xi'an*

(西安) where Huaxian is located, as the foundational style of the form. The designation of "original style" has given the region great cache when marketing their cultural goods and companies have been swift to capitalize on it.

With the purchase of the school, Yutian began building their brand, hoping it would launch their reach beyond the small town of Huaxian and into the nearby metropolis of Xi'an. In addition to the expanded home base, Yutian also began anointing their products with the authenticity and gravitas of well-known artists from the region. My teacher, Wei Jinqun, was hired as resident puppet master, along with his troupe, to rehearse and perform on behalf of the company whenever needed. In exchange, the troupe was given a small stipend, live and work quarters, and the freedom to continue their regular village performances whenever needed. The deal was hard for the troupe to resist as most of the members were above the age of 60 and Yutian's contract alleviated the punishing physicality of farming during the warmer months. The deal was beneficial for the company, too. Whenever a local boss or dignitary passed through the company's campus, Yutian made sure the shadow puppet troupe was rehearsing. Just as the sounds and sights of a performance drew me in on my first day, the show successfully served as bait for prospective clients.



Figure 2.5. Shadow puppet master *Wei Jinqun*. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 11 June 2008.

After touring groups and prospective clients made their way through the rehearsal room, they toured the leather carving studios and finally ended their impressive introduction to Yutian in the makeshift exhibition space. In addition to the contracted performance troupe, the company had hired *Wang Tianwen*, one of the country's best-known shadow puppet carver, to head up their shadow puppet products division.¹⁰² Wang's photo was plastered on nearly every publication about the company's products.



Figure 2.6. Shadow carving master *Wang Tianwen* on *Yutian Wenhua*'s 2011 brochure.

¹⁰² During the 2011 National Shadow Puppet Festival, *Wang Tianwen* was by far the most sought after puppet carver, even by the other provincial masters in attendance.

The museum's modest displays began with the oldest puppets, dating back nearly 200 years to the Qing Dynasty and traced a regional and chronological history to present day. Wang's own master-cuts, alongside a few pieces of his own collection, were featured in the little exhibition area, which further authenticated the company's cultural capital. Wang's attachment to their brand was successful as there were no more exquisite examples of the heights of leather carving craft than the pieces he created - they defy logic and push the material to its absolute limit.



Figure 2.7. Master cut leather shadow figures. Artist *Wang Tianwen*. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.



Figure 2.8. *Yutian Wenhua* Exhibition space, *Huaxian*, *Shaanxi* Province. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Ghostly Figures

Today's Chinese shadow puppet is the exquisite descendent of inherited skill and accumulated artistry, a palimpsest of over one thousand years of cultural transmission - the medium through which shadows and souls pass through and some remain. The intricately carved translucent leather figures evolved from simple shadow silhouettes, torn out of dried leaves or fish skin, into agile articulated two-dimensional colored puppets¹⁰³. The *pi* in *pi-ying-xi*, or *leather* in *leather-shadow-play*, is the irreplaceable material that has made the last thousand years of design evolution possible. As such vital conduits between worlds, a puppet's design, engineering, agility and coloring is essential to their effectiveness *as shadows*. The shadow

¹⁰³ Leather for Chinese shadow puppets is a raw hide, soaked in limewater and scrapped of all fur, hair and sinew. It is then treated again to protect the leather from decay and keep it supple. There is some debate for usage of the term "leather" versus "hide" or "parchment". I use the word leather here for continuity with other literature on Chinese shadow puppetry and for universality in understanding.

figures must convey the "more real" essence of the characters they depict: emperors, empresses, gods and goddesses, monsters, warriors, scholars, and peasants.¹⁰⁴

The shadow puppet is a unique design object in that it is created to make something other than itself: a shadow, which is linked to and also independent of the object that casts it. And instead of creating an opaque silhouette, the Chinese shadow puppet designer must consider all parts: the light that passes through obscured and the light that does not. In this way the shadow figure is both *yinke* 阴刻, (translated as incised carving) and *yangke* 阳刻 (translated as relief carving).

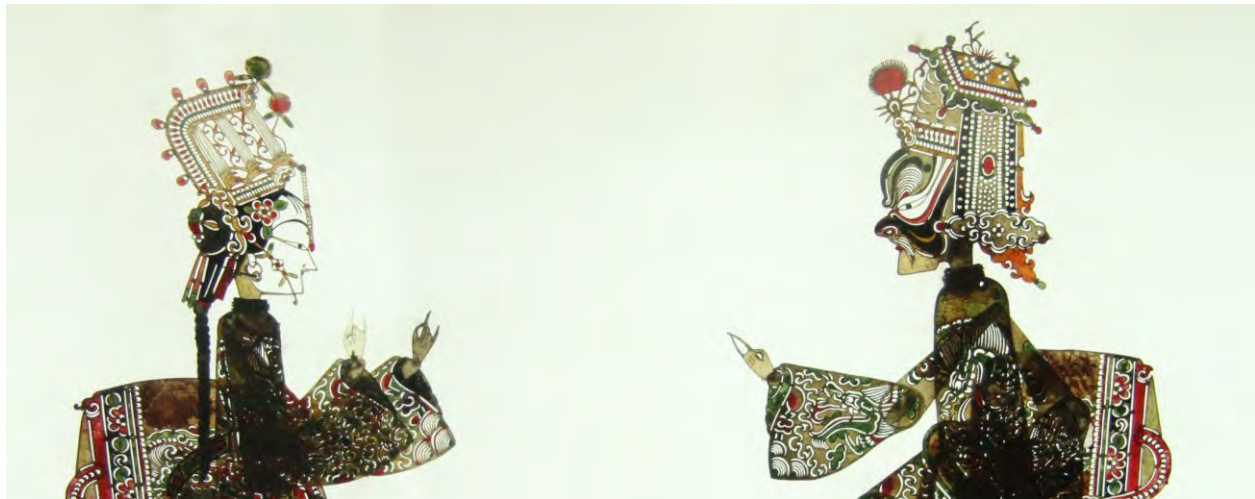


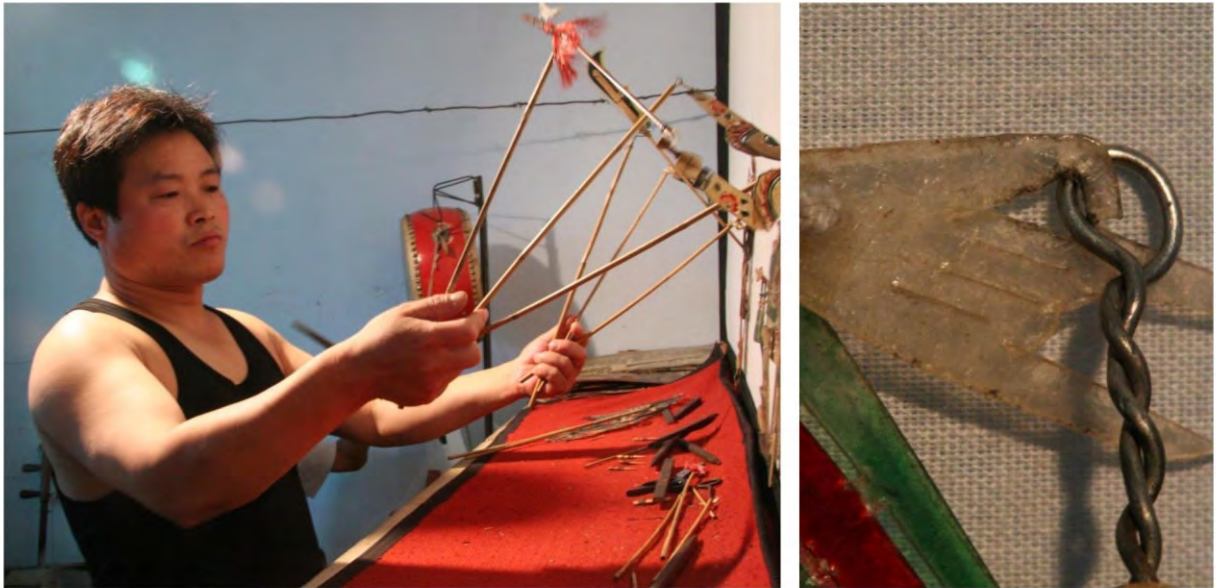
Figure 2.9. On the left is an example of *yinke* – a face defined by its cut outs or negative space. On the right is an example of *yangke* – a face defined by its positive space. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

When these terms are applied to three-dimensional sculpture, they refer largely to negative and positive space: *yinke* implies that the negative space is the focal point and *yangke* implies that the positive space is the focal point. In shadow puppetry, *both* incised and relief carving design theories are utilized simultaneously. The shadow puppet's design and contours rely on both the positive leather through which obscured light filters and from the cut outs through which unfiltered light flows. It is also important to point out here that the first character in each of the terms *yinke* and *yangke* are the *yin* (阴) and *yang* (阳) from *yinyang* (阴阳), which again reminds us not to consider binary opposites, but complementary ones.

¹⁰⁴ For my previous usage of this phrase, see chapter 1, page 59, or Kirby "Shamanistic Origins" 148.

Beyond its design philosophy merging diametrically opposed theories, the shadow puppet is a performing object made to communicate through movement and manipulation and the Chinese shadow figure does this with aplomb. The standard shadow figure depicting a human character is usually made up of eleven pieces in perfect 90degree profile: head, torso, upper arms (2), lower arms (2), hands (2), waist and thighs, lower legs with feet (2). All pieces are connected with a 360 degree string or sinew joint, except for where the head attaches to the torso, for maximum articulation. Three control rods are attached, one at the top of the torso (either at the front or back of the neck) and one on each hand. An accomplished puppeteer can fully articulate one puppet, with three rods, in each hand. And although the shadow puppets' feet do not have control rods, they are manipulable by the weight of the feet and the practiced swing of a puppeteer's arms. Indeed, I have seen many a performance where a shadow puppet's legs are walking in perfect opposition with no assistance from a control rod.





Figures 2.10. Upper left: a typical joint tied with string or sinew. The cutouts in the overlapping leather help to reduce the blockage of light with layering, keeping the puppet homogeneously translucent. Upper right, three control rod placements. Bottom left, puppet master *Wei Jinquan* controls three rods in each hand. Bottom right, the rounded control rod fixture allows for maximum articulation. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Anomalous from all other shadow traditions, Chinese shadow puppets' three control rods do not attach to the figure with a fixed joint.¹⁰⁵ Instead, they are connected by a round eyelet configuration, which allows the entire figure to flip 180 degrees without shifting the rods. Although this special eyelet joinery renders the Chinese shadow puppet more difficult to manipulate, simply because there are more movable joints and parts, the puppet is far more agile than any other shadow puppet form.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ The main examples here being Indian, Malaysian, Indonesian, Turkish, and Greek shadow puppet traditions.

¹⁰⁶ "Tangshan Shadow Puppet Performance Sequence".



Figure 2.11. Upper left: a *dan* and *sheng* role type example. Right, a *jing* role type example. Bottom, two *chou* role type examples. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Chinese shadow puppets are largely designed to fulfill archetypes. On occasion, a shadow figure will be created to depict a specific popular or distinct character, such as the Monkey King or Lady White Snake, but generally, "similar to facial make-up on the opera stage, faces of shadow figures are not realistic portrayals of individuals, but rather stylized according to role types" (Chang 72). Role types in Chinese opera are divided as follows: *sheng* (生) male role; *dan* (旦) female role; *jing* (净) painted-face roles (often martial characters); and *chou* (丑) clown roles. Because of this division of archetypes and the general exchangeability between the archetypal figures, shadow puppet troupes could offer a wide catalogue of stories with fewer puppets. Defying the limitations of gravity and the human body in Chinese drama and opera, shadow theatre excels in *yao* (妖) roles, or representations of fairies, immortals and devils. Here, where human drama and opera can only be suggestive, shadow puppetry is explicit. From many audience members I have talked to over the years, these depictions are what bring them back

again and again. Alongside the profile and head designs, "colors and patterns are used to symbolize character traits" (Chang 72).



Figure 2.12. Left: an elderly man has a specific face but a body that could be used for a number of male role types. Right: an unmarried woman with a long ponytail has a specific head but a more generic female body. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.



Figure 2.13. Left: two examples of *yao* role types. Right: an example of *luxing yunza* (禄星云杂) Star God of Affluence. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008

Wherever possible, embedded deep within each puppet was an impossible labyrinth of carved symbolism that China has carried throughout its history: yinyang (balance/harmony), Earth/Heaven (rectilinear and round shapes in a single symbol), zodiac animals, flowers, sun symbols, peaches for longevity, and waves for power. The color, the placement, the configurations, all of them working in perfect harmony with one another. The coloring and patterning range in complexity depending on the character depicted and the skills of the puppet carver. Most often, shadow archetypes match their real archetypes' intricacies of costume, color and embroidery (much as Chinese opera costumes do) with surprising accuracy.

As for the color in the shadow figure, Barbara E. Ward, a British anthropologist who wrote about the deep symbology and ritualistic basis embedded within Chinese drama, names color as one of its most powerful symbols:

Red is the colour for the faces of good, loyal, brave and dependable characters. Pictures and images of the protector warrior god Kwan Kung (*Guangong* 关公), known to all, patron of many, always have red faces just like the actors who play his part. But red as such, the abstract colour, has symbolic value. Not in China a sign of danger, it is, on the contrary, the good, auspicious colour. Babies are dressed in red, gifts are wrapped in red, charms are often written on red paper, so are invitations and, today, Christmas and New Year cards; traditionally brides wore red, and were carried to their new homes in red sedan chairs; the images of gods are usually clothes in red, and the incense burned in front of them is a red substance. Indeed it has often been suggested that among the most powerful allies the Chinese Communist Party has are its red flag and all its other red connotations, for red is a Yang colour *par excellence* and as such links all red objects into the beneficent Yang aspects of the entire cosmos. (22)

Red symbolizes the positive energy in the entire cosmos! Its symbolism is powerful and impossible to miss when in China. I, too, under strict instructions from my Chinese friends, wore red all during my third zodiac cycle year (the year of the monkey, at age 36) in order to ward off bad spirits that might seek to do me harm. Color in China possesses a ritual magic that can be utilized anytime during a vulnerable or prosperous times in one's life.

Pauline Benton echoes this emphasis in color as layered meaning in shadow puppetry;

To the Chinese, color has always had a far deeper significance than the variations of the spectrum visible to the material eye. 'Imperial yellow', symbolic of the earth, has been concomitant to the might and power which designated the Emperor as earthly ruler of the Celestial Empire. Yellow was the color of his official robes and countless objects about his

personage: the cushions on the "Dragon Throne", the curtains that draped his palanquin, the tiles that glistened on the roof of the Forbidden City which was his official residence and the site of government for the greater part of the last two dynasties. (China's Colored Shadow Plays 1)

The color white, as I experienced at the funeral shadow puppet performance in Huaxian in 2008, is the color of "death and mourning" (22). Linked with the yin of yinyang, this color white signifies cool energy, impurity, danger and inauspiciousness. Black, linked with yang of yinyang, signifies heaven, immortality, knowledge and power and green signifies health, wealth, regeneration and hope. All of these colors (and others) are an added language of communication between shadow object, light obscured and its audience. By shifting from colorless to colored shadows, the Chinese shadow figure was able to embody much more symbolism and meaning in its design than ever before.

As the form spread throughout the nation from its origins in northern central China, each region developed its own aesthetic style that was directly influenced by available materials, geographical context and cultural values.¹⁰⁷ The wide reaching regional differences are evident in the range of artifacts that remain from the Qing era; roughly cut designs from Yunnan province, incredibly refined cutting skills from Shaanxi, thin and flexible leather from the Northeast and round friendly features from the center of the country. Musical roots, popular stories, specialized characters and the differences in leather hides for puppet making (sheep, cow, donkey, water buffalo, pig) are equally as diverse.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre", Chang "Lost Roots" 61.

¹⁰⁸ "Chinese Shadow Puppet Photo Collection".



Figure 2.14. Regional aesthetic styles. Top row left to right: *Dongbei*, *Hebei* and *Zhejiang* provincial styles. Bottom row left to right: *Chengdu* city (*Sichuan* province) and *Yunnan* province. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Whenever I look at a collection of shadow figures, such as the collection in Yutian's exhibition space, I am struck by their beauty, but also by their ghost-like quality. Hanging in

exhibition, as a collective troupe, I always sense a buzz humming below their immobile expressions. The soul traces, embedded, waiting to get out, aching to initiate a ghostly communication. Mu-chou Poo, who researches the ghost's role in Chinese literature and lore, has likened the ghost in China to "a piece of collective memory" ("Imperial Order" 296). Ghosts, which appear in China and its literature long before formalized religions, came to be seen as entities that could "see all" as inhabitants of the limbo between life and death. Chinese shadow puppets are a physical embodiment of ghosts and their collective memories - literally embodied within. And up until the 1900s, the ghosts represented within the traditional vernacular art form and the collective memory, were as wide and diverse as the populace of mainland China itself.

Shadow Revolution

In Yutian's small exhibition space, there are a few panels that deviate from the rest of the antique shadow puppets on display. They sit there, in and amongst the other puppets, with no special label or context to explain their uniqueness. But of course, they need no explanation. These puppets portray the familiar archetypes of China's Communist Revolution (1949CE). From the end of the 19th century, shadow puppetry's practitioners felt the blows of a severe decline and their inheritors continue to navigate survival more than a century later. Constant political instability, widespread destitution and repression and intense cultural changes all demanded the people's attention. The Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901CE), Japanese occupation (1937CE), civil war (1946CE) and the Communist Revolution (1949CE) in just the first half of the 20th century, among other events, enabled a decline in popularity out of neglect, not of irrelevance.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ In Beijing alone, it is estimated that 120 troupes were actively engaged in 1920 as compared to just three in 1932. See Jiang *Chinese Shadow Play*, page 20.

《近、现代戏皮影》



Figure 2.15. The caption above simply says, “modern shadow puppetry” . Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.



Figure 2.16. Left: Chinese Communist Soldier, Middle: Nationalist Guomintang Soldier, Right: American Soldier. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.



Figure 2.17. For the first time, peasants are often featured as heroic protagonists. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

In 1949, the Communist party took over and quickly looked for ways to publicize their doctrine. Mao Zedong, the Communist Party's leader, urged the utilization of folk traditions to serve national and revolutionary causes. Chairman Mao knew just how powerful and necessary vernacular forms were as mediums to disseminate messages to the masses. Colin Mackerras, a well-known Australian Sinologist, has researched and written extensively on Chinese drama, opera and theatre. In a recent article on tradition and change, Mackerras noted the influence of the Chinese Communist Party upon performance activity that did not specifically tout the party's cause:

In effect, Mao regarded the arts, including drama, as propaganda either for or against the revolutionary cause. During the war (Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945), Mao and the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) put very high and possibly top priority on using drama to defeat Japan, but there could be no question anywhere in the CCP regions of using drama for anything but an explicitly revolutionary purpose. (4)

In July of 1950, the CCP created the Drama Reform Committee (DRC) and quickly began revising existing performance material and creating new shows "to show the masses in a good light and the ruling class in a negative one" (4). For shadow puppetry, this meant a small resurgence in activity from the relative anemia in the first half of the century. Mao's edict meant new revolutionary plays usurped the traditional lineage of stories. "Newly written plays were either adaptations from western sources or propaganda stories of the proletarian struggle... Naturalistic figures of new characters were created, sometimes made of celluloid instead of animal skins" (Chang "Lost Roots" 32). The *Turtle and Crane* (*guihe* 龟鹤) was the first governmentally sanctioned shadow puppet play by the newly formed PRC (People's Republic of China), funded as a government initiative and created by an intellectual named *Zhaiyi* (翟翊) in 1952.¹¹⁰ The show was initially performed by the newly established provincial theatre troupes, created and funded by the new Communist government.

¹¹⁰ Zhang Shaorong mentions two other collaborators, *He Derun* and *Tan Degui*, on *The Turtle and Crane* project, but it is unclear who they were and what their roles were, page 18.



Figure 2.18. Left, Tai'an Shadow Puppet Troupe's *Turtle and Crane*. Right, Tengchong Shadow Puppet Troupe's *Turtle and Crane*. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

The *Turtle and Crane* shadow play is a short, allegorical tale of the irreconcilable differences between a turtle and a crane.¹¹¹ The play centers on the story of a dawdling turtle in a bucolic pond, seemingly minding his own business when, after a short romp, a squawking crane flies in and mistakes the turtle's back for a place to rest. What follows is a series of short tussles between the two, the crane insisting on this perfect place to rest, the turtle trying with what little mobility he possesses to rid himself of the crane. The ending is always abrupt and conveys no obvious resolution. The crane, seemingly enough annoyed, simply flies off – this, we sense, is a kind of victory for the turtle.

In Chinese culture, the crane symbolizes longevity and peace and the turtle symbolizes longevity, power and tenacity. If there was a political message embedded within, it was unclear at best. As this story was the work of government propagandists, the crane likely symbolizes imperialist China, or the China of old, as cranes were often used to adorn imperial costume. The turtle, in this case, represents the new Communist government, especially given that the turtle is the eventual victor. But, again, the safe, slow, and unresolved tussle between the two creatures

¹¹¹ "Turtle and Crane".

inspires little Nationalism or pride in the new government – it suggests a victory through a pure stubbornness.

From watching it numerous times in performance, the *Turtle and Crane* pulls little from the traditional shadow puppet lineage in form, presentation, music, content, or aesthetics. The puppets are simplistic in design, foregoing Chinese shadow puppetry's signature complexity of pattern and pictograph carved into exquisite translucent leather. The show's duration is uncharacteristically short, never longer than 15 minutes, which is a far cry from the traditional form's penchant for all-night performances. The score is classical Chinese music, nothing like the raucous din that is made with more rudimentary folk instruments .

Even though Mao Zedong had hoped to utilize existing folk forms to disseminate the Communist Party's messages, the Chairman inadvertently (or intentionally) catalyzed a new strain of shadow puppetry (hereafter referred to as "new form"), one that was not beholden to the traditions of old and, indeed, was forbidden to pull too much from the traditional lineage. This new form of modern shadow puppetry was propagated by the newly instated provincial theatres, funded entirely by the new government, and was the beginning of a "polarization" between traditional and the modern form and a homogenization of China's diverse shadow puppet forms.¹¹²

¹¹² Zhang "Characteristics of Chinese Shadow Theatre" 7.



Figure 2.19 & 2.20. Members of the Shaanxi Folk Theatre Shadow Troupe rehearse a modern repertory shadow show entitled, *Laoshu* or *Mouse*. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

During the Cultural Revolution that followed (1966-1976 CE), the new government's desire for hegemonic control of culture and its messages banned all but provincially approved troupes

and governmentally approved performances. Scholar Barbara Mittler, who has focused much of her research on China and its cultural propaganda, points out that the propaganda created by the new Communist government throughout the mid-late 1900s wasn't all negative, nor was it totally resisted by the populace.

(The Cultural Revolution)...was not such that cultural life during the Cultural Revolution was totally restrictive, although it was that too - but indeed, it opened up opportunities for some, even saved their lives. It was not such that the Cultural Revolution absolutely destroyed the tenets of Chinese culture and civilization - it did to some extent, but then it can also be seen as a significant 'enlightenment movement'. And it was not such that the propaganda culture of the Cultural Revolution was entirely boring and thus repugnant to everyone: if its constantly repeated message was less exciting, some of its products nevertheless bear unmistakable artistic qualities and are appreciated, even enjoyed, today. (A Continuous Revolution 5)

This mix of positives and negatives has shaped the way in which the art of this period has been viewed in post-Revolution China:

The propaganda art from the Cultural Revolution is to be seen as one development in the broader attempt to create a new but Chinese modern art and culture...Many of its contents have been communicated for generations, surviving even social and political changes and revolutions. They appear in a variety of media, can be physically experienced in propaganda events, and thus form time-resistant semantic units that become important and structuring elements in a collective cultural memory. (10)

However, what cannot be measured from today's cultural milieu is the erasure of traditional forms during that period for any performance,

...with traditional themes (was) heavily censored. In their stead, a set of revolutionary model operas (*yangban xi* or *geming jingju*) was promoted. These operas told stories from China's recent past. They depicted the Chinese people's determined struggle against outer and inner enemies, glorified the close cooperation between the People's Liberation Army and the common people, and emphasized the decisive role of Mao Zedong and his thought for socialism's victory in China. ("Eight Stage Works" 378)

The censorship extended beyond urban forms of opera and drama to include folk and ritual performances, including shadow puppetry. In some provinces, the enforcement was exceedingly harsh; often the troupes were forced to burn their trunks of puppets and tools by force or

intimidation.¹¹³ This particular targeting of traditional shadow puppetry, while devastating, was a testament to its widespread popularity and its ability to disseminate messages to the masses. Few other folk art forms were popular enough to warrant such attention by the new government.

Certainly, governmental interventions have contributed to a shift in shadow puppetry. And, certainly, governmental interventions within the shadow puppet vernacular during the Communist and Cultural Revolutions have re-structured the collective memory of the form and the collective memory, which the form re-structures. In the urban areas, these shifts towards modernization and within the collective memory were less drastic, as their community and ritualistic dependency on shadow puppetry was slight, if anything. In the countryside, however, the changes were immeasurable as they did not just affect the form but the entire fabric of culture and community.

For performances in the countryside, the suppression of traditional story themes, ritualistic performances, and the introduction of Government-sanctioned model plays weren't the only mode of censorship for a shadow troupe: "Traditionally, a huge variety of local ritual activities took place at family gatherings, festivals, and temple fairs throughout the year all over the country. Such ritual activity, however, was suppressed during the Cultural Revolution" (Mair and Bender 180). As the PRC worked hard to suppress ritual activity through outright bans on ritual practices, destroying temples and beating or imprisoning ritual leaders,¹¹⁴ the new regime concurrently sought to regulate China's polymorphous popular religion by supplanting and standardizing ritual practices, deities, holidays and more.

The state-controlled symbolism produced a high degree of cultural unity, transcending social differences in myths interpretation and variant local ritual practice. In doing so it depended on the active assistance of the local literate elites, who willingly promoted standardized cults and proper funerals as a way of enhancing local respectability and their own standing as agents of the state. The ordinary people went along with this, more or less willingly...the movement of standardization was top-down, serving the interest of the state. (Sutton 5)

¹¹³ Of the shadow puppet practitioners still working today, many of them have tales of resistance from that time period. Hu Waitang from Xiaoyi, Shanxi province, buried his trunk of puppets and was therefore able to resurrect his practice much more quickly after the Cultural Revolution ended (1977).

¹¹⁴ Dean "Local Communal Religion" 339.

The new ritual mandates were not just put into place to prevent the control of locally-born superstition and spirituality, but also to Sinicize the 56 non-Han Chinese ethnic minorities, assimilating them into dominant Han culture.¹¹⁵ There was a "Chinese-culturalist notion that political identification followed from ritual change" (Sutton 7).

Even though understanding the impact of the Communist and Cultural Revolution is imperative to any study of a Chinese folk art form and its recent history and current trajectory, it can be delicate to question shadow puppet practitioners about their experiences of the Cultural Revolution. Common responses include bristling or simply silence. After months of working with Tianxiang, of the Lu Family carvers in Tangshan city, Hebei province, he confirmed a general desire of the current generation of practitioners to know more about that time period and the general reticence of the older generation to tell their stories.

The Lu family is one of the last remaining families who create handmade leather shadow puppets from leather preparation to painting and finishing.¹¹⁶ As was customary for shadow master's families in the last few hundred years, the Lu family carvers conducted an entire shadow puppet carving business within their small home. Lu Fuzeng, the family's patriarch, carved the leather figures, his wife, Yishu, painted the carved figures and Tianxiang, their son, lacquered, strung and finished the puppets. Tianxiang also tried to ask his parents about their experiences during the Communist and Cultural Revolution and had always been rebuffed with a curt, "*meiyou shenme keshou* (没有什么可说)", or "there's nothing to tell." Tianxiang had initially taken that statement at face value and eventually stopped inquiring. Only later, when he witnessed his father being pressed to admit some hardships to a journalist doing a profile for a local television station, did Tianxiang realize that "*meiyou shenme keshou*" was a cover for that which was too difficult to tell.

In the post-Mao era of the late 1970s, after the Cultural Revolution had ended, change was on its way. Traditional shadow puppetry was permitted again, but the practitioners found its audience wholly changed. Without the time to organically evolve to meet the needs and relevance of a new culture and new society, shadow puppetry floundered for relevance and continued its steep decline from the beginning of the century. Urbanization, competition with

¹¹⁵ See Mair and Bender "Chinese Folk and Popular Literature" 3.

¹¹⁶ Rollins "Inheritance of Shadows".

modern forms of entertainment and countless other factors have pushed it to the brink of survival.¹¹⁷

The *Turtle and Crane* show that was created in 1952 catalyzed a new form of modern shadow puppetry in China and is still in heavy rotation today.¹¹⁸ The popularity and durability of this piece is likely due to its blandly universal reception amongst all demographics and its inability to offend anyone, while simultaneously pointing to a critical point in the forms history. During my fieldwork to nine provinces in the year of 2011, I saw nearly identical performances of the story by both provincial theatres and commercial companies.¹¹⁹ The provincial theatres, funded and mandated by the centralized national government, really do resemble one another, and their influence on the current repertoire and style of puppet theatre in China is immeasurable. Their top-down impetus for performance, the uniformity of story and aesthetic and the continued oversight of the government in all matters makes the provincial theatres diametrically opposed to the diverse, iterative and ritualistic shows of the countryside.

During my Fulbright year of fieldwork, in 2011, when I dared to ask about puppeteering in times of revolution, I often heard "there's nothing to tell". Sometimes, such as with the Lu family in Tangshan, the story of how Lu Fuzeng and his family navigated the last 60 years of history and politics in China was told to me by someone else - in this case, his son. Censored research and publication has left an obvious 30 year gap on Chinese shadow puppetry during the 1950-1980s. Even if someone had deemed the practitioners' personal histories worthy of the archive, they would still be reticent to talk openly about that time in their lives.

The stories I was privileged enough to receive during fieldwork had a great impact on my work and approach to shadow puppetry. The practitioner's dedication to their craft, in the face of great danger, made me reflective of the preservation process: what it means to pass on a tradition is different in every context. In 2012, I began work on a full-length shadow play that centered upon this very idea. *There's Nothing to Tell* focuses on Yeye's (爷爷) story as a shadow puppeteer in China's dynastic era through the Cultural Revolution. Although Yeye's (Mandarin

¹¹⁷ With an 85% decline in traditional troupe activity from 1980s to the 1990s, it is likely down to less than 1% of those remaining just twenty years later. See Chen *Chinese Shadow Theatre*, page 3.

¹¹⁸ See Chen "Temple of Guanyin" 61; Rollins "A Revolution in Chinese Shadow Puppetry". Many other folk traditions in China have experienced this division in the form, catalyzed by top-down government influence, see Ellen Gerdes "Yangge".

¹¹⁹ Gansu, Hebei, Hubei, Shandong, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Zhejiang provinces.

for paternal grandfather) story was fictional, the details of his history were a literal aggregate of three living masters: Lu Fuzeng in Tangshan, Hebei, Wei Jinquan in Huaxian, Shaanxi, and Wu Haitang from Xiaoyi, Shanxi.



Figure 2.21. *There's Nothing to Tell*, Audience view. Performed by Daniel Dukich, Derek Miller, Stephanie Watson, Rebekah Rentzel, and Annie Katsura Rollins. Photo by Aveye Alexandres, 2012.



Figure 2.22. *There's Nothing to Tell*, the main tri-fold screen and side screen with Yeye. Performed by Daniel Dukich, Derek Miller, Stephanie Watson, Rebekah Rentzel, and Annie Katsura Rollins. Photo by Avey Alexandres, 2012.



Figure 2.23. *There's Nothing to Tell*, (left) Yeye's small shadow figure is (right) pulled from the shadow puppet trunk by his granddaughter. Performed by Annie Katsura Rollins. Photo by Aveye Alexandres, 2012.

The play begins with the opening of a shadow trunk, behind the main screen, from which our narrator, Yeye's Chinese-American granddaughter, pulls the shadow figures needed to tell this story. Yeye, himself, sits as an oversized black silhouette in a permanently soft glow on a side screen, interjecting to correct his granddaughter's retelling when necessary. On centre screen, he also appears from the trunk as a small colored shadow figure and takes his rightful place as re-enactor on center screen. The granddaughter, appearing as herself in human shadow, begins the retelling of yeye's biography, including his early introduction to shadow puppetry, his irrepressible obsession with its craft and the struggles of carrying the tradition through revolutionary times. We end in present-day America, as the granddaughter processes her role in the lineage of shadow puppetry's continuance, telling this story and performing these characters. Her Yeye, living both as a large shadow puppet and a small colorful figure in her hands, must both be packed away at the end of the night - reminding the audience that the shadows are immaterial and ephemeral mediums best at conjuring our ghostly pasts.



Figure 2.24. *There's Nothing to Tell*, a soldier visits a young Yeye and his family during the Cultural Revolution (1968). Performed by Daniel Dukich, Derek Miller, Stephanie Watson, Rebekah Rentzel, and Annie Katsura Rollins. Photo by Avey Alexandres, 2012.

The aim of the production was to introduce audiences to Chinese shadow puppetry's fascinating history, exquisite artistry and illuminating storytelling abilities. As such, the production was presented in the round, meaning that the audience was free to sit, stand and walk around the entire screen and performance area, just as I was able to do during my visits to traditional performances. We also served tea and snacks to audience members and encouraged their questions and puppetry attempts after the show was over. The show was so well received when it debuted in 2012 at the In the Heart of the Beast Theatre, that it ran again the following year.

Moving Figures

The Chinese shadow figures yearn to be in action, communicating through the immaterial nothingness, symbolism, and color, conjuring for the audience that bore them. The translucent leather figure is the nexus through which deep cultural attitudes about shadows as ghostly conduits are embedded and transmitted. In pursuit of my first research question, "what are the particular ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry, a traditional vernacular puppetry form, is resistant to current methods of preservation", this chapter showed the importance of Chinese

leather shadow figures and their autonomous colored shadows through performance, which have rendered them extremely difficult to preserve and archive in their totality. This chapter also wove in a relevant recent history of China to better understand Chinese shadow puppetry and its current circumstances and contexts. The involvement of the central Government, beginning in 1952, within the vernacular form has begun a shift in creative and evolutionary impetus from the practitioners to government and institutional officials, a shift which has greatly influenced the current approach to safeguarding vernacular forms in China. These aspects of recent history, the shadow figure, and its immaterial performance partner, combined with Chinese shadow puppetry's roots in ritual performance, are what require a reconsideration of safeguarding policy and methods from the roster currently enacted.

Chapter 3: Transmitting Shadows

言传身教

(yan-chuan-shen-jiao)

to pass on through words and to teach through the body

In Chinese, a *chengyu* is a set phrase or idiom, usually made up of four characters. For the Chinese and for Chinese linguists, these idioms and set phrases hold a perpetual fascination for their poetry, economy and their ability to enlighten cultural importances through their repeated usage. Because most idioms are limited to just four characters, there is often heavy abbreviation in meaning: for example, one of the common idioms to wish to a newlywed couple is *baitoudaolao* (白头到老) which literally means “white hair, arrive, old” - not much of a wish at first glance. However, its poetic interpretation means the well wisher hopes the new couple will “live well together until their hair turns white with old age”. Many idioms have equivalents in English, such as *yishierniao* (一石二鸟), one stone, two birds - or as we would phrase it: to kill two birds with one stone.

Importantly, the repetition and rhythm of these four character phrases means they are often used together and in succession. When my friend Tianxiang got married in 2014, I sent him a congratulations that included *baitoudaolao*, followed up with *zaoshengguizi* (早生贵子) may you soon give birth to a son, *bainianhaohe* (百年好合) may you have a harmonious reunion that lasts one hundred years, and *yongjietongxin* (永结同心) may you always and forever be of one mind and heart:

白头到老

早生贵子

百年好合

永结同心

Strung together, they make an elongated poem, already metered and incredibly pleasant to the ear, which is why idioms are so often utilized in poems, music and dramatic literature.

There are anywhere between 5000 and 20,000 idioms in the Chinese language.¹²⁰ Chinese, however, orally circulate only the most common and useful ones, numbering somewhere between 500-1000. These commonly used idioms, therefore, represent the most persistent and important philosophies, concepts, ideals and wishes in Chinese culture.

One idiom that I have picked out of multiple conversations with Chinese shadow puppet practitioners is *yanchuan shenjiao* (言传身教), or as my Chinese-English dictionary translates it, "to teach by personal example as well as by verbal instruction". This idiom has floated in and through many of my exchanges with masters and students alike. It was particularly emphasized during my interview with *Qinfeng*, the head of puppetry training at Shanghai Theatre Academy, when he said, "this is Chinese drama and Chinese culture's base. It doesn't resemble the American way of just thinking it in your head and then making it, it comes from working through the body with repeated practice (*yanchuan shenjiao*)" (2016). *Liu Weiwei*, long-time apprentice at the *Longzaitian* shadow puppet troupe in Beijing, also emphasized the phrase when describing their training process, "We learn by verbal instruction and then through physical example (*yanchuan shenjiao*). I lead you, I don't make you read a book and just tell you what to do. I let you take those sticks in your hand and then I tell you or show you how to move them. When you move them wrong, I correct you, etc. This is how you lead the new students"¹²¹ (2016).

¹²⁰ The Routledge Dictionary of Chinese Idioms posits that the total number of idioms is likely somewhere around 20,000, see Jiao, Kubler and Zhang, 2013.

¹²¹ It is important to note here that the word Liu Weiwei uses to convey transmission in her interview is not *teach* (教 *jiao*), but to *carry* (带 *dai*).

The idiom is comprised of the following characters: *yan* 言, language; *chuan* 传 to pass; *shen* 身, the body; and *jiao* 教, to teach. *Yanchuan* literally means "language transmission" or "language impart" and *shenjiao* means "body teach". The word *shen* can be widely interpreted as body/life/incarnation/character, but in the context within which my participants used it, often accompanied with a physical demonstration of the ways in which the body teaches through to another body, they are utilizing the word *shen* to mean our physical body. As Qinfeng emphatically stated, this teaching method is the basis of transmitting *all* traditional Chinese forms of drama and performance and is at the core of China's preferred model of transmission: apprenticeship.

This chapter concludes my inquiry into the first research question, "what are the particular ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry, a traditional vernacular puppetry form, is resistant to current methods of preservation" by examining the deeper, invisible layers of *yanchuanshenjiao* within the traditional apprenticeship system in order to explicate how this method of transmission differs from others and how it is central to the continuance of a vernacular performance form. Chinese shadow puppetry's elusive ephemeral, ritual and immaterial performance practice has been transmitted through the apprenticeship system since its origins and is central to its continuance in situ, but it is also this epistemological system that has become one of the most difficult and elusive elements of the form to preserve. For in addition to the necessary corporeal lessons received during apprenticeship through *yanchuanshenjiao*, the social and cultural lessons received through apprenticeship's contextualized learning are just as important to linking generations of practitioners within a practice.

The chapter begins with an overview of apprenticeships as the oldest model for "formal" learning and their historic basis in Asia and China. I then present two current case studies of modern Chinese shadow puppetry apprenticeship to unpack the nuances of each apprenticeship's circumstance and how these subtle differences change what is disseminated and perpetuated within the learning process, namely that in addition to the corporeal, social and collective learning going on in apprenticeship, creativity and an expectation of mastery is crucial to preventing stasis within the lineage. Finally, I utilize my own experience in shadow puppetry apprenticeship between the years of 2008-2016 in order to better explicate these less visible ways

in which apprenticeship shapes a future practitioner and to privilege the bodies of both learner and teacher as necessary considerations in any preservation and safeguarding method.

China and Apprenticeship

In plain definition, apprenticeships are an educational relationship between a high-level practitioner (the teacher, often called the "master") and apprentice (the student) that places proximity, intentional observation, and repeated practice at the center of its epistemology. Apprentices usually learn and apply knowledge within the same environment that they study within (also known as contextualized learning) and the length of an apprenticeship is determined by the complexity of the skill or form being transferred. Apprenticeship is the oldest form of systematized knowledge transmission and universal to every region and culture.

The earliest accounts of apprenticeships link their inception to Mesopotamia, well before the turn of the Common Era.¹²² The clearest records of apprenticeship, however, come from China as early as the Shang Dynasty (1600 BCE) and show a growth in apprenticeship through the millennia.¹²³ The peak of the apprenticeship system's sophisticated complexity is best illustrated through the example of Emperor *Qin Shihuang* (260-210 BCE) and the creation of his eventual tomb. The project organized nearly 700,000 apprentices who would eventually produce over 8,000 life-sized terracotta warriors, along with hundreds of accompanying horses and chariots - all with unparalleled quality control.

More typical than the Shang dynasty example, however, were small-scale models of apprenticeship throughout China. Before the Communist Revolution (1949), there were two types of apprenticeship transmission in China. The most common model is *jiajupeiyang* (家居培养),¹²⁴ or "home-dwelling cultivation", wherein the art form is passed down through the familial lineage (most often patrilineal).¹²⁵ Apprenticeships of this type begin very early and slowly as the child grows to assume new and more complex tasks and duties. The apprentice can

¹²² Billet 61.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ These two models of apprenticeship in China have been reiterated to me throughout my fieldwork tenure.

¹²⁵ Although it was ideal to pass mastered skills through the familial line for economic reasons, an interested apprentice from outside the family could make a bid for a place at the table. If a master was sonless, this was more easily accomplished.

only become a master once their own master passes away, which can take several decades. The second apprenticeship model is *kebanshi* (科班式), or troupe style. This method of apprenticeship transmission takes place within an existing puppetry or theatre troupe and implies that apprentices are not bound by familiar affiliation. Students are often given room and board and a cost-free study period with no salary as they move slowly up the ranks. The apprentices often pay back this initial investment of the troupe by taking on other non-performative tasks within the theatre: cleaning, cooking, administration, etc. When the apprentices have trained sufficiently and can contribute to the profitable activities of the troupe, the troupe will often provide a small stipend (commensurate with the talent of the performer) alongside the benefits of room and board. The privilege to advance within the troupe is a question of seniority *and* skill.

After China's Communist and Cultural Revolution (1976CE), shadow puppetry apprenticeship began making a dramatic shift from primarily jiajupeiyang family apprenticeships to the *kebanshi* model of apprenticeship, as the theatrical landscape shifted and new cultural industries emerged. The *kebanshi* model is most notably employed by the large, government-funded provincial theatres all over mainland China, which continue to prosper.¹²⁶ Jiajupeiyang is increasingly rare as shadow puppetry loses its viability in rural areas and single-family troupes are unable to support the existing troupe members, let alone foster a long-term apprenticeship agreements with new apprentices.¹²⁷ In order to clarify apprenticeship's embedded epistemology and how the transmission of Chinese shadow puppetry can be altered with changes to these models, I now present two modern case studies of apprenticeship in China.

Modern Jiajupeiyang Apprenticeship

The Lu family's journey in shadow puppetry started when Master Lu Fuzeng was a young boy living in the outskirts of Tangshan city in Hebei province.¹²⁸ In the 1950s it was common practice in the region to use shadow play as a learning tool in the rural classroom. As elementary school students, many learned to cut simple puppets from paper and act out popular plays. From that experience, Lu Fuzeng was hooked. As he grew into his teen years he aspired to make

¹²⁶ This apprenticeship model shift has been true for many Chinese opera forms as well. See Stock "Learning Huju".

¹²⁷ Rollins "Changing Apprenticeship System".

¹²⁸ For a more in-depth article on the Lu family, see Rollins "Inheritance of Shadows".

shadow puppet carving a career and began the search for a childless Master who was willing to share his secrets to someone with a different surname. Once found, the young Lu Fuzeng dove in.



Figure 3.1. Left to right: *Lu Fuzeng, Xu Yishu and Lu Tianxiang* of the Lu Family shadow puppet makers. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 3.2. *Xu Yishu* paints leather shadow puppet pieces on the *kang* bed while a neighbor chats with her about her practice. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

When Lu Fuzeng married *Xu Yishu* in 1979, she was inducted into the shadow puppet making process and learned to paint the leather pieces after her husband cut them. When the couple bore two children, they were slowly brought into the fold by learning and performing small tasks to assist their parents' work: from filling the barrel with water for hide soaking, to assisting in the hand-scraping process of translucent leather, to stringing the puppets together. The complexity of the skills increased as their expertise did. Throughout the years, the Lu family has used shadow puppet making as necessary supplementary income to farming during the winter months. When other farmers may be processing spices or cotton, the Lus are cutting and painting leather in their workroom, lacquering in the courtyard and stringing the pieces together by nightlight. Shadow puppetry even helped them through a hard few years when Master Lu was battling health issues that kept him from their fields.



Figure 3.3. *Lu Tianxiang* at a shadow puppet performance in Luanxian. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

Although the family worked together for much of the 1990s and 2000s, a life-long apprenticeship was not expected of either of the children. Still, Tianxiang has become a rare and dedicated apprentice by personal choice. Knowing that shadow puppetry was a risky future, the Lus stressed formal education for their children even as they steeped them in a *jiajupeiyang* style apprenticeship. As their son, Tianxiang, approached high school graduation, he shouldered their expectations and worries and expressed his desire to continue onto technical college - but there was no money.

When I started, I didn't have much of an interest towards shadow puppetry. Like all young people, this kind of culture, shadow puppetry - traditional, older - I didn't really understand it. So when I was cutting shadow puppetry, I only had one objective: make money, send myself to school...I was about to graduate from high school and shadow puppets were just becoming popular again. I realized this was a good opportunity to work and I needed money to continue in school, so I decided to seriously study with my dad...every break we had, I practiced...because, to practice shadow puppet carving is a very repetitive process. You have to get it in your body. Once it's in your body, you cannot forget. (Lu Tianxiang)

In 2002, Tianxiang became his father's formal apprentice in leather carving to make money for school, but in the years leading up to this milestone, he had actually been apprenticing all along. Before he learned to carve puppets, Tianxiang had performed and perfected every other step in the puppet making process: leather preparation, blade sharpening, painting, puppet lacquering, and puppet assembly. What was also informally transmitted through those earlier years of observation, proximity and repeated practice over time, was the socio-cultural importance of shadow puppetry and the ways in which his father navigated the form's shifting circumstances and vernaculars. When I met the family in 2011, Tianxiang had made a shift from feeling like he didn't understand shadow puppetry in 2002 to becoming a passionate advocate for the form, his father's contributions and finding his own place in the tenuous shadow puppet lineage. What catalyzed Tianxiang's deeper understanding of shadow puppetry and the cultural legacy he had been tacitly steeped in was finally discovering his father's own struggles to keep the form alive during the Cultural Revolution and the proceeding decades.

It's a mission. It hasn't really become my profession (...), it's more of an undertaking. If it's your profession, it is the thing that makes your income. If it's your undertaking, you don't need to make a living at it, but you can still strive for it all your life. You know there was a time when I was carving shadow puppets and I didn't really know why. Then, it wasn't an undertaking - I didn't know what the purpose was or what a mission would be. But later, slowly, (...) I have understood its value, its meaning.

This example of the *jiayupei* model of apprenticeship equally emphasizes the corporeal transmission of skills and the socio-cultural importance of the form and its vernacular relationship to a given community. It is also geared towards launching Tianxiang to the role of master practitioner, by challenging him to take on more and more creative choices and collaborative tasks. In this way, *jiayupei* "preserves" both the form of Chinese shadow puppetry as well as a method of how to keep the form responding and relevant within an apprentice's environment.

Modern Kebanshi Apprenticeship

The *Longzaitian* shadow puppet troupe is a company that's grown quickly in size and scope since its inception in 2008.¹²⁹ Co-founder *Zhonghua* started the company because of his passion for shadow puppetry and the dying folk art forms of China. His idea was to make a shadow puppet theatre financially viable in the modern era by combining it with another social issue: that of gainful employment for little people. The entire performing company is comprised of dwarves who have migrated from all over the country, often with no prior theatrical experience, to join this community of fellow little people and to learn an ancient craft. The government has stepped in to support the endeavor by subsidizing operating costs of their large building, right next to the summer palace. Its locale has ensured the company tourist groups and school trips year-round to create the base of their financial income. As the company has expanded throughout the last five years, many more activities have been added to their roster: national and international touring performances, setting up satellite companies in sister cities around the mainland, and outreach teaching in the schools.



Figure 3.4. The *Longzaitian* Shadow Puppet Troupe's rehearsal and performance space just outside the summer palace location in Beijing. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.

¹²⁹ More Longzaitian Company information can be found at www.xiuzhenrenpiying.com.



Figure 3.5. *Wang Yueyue and Liu Weiwei*. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2016.



Figure 3.6. *Liu Weiwei* performs as emcee in a *Longzaitian* show. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

The Longzaitian shadow puppet troupe has based its apprenticeship model on the *Kebanshi* method of transmission since its inception. The initial tuition-free period helps entice new students, offsets the high-turnover rate of new apprentices and the opportunity for advancement helps keep committed students there for the long term. *Liu Weiwei* and *Wang Yueyue* are two students who began Longzaitian's *kebanishi* apprenticeship program in 2009 and 2010 respectively. I met them for the first time at the beginning of their training in shadow puppetry in early 2011. Both of them have moved up the ranks through subsequent years, even while remaining apprentices, to become touring performers and teachers, which gives them a unique reflexive position on their training.

Liu Weiwei is a smart young woman who chooses not to disclose her age. She carries herself with an innate poise and speaks with energy, even though she admits to being introverted. *Wang Yueyue* is an energetic and enigmatic young man of 28, who has excelled in the physical tasks of shadow puppet performance: puppet manipulation and physical comedy. He's endlessly fascinated about the world, always peppering me with questions that he can't find an answer to

elsewhere: "do you raise pets in America?", "does it ever snow there?", "in America do you use the word 'states' or 'provinces?'"

The apprenticeship program at Longzaitian is a rigorous schedule of 10-hour days, 28-days a month. The training methodology is focused on presence with instructors, proximity, practice and, most importantly, time. As Wang explains, "Well, you don't start training with actual puppet performance, you just start with two sticks (puppet rods). You work on your hand agility for about two months, up to three. When you've got that down, you start with very simple animal (puppets)" (2016). When students first arrive, this is the first and only skill they must master in order to progress to the next stages. Wang continues, "At around three months you've got an idea (of the basic rod manipulation). You're comfortable with the sticks and maybe some animals and then there are two and three and even four-sticked puppets - where there are two sticks on the feet and two puppeteers." Liu elaborates on the method through which these foundational first months of apprenticeship are conducted:

We learn by verbal instruction and then through physical example (yanchuan shenjiao). I lead you, I don't make you read a book and just tell you what to do. I let you take those sticks in your hand and then I tell you or show you how to move them. When you move them wrong, I correct you, etc. This is how you lead the new students. There is no trying to understand how to do it all from a book or something! You can start by example, "it's like this and this and this way" and also by correcting the students own practice when they try. The time is spent like this.

Wang Yueyue emphasizes the necessary element of time in apprenticeship learning by saying, "To grasp all of these skills fully? The quickest anyone might be able to study this is 6 months. I mean, to get a good idea about all of it. To study it well? It won't be till I'm old." Apprenticeship instruction, by formal educational standards, may seem slow. 280 hours a month for six months to master the basic movements of just a few puppets? But, for tasks that involve such minute mastery and finesse of the corporeal body, time is an essential element.

The rigorous training schedule and the narrow content for the first half-year can be daunting to new apprentices. When I ask Wang Yueyue about his changing impressions of shadow puppetry, he conveys a common progression of intimacy towards the form: "When I finally saw it [shadow puppetry] performed for the first time, I thought it was curious and interesting; studying it was a little dull and dry; and then when I finished studying and could perform I really liked it, it was great." So many students talk about the drought of interest in the middle, most

rigorous part of their training, which ultimately leads them closer to mastery and back to appreciation and respect for the form. Liu chimes in about this "dull and dry" period with,

There's no other way. Everyone has to pass through this portion. Every day we'd go to class and listen to the teacher, even when we didn't want to. If you don't listen and don't pay attention, the teacher can't take you any further. If you don't pass through this part you truly can't continue or progress. If I do a movement, say, dipping the head, but if you can't move the control rods correctly, you really can't make the correct movement. You want to dip it or turn the head or whatever, you don't practice? You just want to watch the teacher do it? No. Of course if you just watch someone else do it, these are two different things entirely. I watch him or her do it? Looks so easy! But, then I try to do it myself? Totally different thing... [This period is] so boring and dull! Because, these things, even with a super smart person, you *must* practice! If you don't practice your hands can't do it. Any skill, the control rods and performing, you *must* practice. If you've got innate talent and some technique, you can study a bit more quickly; but if you don't have innate talent - you could practice to death!

What Liu Weiwei and Wang Yueyue both describe in their apprenticeship experiences clearly highlights both the yanchuanshenjiao principles of teaching through verbal and physical example and the importance of practicing, repeatedly, for a prolonged period over time until mastery is accomplished. The cohort of apprentices usually study with teachers who come into the Summer Palace theatre for a few weeks at a time and then return to their own communities. Longzaitian apprentices are also not encouraged (as of 2016) to take on greater creative roles as they ascend the ranks. Instead, their ceiling remains simply technical mastery.

In this particular example of the kebanshi model of apprenticeship, corporeal and somatic mastery is emphasized over the social and cultural aspects of the form. This unintentional deemphasis on socio-cultural foundation is the most prominent epistemological difference between the two apprenticeship model examples I've presented here. Is it also important to recognize that the difference in emphasis changes not only the knowledge that is received by the apprentice, but also the approach to how the form is practiced and propagated within an apprentices' given community. In order to examine these two models of apprenticeship and their dissimilar effect on continuance and preservation efforts, we must look more closely at what is happening epistemologically during yanchuanshenjiao.

The Way-in

On the first day of my kebanshi shadow puppet-making apprenticeship with the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe in 2008, I equipped myself with what I thought were the appropriate

materials: camera, audio recorder, notepad, pen, pencil, and a big eraser. I presented myself to the master and was sat at a long leather-carving table along with about ten other apprentices with varied levels of expertise. The master leaned down to me and simply said, “when you have a question, you are free to ask.” Then he left. The prompt seemed reasonable enough until I realized that I had no idea where to begin.

I had seen Chinese shadow puppets before. Laboriously carved leather puppets, crammed with symbolism and meaningful design were the reason I was here in the first place. I sat at that worktable as the rest of the room buzzed around me with quiet activity. Eventually, with an increasing desire to look busy, I began to walk around the small 8 x 15 workroom, sniffing out materials and sheepishly observing the other students. Sometimes I took notes, sometimes I stared out the window and when I got too restless, I would wander around the workroom again. The master would pop in occasionally and make the rounds, nodding his head slowly or uttering a "yes" or "no" when asked a direct question. When he got to me, he'd just give me a small smile to acknowledge my presence and then move on to the next student who was doing something.



Figure 3.7. *Wangyan* watches over me as I progress in my leather carving apprenticeship. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.



Figure 3.8. The leather carving studio at the *Yutian's Huaxian* branch during lunch break. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

After a few more days of this, I finally got impatient enough to start asking questions. I leaned to the puppet cutter on my right, *Wangyan*, who I'd observed to be one of the more skilled artists and asked her directly about the leather piece she was working on. She stopped what she was doing and answered my question with a palpable patience, allowing me to touch the leather piece. I followed up with a few more questions about the knife, the wood board and her movements. Soon, I had a basic explanation of the cutting process. This little bit of success with my first initiative gave me confidence to move forward. I had soon borrowed a hard date wood (jujube) cutting board, a set of small hand knives, a set of chisels and a wooden hammer.¹³⁰ In addition to the borrowed hand tools were commonly shared sharpening stones, bottles of water to lubricate the stones, and some sort of large press (usually an old stool or set of tiles, weighed down by bricks or stones) to keep the moistening leather pieces flat. With a few questions and answers under my belt and a few tools in hand, I began a more earnest observation over the

¹³⁰ The wooden hammer is primarily used in styles that derive from the Northern Central shadow puppet lineage.

masterful students and felt ready to apply a few nascent conjectures to some leather scraps I had collected. Finally, I thought, the apprenticeship had begun.



Figures 3.9-3.10. Top left, clockwise: *Huazhou* style cutting set of tools; the makeshift leather press made with stool and bricks; *Wangyan*'s expert hands cut a difficult pattern; a sample of *Wangyan*'s "snowflake" patterning in unpainted leather. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

Situated Learning in Apprenticeships

"Situated learning" is a term coined by anthropologists, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, in their seminal work, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Here, they expand

upon the limited historical notions of the kinds of learning that happen in an apprenticeship. Lave and Wenger push the antiquated boundaries of Western epistemology in a number of ways. First, they insist that the learning happening during apprenticeships is not limited to the practical skills learned, but invariably extends to social, cultural and physical world learning in the process. As John Seely Brown, Alan Collins and Paul Duguid, researchers who continued Lave and Wenger's work with situated learning and cognition, explain it, "situations might be said to co-produce knowledge through activity" (32). All situated learning advocates also insist that, unlike much formal schooling, knowledge dissemination is not viewed as unilateral from teacher to student but circular: acknowledging that each element affects the other in profound ways. Finally, their research has definitively shown that though this knowledge is created in-context, it is absolutely applicable elsewhere.

Situated learning, like all learning theories, has its critics. The loudest critique surrounds "exaggerated claims" of situated learning advocates. Educational researchers John Anderson, Lynne Reder and Herbert Simon, while confirming that situated learning has its irreplaceable benefits in the sphere of knowledge transmission, emphasize that many of these claims are "exaggerated to assert that all knowledge is specific to the situation in which the task is performed and that more general knowledge cannot and will not transfer to real-world situations" (6). Their stance that some knowledge does not transfer between contexts and that training out of context isn't entirely useless is not necessarily contradictory in the field. Through my thorough survey of the literature surrounding apprenticeship, situated learning and experiential learning, no one has purported what Anderson, Reder, and Simon are refuting. I believe the vast majority of educators would agree that certainly some knowledge is transferred in decontextualized contexts and that decontextualized learning is not useless. What situated learning advocates are saying, myself included, is that some types of knowledge are transmitted more holistically when done so in context.

In this chapter, I use the term "situated learning" to mean learning done in the same context that it will eventually be applied. William F. Hanks, a linguist who has been inspired by the work of Lave, writes in the forward to Lave's book entitled *Situated Learning*: it takes as its focus "the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it occurs" (14).

My own introduction to situated learning through apprenticeship was rocky. I was yet unaware of the tacit transmissions of knowledge that were happening just below the surface of

my everyday actions. That first week in my puppet making apprenticeship was, for me, what Jean Lave calls the “way-in” (A Comparative Approach 184). Loosely defined, the “way-in” means: “whatever it takes to get from a state of high ignorance about how to do something to a state in which one can make a first approximation to it.” My way-in to shadow puppet-making was messy. Though that week felt like a just a bunch of frustrated confusion to me, upon reflection, there was a whole host of learning going on; from creating a mental catalogue of tools to feeling the leather pieces when they are perfectly moist and from gaining a familiarity with Chinese shadow puppet aesthetics to a general overview of the puppet making process. Soon, I was also tuning in to the sounds, attitudes, conversations and exchanges going on around me. And while I wasn't sure what exactly I was being taught through this process, I was sure that I was, tacitly, learning.

Tacitness

Tacit learning was first promoted as a concept by polymath Michael Polyani in *The Tacit Dimension* (Polyani 1966).¹³¹ The book re-situates the body as primary participant in knowledge creation. Independently, the word tacit is defined as “understood or implied without being stated” (Oxforddictionaries.com) but can be more generally understood as “we know more than we can tell” (Polyani 4). Tacit learning is learning that is not explicit, overtly cognitive or verbal; it is embedded in practice and often conducted on a level beyond our cognitive consciousness. Tacit knowledge (or “tacit knowing” as Polyani preferred) is the knowledge that is created through a tacit learning process. For example, though you could hear a specific scientific and sensorial account of how one rides a bike, the chances that you could instantly transfer that cognitive information into an embodied practice is slim to none. Instead, the learner would have to learn through observation and practice, or tacit learning, to develop a corporeal understanding of the verbal examples, or *yanchuanshenjiao*. The tacit knowledge is the ability to ride your bike. Just like the saying, “once you learn how to ride a bike, you never forget”, so does tacit knowledge remain within, ready to be called upon when needed even without continued and direct use.

¹³¹ Although Polyani's book is over 50 years old, it is still considered a primary text on the topic of situated and experiential learning.

All knowledge, explicit or implicit, is grounded in tacit knowledge.¹³² Richard Sennet, an influential sociologist who has explored a wide range of topics, explores the everyday embedded nature of tacit knowledge in his book *The Craftsman* with this example; “If a person had to think about each and every movement of waking up, she or he would take an hour to get out of bed” (Sennet 50). Tacitness, once understood, is evident in every single action we take. I have observed, however, that even with our keen attention, there are elements to the inseparable relationship between the mind and body, which we cannot be conscious of no matter how hard we try.

As an extension of the belief that all knowledge is grounded in tacit knowledge: any learning method, formal or informal, is also grounded in tacit knowledge. Formal schooling, however, places primacy in cognitive learning methods, such as lectures, close readings and memorization, leaving its relationship to and consciousness of tacit learning and knowledge as peripheral. Situated learning places tacit learning and knowledge at the heart of its epistemology as tacit knowledge is primarily created through situated learning’s inherent emphasis on practice, proximity and time.

To further illustrate how some aspects of tacit learning and knowledge are not able to be replicated beyond a situated learning system, such as apprenticeship, it is important to further dissect what constitutes these terms. Harry Collins, a sociology professor from Cardiff University, wrote a thorough monograph that examines tacit learning and knowledge under a microscope. Building upon Polyani's work in his book, *Tacit and Explicit Knowledge*, Collins extrapolates three subcategories under the umbrella of "tacit knowledge": somatic, that which pertains solely between the body and the external world; collective, that which pertains to culture and society; relational, that which could very easily be made explicit but is not so because there is no need. Although I disagree with the direction Collins eventually takes his subcategories to prove a theory on Social Cartesianism, I cannot argue with his deconstruction of tacit knowledge.¹³³ Both somatic and collective tacit knowledge may fall into relational tacit knowledge categories. Examples of relational tacit knowledge are actions such as waving “hello”, smiling or walking; tasks that are either so simple they need no explanation or tasks that were universally learned in a pre-verbal development stage. Relational tacit knowledge, though

¹³² Gasciogne and Thornton 2013, Polyani 1966.

¹³³ Collins 131.

the easiest to explicate, is not as relevant to me here as inexplicable somatic and collective tacit knowledge are.

Somatic Tacit Learning

After I had found my way-in, the next few weeks in my summer apprenticeship were painful. Physically, my arms and back ached; my neck grew stiff and my hands cramped. Mentally, I still felt lost and stupid, adrift in a sea of ambiguous confusion. I arrived at 9am every morning, took a short lunch break with my fellow cutters at 1pm, and continued cutting until the sun grew weak. On a good day, I was lucky enough to have a moment of what felt like success, even if it was followed by one of defeat. On the not-so-great days, I felt only setbacks. It was the first time in my life I couldn't think my way through something; I couldn't will my own advancement. My classmates just kept repeating the phrase, "*manmanlai* (慢慢来)" or "it'll come slowly". At some point in the third week, I gave up thinking through it altogether out of pure exhaustion and just continued to work. I stopped trying to "get it" and just began to do.

By the end of the fourth week, I noticed an almost imperceptible progress evident in my body. My arm, so accustomed to the repetitive and nuanced motion of the blade across the sharpening stone and the result of its actions, began to make undetectable corrections to its positioning. Without knowing quite why, I would press harder or softer on the front edge of the blade and it seemed to come out right more times than not or know exactly when the leather was moist enough to cut but not so moist that it would squish under a knife blade.

This recollection of my first month in the Chinese shadow puppet apprenticeship and my body's slowly acquired abilities is an example of somatic tacit knowledge.¹³⁴ Somatic tacit knowledge, just like riding a bike, attends entirely to our body's interaction with the external material world. Tianxiang described the somatic tacit learning process as, "a very repetitive process. You have to get it in your body. But, once it's in your body, you cannot forget how."¹³⁵ Additional examples of somatic tacit learning beyond the Chinese shadow puppet workshop may include a blind person's competency with a white cane, artists' learned skills in a craft such as

¹³⁴ Collins 99.

¹³⁵ The idea of "not forgetting" is a recurrent theme throughout research on the body in learning. While the mind is so often forgetful, most knowledge and skill achieved by the body is never forgotten. It is evident in phrases such as, "muscle memory."

pottery and a pole vaulter's abilities. Although there are certainly aspects of puppet making work that are cognitive, the basis of my learning was done tacitly through repeated instruction and practice through my body.

Somatic tacit knowledge has historically been the singular aspect of tacit knowledge, if indeed covered at all, in apprenticeship and situated learning inquiries.¹³⁶ Its relatively concrete outcomes, such as learning to ride a bike or the ability to create a Chinese shadow puppet, are more easily understood by that which tacit knowledge is attending to. Still the understanding of how the body learns through practice is less understood. Polyani theorizes that the body's process of learning begins with *perception*. This, according to Polyani, is knowing's "most impoverished form" (Polyani 7). From the basic sensory level of perception (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting), we then move to *subception*, which denotes "non-conscious discriminatory abilities" (Gasgione & Thornton 19). And finally, through subception the body's knowing moves back out to interact with the world in what is called *extension*. Put these terms into our example of learning to ride a bike and perception becomes the sensory stimuli of gravity, the exact pressure needed on the pedals and physical control of the steering and balance as well as seeing a forward path. Subception is the stage in which this perceptive information becomes fully realized subconscious understanding in the body and extension manifests itself as the ability to ride your bike around new terrain and environments.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of phenomenology and perception also validates the body as direct sensor and connector to our material world and reinforces the notion that this embodied interaction with this world is our primary source of stimuli, information and learning.¹³⁷ Phenomenology, as summarized by Elizabeth Grosz, posits that "the body is my being-to-the-world and as such is the instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated" (87). Merleau-Ponty's theories make quick work of re-privileging the body as central to our processes of perception, which rejects Cartesian dualism in total.

Elusive and imperceptible learning within the body, or somatic tacit knowledge, in vernacular traditional performance and craft practices is part of the reason that embodied skills within these forms and their cultural impact has been difficult to even perceive, let alone quantify and validate. Moreover, the invisibility of somatic tacit knowledge and the body's layers of

¹³⁶ Literature that reached beyond the somatic elements of situated learning began in the 1960s.

¹³⁷ Merleau-Ponty 1962.

consciousness deep within have too often allowed the miscategorization of traditional forms as repetitive and antithetical to creativity. But, as Richard Schechner points out,

As basic work becomes second nature, subtleties emerge that reflect very precisely the personality of the performer. It is not as an American might think: creativity has not been stifled by all the apparently mechanical training. Rather, when the time comes for individuality to be expressed it emerges from a wholly mastered technique that no longer feels 'technical' either to the performer or to the audience. Masters contribute from themselves - even if they are not always conscious that they are doing so. From their point of view, they are doing what they know how to do, pouring themselves into the vessels of their scores. But these vessels are not stone-hard, they are surprisingly malleable, not only during the times of allowed improvisation but even in the details of the scores themselves. (Between Theatre 223-224)

Not only does an observer have trouble understanding what is going on in the body during apprenticeship and practice, but so does the practitioner themselves as the tacit learning body is often operating at the subconscious. Trevor Marchand expands on the body's creative process, which responds in real time, to the materials and context at hand:

...crafting minarets and dwellings, is not about producing an *a priori* idea or image 'in the mind's eye', but rather creativity centrally involves engagement in the physical 'making' itself. The finished architecture unfolds *in* these processes, whereby the mason-subject is merged with the material object in a hands-on interaction over time... The physical object, like the tools used to create it, becomes an extension of the craftsman's unfolding idea. (Marchand "Muscles, Morals, Minds" 257)

In a situated learning mode, the body and hands are an active learner *and* creative counterpart to the conscious mind. This prolonged material engagement with the physical body is what becomes, over time, as central to an apprentices' creative process as the social and cultural lessons that have been passed down through situated learning.

Collective Tacit Learning

Over the course of the entire summer, I had learned and un-learned a great deal. I had found my "way-in" to the apprenticeship and puppet-making practice. Beyond the craft work, I was starting to feel even bigger changes evident in my overall ease in the day to day. The workshop became a place of focus and concentration rather than a site of frustrated confusion. I no longer balked at setbacks, but dug my heels in deeper because of them. The puppet cutters around me had slowly become my friends, through accumulated conversations here and there. During lunch

I would try out my new Mandarin vocabulary words and ask them questions about their family and work. In subtler ways, I was also starting to intuit general attitudes towards folk culture, shadow puppetry with its canon of stories and inherited traditions.

The outcomes of my apprenticeship, beyond the concrete ability to carve a puppet piece out of leather, were harder to comprehend. What was that quieter knowledge about the complex social workings of my work studio, the culture of student hierarchy, the intuited pace of work, traditions of respect, and inherited beliefs of art's place in everyday life? This messier counterpart to somatic tacit knowledge is categorized as Collective Tacit Knowledge – that which pertains to communities, society and culture.¹³⁸

Collective tacit knowledge, like somatic tacit knowledge, is ever-present in our everyday. Our personal interactions, the way we navigate traffic or expressions of appropriate public personas are all primarily based on our subliminally learned lessons of what is acceptable. This, rather obviously, varies greatly around the world as our collective tacit understanding is directly based on what culture or society we are exposed to and what our positionality is within that culture or society. For Tianxiang, he described his unhurried work with traditional shadow puppetry as a counter to the modern status quo:

I feel that society is a bit fickle and impatient, their pace is fast. And, in turn, so am I. But as I continued to cut puppetry with my father, a tranquility and calm began to seep in. It helped me foster a development in personal behavior and my character. From then on, I've become a more honest and unaffected person. (2016)

Further examples of collective tacit learning might include a woman in the modern corporate workplace in China who navigates her way around the boardroom in a very different way than a woman might in North America. Within China, a woman in a mega-city such as Beijing would carry herself differently in business than a woman would in a smaller provincial city, such as Xi'an. Further determinates might include the type of business or industry and its current culture, regional standards of beauty, embedded historical notions of gender equality — you can see how the list may never end. Where the three stages of perception, subception and extension remained vague terms about somatic tacit knowledge, the poverty of their ability to decipher what is happening in the processing of collective tacit knowledge is even more pronounced.

¹³⁸ Collins 2010.

The beginning and end stage of the tacit learning process, perception and extension, are difficult to pinpoint in the collective learning realm, but it is the stage of subception that really challenges. Though the senses may take in the same stimuli, such as a tone of voice, a sentence, body language, group dynamics, the processing of this information depends heavily upon the individual and their unique background. To illustrate this point, I can return to my own experience in the workshop. That first week I described, with my initial confusion at the lack of teaching, was a direct result of my unconscious epistemological bias. I also felt lost and stupid because I had tacitly learned, in my western formal education, that the faster I “got” something, the smarter I was. My Chinese student peers did not encounter any of these issues because they were already familiar with apprenticeship as a legitimate method of transferring and creating knowledge. They also did not feel the same impatience I did, knowing full well that mastery would take several years or more: what was the rush? This mid-stage of subception is undeniably messy. Without concrete outcomes, like executing a perfect cut pattern in leather, it is harder to even define what “correct” is. And, even in the pursuit of this obscure goal, it is so easy to get it wrong. Like its somatic counterpart, collective tacit knowledge requires repeated practice to achieve a desired outcome.

In recent studies by ethnographers, using situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation as research method, this previously omitted element of collective tacit knowledge comes to the forefront.¹³⁹ Trevor Marchand, who has apprenticed with numerous architectural and construction communities within Africa writes at length about what building apprentices learn by simply being there. Through their legitimate peripheral participation, apprentices are “listening to negotiations and disputes with clients, suppliers, team members and other masons, [they] becomes further immersed in the concerns, worldview and social behavior of [their] mentor” (“Muscles, Morals, Minds” 254). In other words, apprentices are not just learning the craft, but *how* to practice their craft. Geoffrey Gowlland, who works with ceramists in Jiangsu province, writes about the collective tacit knowledge within the Dingshu workshops. The multiple master’s studios, which occupy a small area, house many apprentices who are encouraged to perform *laibaixiang* (来白相) or make “regular visits to others, movements of coming and going between workshops” (Gowlland 365). He continues, “for younger artisans,

¹³⁹ Lave and Wenger 1991.

laibaixiang is the context in which legitimate peripheral participation can take place — the learning not only of practical skills but also the development of a way of speaking and acting; in short, it is the development of an identity as an artisan.” Indeed, it is the collective tacit understanding that creates artists and makers at least as much or more than its somatic counterpart.

In his own apprenticeship, Tianxiang has tagged along with his father on countless interactions and errands, as well as spent decades assisting him in the workshop. When asked to explicate what he is doing, Tianxiang responds as most practitioners do with an account of the somatic skills acquired. What is harder to explicate, especially for those that are currently in an apprenticeship, is the collective tacit knowledge that comes with presence, proximity, and practice *over time*. I, too, was unable to articulate the wide breadth of knowledge I was obtaining through my own apprenticeship experience until I returned to the literature on situated learning and tacit knowledge. But certainly, somatic and collective tacit knowledge is what I was absorbing, slowly over time, passed on through words and taught through the body.

Apprenticeships' situated learning has formed the basis of my resulting creative work through daily cycles of repeated practice, instruction, correction, revision, and retesting. Theories of how and what to create emerged during study. My daily creations were test cuts of archetypal characters, of leathers, of knives, of symbols and patterns, codified movements or expressions of stock characters, or testing questions with my forgiving masters'. Each iteration produced new and infinitesimally more nuanced knowledge than the previous one. And each iteration pointed to a closer relationship with the form and the vernacular from which it came.



Figure 3.11. My cutting samples during apprenticeship, between the years of 2008 & 2011. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins.

Collective tacit learning and knowledge is a natural by-product of situated learning and *yanchuanshenjiao*. While somatic knowledge might be transported to another environment, say a formal education situation, with little disturbance, any collective tacit learning abilities would be almost completely removed.¹⁴⁰ It is the difference between being told to “slow down” and learning that I must slow down through repeated practice and failure in order to start attending to the quiet workings of my body. It’s the difference between being told that Chinese shadow puppetry is integral to the rural community identity and feeling the inherited importance of the art form through repeated personal and historical stories exchanged throughout my workday. It’s the difference between seeing a shadow performance as entertainment and understanding that embedded within any shadow performance is an anchor of ritual significance. It is why Qinfeng, director of the Shanghai Theatre Academy, named *yanchuanshenjiao* the basis for all transmission of Chinese performance forms.

Situated Transmission

Chinese shadow puppetry was an ideal performative vernacular form for the peasants of China. Busy with work out of doors while the sun was up, the best time for gathering was after night fell. A modest screen of rolled paper or cloth, two-dimensional shadow puppets, and a

¹⁴⁰ Lave "A Comparative Approach" 181.

simple fire lantern fit easily into a rucksack or on the back of a donkey. In 20 minutes, a full stage could be erected and the village audience could gather at the glow of the singular light to be educated, challenged and entertained. Through the troupe's canon of stories, whole regions learned about their oral histories, morality tales and propaganda from the capital; through ritual performance the sick were healed, the dead were sent to the great beyond, angry gods were appeased and good fortune was brought to the land. They celebrated local triumphs with dedication, made fun of district officials with glee and shared tales of romance with abandon. Shadow puppet performances were a central happening and unifying experience for many rural communities.

Traveling around China, working with many of the form's remaining practitioners, I found just how situated Chinese shadow puppetry is within any particular environment. Aesthetic differences manifest out of ideological idiosyncrasies within locales and performance styles range so widely that it's hard to believe you're watching the same archetypal character between two provinces. And at the deepest level, that muddy stratum of collective tacit knowledge, there is a great sense of the form being born directly out of its community. The plea for good harvests and healthy children, the nostalgia for beloved rulers and the desire for romance; these wants are fulfilled by the shadow artists who live and work within those communities. Like many vernacular art forms, the artists and their communities bear these works of art *together*.

As I have come to work with more and more troupes and talked to more and more teachers and practitioners about continuance, their concern is not about the future execution of a traditional design in carved leather nor the perfect acquisition of codified shadow puppet movements. Instead, they are concerned with the loss of collective storymaking between practitioners and community when the form is transmitted through modes other than apprenticeship and situated learning. In other words, practitioners are not as concerned with *what* is practiced in future generations, but *how* it is practiced in future generations.

The collective tacit learning in situated learning contexts and the knowledge it creates in subsequent generations of practitioners is the most difficult component to safeguard when considering preservation methods for traditional vernacular performance forms. Even within models of apprenticeship and situated learning, collective tacit knowledge is the most difficult aspect to identify and perpetuate. In theory, and in most historic instances, both methods of apprenticeship work equally well in training the next generation of shadow puppet practitioners,

but while Tianxiang's jiayupei yang family method of apprenticeship and the Longzaitian Company's kebanshi method of apprenticeship are training the next generation of shadow puppeteers and makers, they are not necessarily steeping their apprentices in the practice of how to use those skills to create an art form that belongs to, responds and contributes to a community. Both methods utilize proximity, presence, practice and time to transmit the somatic skills of leather shadow puppet making and performance skills. Both create a technically-skilled apprentice. But only Tianxiang's situated learning experience has steeped him in the history of the form's traditional lineage, its role in community building and his intended role as its next creative enactor. Yanchuanshenjiao, teaching by example and learning through the body may appear to be solely somatic study, but in its historic traditional context, its epistemology is also steeped in collective tacit learning.

In the Longzaitian kebanshi model, slight changes in the apprenticeship's context and execution change the basic epistemology of the transmission method, mainly that there is little training beyond the technical skills of the craft and the apprentices' are never tasked to create new stories, productions or characters within the current model. The company's learning context, situated in the commercial theatre just outside the gates of Beijing's popular summer palace and amongst the apprenticeship cohort within the walls of that theatre, is a great example of how vernaculars can be radically defined and still be considered, in the theoretical framework of this thesis, "vernacular" if, indeed, the company is charged with responding to them. But the apprentices at Longzaitian are not. Instead, the apprentices' creative choices come from hierarchical administrative mandates, even the temporary teachers who conduct residencies are given little creative agency, if any at all. The model is not intended to produce independent artists and puppeteers, but technicians. Therefore, while the Longzaitian cohort of apprentices has certainly mastered their somatic tacit knowledges, which is certainly a high accomplishment, they have little by way of collective tacit learning that would scaffold their skills to creating a legacy of performance that responded to the future's changing contexts, a legacy that could continue a lineage.

In Tianxiang's family apprenticeship, that he has been engaged with since birth, the technical mastery of puppet carving as well as the role of shadow puppetry within the Hancheng community just outside of Tangshan, was communicated through every lesson and every interaction. Over the years, Tianxiang has witnessed his father working in a multitude of

modalities and has seen his father's work at play in the community. Even during my apprenticeships in the family's home, I came into contact with a lively cast of neighbors and artists who come to chat, question, influence and receive. In essence, *laibaixing* (the practice of casual visits to artists in their studios) is happening not just among artists, but within the entire community. The community feels that this artistic practice is as much theirs as it is the Lu family's. This immediate and contextual relationship between practitioners and their audience is what marks vernacular arts - that which is made by and for a given community. When considering ICH preservation theories and methods, it is imperative to not only consider what transmission through situated learning safeguards, but also the format of these apprentices, for the format dictates learning outcomes. Ideally, any apprenticeship model encouraged by a preservation policy would prioritize both somatic and collective tacit learning to occur, with the ultimate goal of launching apprentices as artists evolving their traditional performance forms in tandem with the changes in their community.

In the 21st century, Chinese shadow puppetry and its relevance within many communities has faced greater challenges than ever before. With China's fall of dynasties, occupation, civil war, revolution, repression, economic emancipation, urbanization and its current sprint into modernity, the form has had little opportunity to organically evolve with its audience over the last century. The communities that once supported full time troupes in the countryside have now migrated to the cities in search of new and better opportunities. Without intervention, the last remaining traditional practitioners are estimated to pass away within a decade — with no full-time apprentices to succeed them.¹⁴¹ The few troupes still surviving were doing so with an incredible combination of luck, innovation, geographic obscurity or prominence and tenacity. The question of continuance is a pressing one. When I asked Tianxiang for his opinion on shadow puppetry's possibilities for continuance and the universal prediction from his community members that he may be the last generation of inheritors, he replied:

If society develops back to this community focus, maybe the people's consciousness will follow to land beside one another. Right now, the locals consciousness is focused on themselves, the pressure is too great. There isn't any energy to focus on other people

¹⁴¹ The most recent information on practicing apprentices is collected through my own fieldwork throughout the last decade. This survey covers nine of the eleven provinces that have or have had a significant shadow puppet lineage prior to the year 2000.

(community) or their issues. Your environment, locals' lives, they're protecting it. I have to study and make money and work and tomorrow I may have to go to the hospital - there are so many situations like this in China right now. It's not a shadow puppetry thing, it's a China thing. (2016)

Tianxiang's jiajupeiyang apprenticeship, coupled with his interest and ability to continue his father's work, has made him an anomaly in today's Chinese shadow puppet milieu.

Although the form of Chinese shadow puppetry has certainly experienced changes in popularity throughout its long history, no period of decline has been more total than the last 70 years, beginning around the time of the Communist Revolution in 1949. Without concrete troupe data prior to Jiang Yuxiang's fieldwork in the 1980s, Fan Pen Chen estimates an 85% decline in troupe activity from 1980s to the 1990s.¹⁴² Just thirty years later, it is likely down to less than 1% of that remaining 15%.¹⁴³ Such a steep decrease in troupe activity in the last thirty years has triggered preservation efforts.

With traditional vernacular performance forms already a challenge to preservationists, Chinese shadow puppetry's additional foundation in ritual practice, its usage of the immaterial shadow as storytelling medium, and its traditional transmission through apprenticeship have confounded most existing theories and methods. The Longzaitian company, which receives governmental funding for heritage preservation, is ostensibly carrying on Chinese shadow puppetry transmission through apprenticeship.¹⁴⁴ But as we examined, the apprentices were largely trained to fulfill technical roles, uninvited to join in creative decision making or development, with no expectation to do so within their careers. Tianxiang, however, whose family does not receive governmental funds for heritage preservation, is apprenticing to carrying on the tradition to the next generation. It is difficult to explicate exactly how differing models of preservation effect transmission outcomes, even between their minute differences, and even more difficult to create safeguarding methods that consider all of these element.

Chinese shadow puppetry's ephemeral, ritual and immaterial performance practice has propagated through the apprenticeship system for over a thousand years and this epistemological

¹⁴² See Fan Pen Chen, *Chinese Shadow Theatre*, Page 3.

¹⁴³ Jiang Yuxiang and I have compared notes and this is our best guess for remaining troupe activity as of 2018.

¹⁴⁴ The Longzaitian company also receives assistance for providing gainful employment for little people.

emphasis on presence, proximity and practice over time ensures that alongside the technical skills needed to continue the practice onto the next generation, the social and collective basis for this vernacular form are also transmitted. This type of transmission handles the phenomenological problem of preserving ephemeral performance, ritual practice and the immaterial medium of shadows. And yet, apprenticeship, itself, is just as elusive to safeguarding methods as the elements it transmits so well. Preserving apprenticeship, or prolonged study in situ between a student and a teacher, is the best way to also safeguard the form's ritual and immaterial aspects, while also allowing each generation to respond to the changing needs of their audience and community.

This chapter concludes my inquiry into my first research question, "what are the particular ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry, a traditional vernacular puppetry form, is resistant to current methods of preservation", and begins my examination of the second question, "how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms? Ancillary to this, can creative artists outside the lineage of Chinese shadow puppetry contribute to this endeavor?" In order to begin processing this second question, the next chapter examines current safeguarding policies and philosophies and the (im)possible efforts to preserve Chinese shadow puppetry that are underway throughout the mainland. A thorough look at the breadth of effects that safeguarding policy has on the living practice will then propel my conclusion towards suggesting possible futures of safeguarding policies and methods towards vernacular performance forms.

Chapter 4: The (Im)possible Archive

活化石

(huo-hua-shi)

'living fossil'

The term *huohuashi* (活化石), or "living fossil", is a Chinese word that denotes certain invertebrates, reptiles and other animals that possess genealogy dating back to prehistoric times (meaning they could have actually left fossils) but still remain among us today. *Huo* (活) means "alive" or "living" and *huashi* (化石) means "fossil". The first character in *huashi* (化 *hua*)

signifies transformation, for included in its many meanings are the words transform, change, turn, convert, melt, dissolve and digest. The second character, *shi* (石), is simply the word for stone. With a quick *baidu* search,¹⁴⁵ *huohuashi* returns photos of sea mollusks, many-legged insects, green fronds and large reptiles. Together, they certainly look to represent "species (that) have survived the major extinctions and retain the original features of the past" (Baidu "Living Fossil").

In the last decade, however, the term *huoshuashi* has been co-opted by the cultural reclamation movement to signify ancient but still "living" cultural practices,¹⁴⁶ such as storytelling, dance, opera and puppetry.¹⁴⁷ The impulse to modernize "folk" histories, practices, and objects to represent a history long since passed and a locality larger than intended is a growing trend of globalization. The Chinese government's desire to merge the old and the new and the local with the national is not a new directive.¹⁴⁸ Megan Evans, who is a researcher and practitioner of Chinese theatre and opera, has studied opera as cultural ambassador in modern China. Her impactful article, which focuses on the usage of Chinese theatrical traditions during the 2008 Olympic Games opening ceremony in Beijing, articulates the conscientious utilization of these traditional and vernacular forms by China for the global audience. There is a "continuing internal debate concerning China's 21st-century cultural branding that increasingly emphasizes a synthesis of traditional elements" (Evans "Brand China" 114). Pre-1900s cultural practices that were shunned in the People's Republic of China (post-1949) are now resurfacing and presenting themselves as valuable, distinctive, and an essentialization of China's culture and history¹⁴⁹. As the pace of progress picks up, so does the intensity of our nostalgia for the past.¹⁵⁰ Current premiere *Xi Jinping* has said, "protecting historic and cultural heritage...is like cherishing our own lives" (Duan "Xi Jinping"). Premier Xi has also been a vocal proponent of preservation

¹⁴⁵ *Baidu* (baidu.com) is China's google equivalent.

¹⁴⁶ The term sometimes used to differentiate biological *huohuashi* from the cultural term is *huohuashi wenhua* (活化石文化) or "living fossil culture."

¹⁴⁷ Chen "Intangible Cultural Heritage".

¹⁴⁸ Evans "Brand China" 116.

¹⁴⁹ Chen "Intangible Cultural Heritage".

¹⁵⁰ Shils "Tradition" 1-2.

efforts and cultural export, not necessarily as a compassionate measure, but because of cultural disseminations' ability to increase "soft power" at home and abroad.¹⁵¹

As national interest in fossilized culture grows, these vernacular cultural forms are being appointed as international cultural ambassadors for China in the global arena.¹⁵² Huohuashi performances and their iconography now grace television programs, fill the repertoire's of governmental provincial theatres, populate national and international festivals, and are used to push both local and international tourism. Joost Smiers' book, *Arts Under Pressure: promoting cultural diversity in the age of globalization*, speaks to the global scope of this movement, which is by no means contained to just China. Smiers conjectures that the global cultural economy is now, essentially, what drives local movements of heritage preservation and promotion. The Chinese government is increasingly aware of how valuable cultural diplomacy and preservation can be, and this shift of this national valuation has certainly effected vernacular forms.¹⁵³

In many ways, Chinese shadow puppetry could be interpreted as a huohuashi. Vestiges of its original form, dating back to more than a thousand years ago, surely survive in performance and practice into the present day. Depending on how you interpret the findings, you could locate the indelible markings of an "original" form created by the first shadow practitioners, etched in the hard stone of aesthetic, story content, music techniques and instruments, and materials. Replacing the acts of procreation and birth to perpetuate and evolve a species, apprenticeship stands in here as a method of transmission and propagation - allowing for the merging of new and diverse genealogies. Just like a fossil then, it is possible to uncover elements of shadow puppetry's genealogy from its present day form.

But, unlike the genealogy of a living species, the transmission of genes is nothing like the transmission of a cultural form. There is nothing fixed or necessarily transferable between generations of a performative folk form like the genealogy of a species. As I examined in the period between pre-Communist Revolution and post-Cultural Revolution versions of shadow

¹⁵¹ "Soft power" was coined by political scientist Joseph Nye to explain the growing post-Cold War phenomenon of governmental techniques to persuade by attraction rather than by brute force. The concept of soft power has long been talked about in regards to China's current Communist government. For more on soft power in China see Schreiber "Soft Power".

¹⁵² See Evans "Brand China".

¹⁵³ Ibid.

puppetry,¹⁵⁴ the lineage was nearly completely broken within the span of a few generations, or what sinologist Kenneth Dean refers to as "the gap in traditions" (342). In fact, the new form was *forbidden* to pull too much from its parent. Vernacular practice and traditional transmission were decimated. To use a term that suggests that any new form of a traditional cultural practice is necessarily passed down from generation to generation is a misnomer.

Moreover, the word *huo* (living) indicates that any traditional forms that have been given the title *huohuashi* is indeed still living. But what constitutes life for a traditional performance form? The decline that began in the late 1800s has continued until today and has decimated the numbers of practitioners and performances around the country. The decrease of active artists from before the Communist Revolution (1949CE) through the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976CE) to the early 1980s is estimated at around 85%.¹⁵⁵ Today, the tradition of Chinese shadow puppetry has experienced a steep and constant decline of active artists since the early 1980s due to a convergence of factors including urbanization, modernization and competition with other forms of entertainment.¹⁵⁶

In this way, *huohuashi* is more of a tool for marketing and optics than a literal term, an optimistic view of cultural practices as they circulate in the realm of heritage. So far, being designated *huohuashi* has not supported practitioners and their vernacular forms, rather it has accelerated heritagization, institutionalization and decline *in situ*.¹⁵⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett reminds us that, "these measures reveal how different the professional heritage enterprise is from the heritage that is to be safeguarded" (Metacultural 55.) *Huohuashi*, then, is perhaps less a present day connotation and more of an omen of what is to come - a term for all attempts at archiving living culture.

This chapter utilizes the previous three chapters' explication of Chinese shadow puppetry's unique qualities, namely vernacular traditional performance and ritual practice, immaterial shadows, and tacit transmission, and uses that examination to survey the complexities of *huohuashi* and the current cultural reclamation movement in China in order to apply them to the second research question: how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter 2.

¹⁵⁵ Chen "Chinese Shadow Theatre" 7.

¹⁵⁶ This estimate of decline is based on my fieldwork trips between 2008-2016 and in conversation with professor Jiang Yuxiang from Sichuan University.

¹⁵⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Metacultural" 58-59.

better support traditional vernacular puppet forms. By surveying central issues of the archive, cultural heritage and commodification, the chapter highlights difficulties of preserving living culture, and how this difficulty is exemplified by Chinese shadow puppetry's particularities. The chapter concludes by focusing on the current safeguarding movements within China, identifying UNESCO and the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) project as the key player and how the organization's enacted policies have effected Chinese shadow puppetry within the last decade. As Diana Taylor has also stated in her examination of UNESCO and the ICH project and policy, "while this is not intended as a critique of UNESCO, the organization's leading role in trying to negotiate international accords makes it an important case study in elucidating the challenges of safeguarding the 'live'" ("Performance 93). This chapter lays the groundwork for chapter five's presentation of current case studies of shadow puppet preservation in order to posit an addition to the existing roster of safeguarding methods, which encourages apprenticeship, practitioner-led creativity and performance as the central mode of dissemination as central tenets.

Yutian Wenhua Three Years Later



Figure 4.1. *Yutian Wenhua* in *Huaxian*. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

When I returned to the countryside of Shaanxi province in 2011 to continue my apprenticeship with the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe, I found that the for-profit cultural commodities company, Yutian Wenhua, that had kept the Huaxian Shadow Puppet troupe on payroll since 2005, had spruced up the old school on the dirt road.¹⁵⁸ The entrance gate had a new facade, replete with colorful flags and requisite red Chinese lanterns. Gold characters on the sign directly overhead read: *Huazhou guoji piying wenhua shengtaiyuan* (华州国际皮影文化生态园) or "Hua Prefecture International Shadow Puppet Culture Ecology Park". While grandiose slogans such as this one are scattered all over small towns and villages in China, the inclusion of the words *guoji* (international) and *shengtaiyuan* (ecology park) piqued my interest. Yutian's hopes for this small school on the side of a dirt road, twenty minutes outside of the nearest small town, one and a half hour outside of the nearest big city, was a relatively progressive (ecology park) approach to exhibiting Chinese culture and one that they hoped would entice an international (*guoji*) audience.

¹⁵⁸ My first apprenticeship with the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe began in 2008; see fieldwork chart on page xi for a fieldwork timeline



Figure 4.2. Banners in the entranceway read "we enthusiastically welcome all leaders to visit our park". Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

Just inside the gate, another set of banners was hung and this time with a more direct message: *relie huanying gualing geji lingdao lili chanyeyuan canguan* (热烈欢迎各级领导莅临产业园参观) or "we enthusiastically welcome all leaders to visit our park".¹⁵⁹ Scanning the rest of the campus, the changes really were worthy of "all leaders": the old cement-block buildings had been painted a handsome dark grey, the landscaping has been overhauled and even the abandoned basketball court had been turned into an outdoor gallery of sorts.

Within the school, there was less of a facelift, but more rooms had been designated for future leather carving apprentices and the exhibition on the second floor had been spruced up. The troupe was still rehearsing daily in the small, narrow room on the first floor, but it had been given a sorely needed coat of paint. All of the employed practitioners were still living in the one-

¹⁵⁹ *Lingdao* directly translates to "leader", but is used widely to mean any position of leadership from business to management to politics.

level brick quarters in the back of the school's campus, which unsurprisingly hadn't been touched by the renovations.



Figure 4.3. *Yutian Wenhua's* new courtyard gallery. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 4.4. The shadow puppetry building and courtyard entrance façade. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 4.5. The artist quarters in the back of the compound were untouched by the renovations. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

All in all, I was impressed by the changes. Even if the renovations were made with profits in mind, the effort and cost put into the transformation boded well for the expectations of shadow puppetry's status as rising cultural star in the collection of China's cultural *huohuashi* practices. Yutian wasn't planning on just dealing in the single products to the everyday buyer, but aiming higher at bulk sales to "all leaders" in whatever business might have an interest. Their enthusiasm and hopeful expectation had spread to the practitioners, too, and everyone seemed more buoyant than during our summer in 2008.

For the first few days back, everything seemed great within the walls of the Yutian Wenhua campus. Everyone was humming along, buzzing with the promise of a bright future even as we settled back into old work routines together. But as the summer wore on and I returned again and again to continue my apprenticeship in multiple residencies of a few weeks here and there, it became clear that the projected success of the cultural commodity industry was inversely proportionate to the decline of the traditional performance practice in situ. My expectation to catch a performance in the countryside during one of my many visits was based on the Huaxian

Shadow Puppet troupe's 2008 schedule, which had them performing locally numerous times a week between the months of July and September. But I never could catch a performance in 2011 as the troupe only had three the entire summer.

The troupe members were greatly disheartened by this and by the fact that they had no performance apprentices while the leather figure carving studio had many. Over the summer, it slowly became clear that the practitioners working there were not so much happy that the Yutian Wenhua company was banking on shadow puppetry's bright future in commodities, so much as they were grateful to have some form of employment when the decline of shadow puppetry in their own communities felt so imminent. At the time, there was no feeling that Yutian's capitalization on the cultural commodity value of shadow puppetry had at all contributed to this swift shift in community relevance or presence.

The transition of shadow puppetry from living cultural practice to cultural commodity was in process in many regions around China that year. In September, I attended the bi-annual national shadow puppet festival in *Huanxian*, *Gansu* province. There, I met with troupes from numerous provinces, including *Beijing*, *Hebei*, *Hubei*, *Shandong*, *Zhejiang*, *Qinghai*, *Gansu*, *Shaanxi*, *Shanxi*, *Guangdong* and *Yunnan* province. Subsequently, I went to visit most of these troupes and practitioners and found that all were surviving with some form of subsistence from a cultural commodity company or a local government cultural bureau, or both. The Tengchong shadow puppet troupe, from *Yunnan* province, was employed by the local ministry of culture to perform nightly at restaurants for tourists visiting the local natural hot springs; master carver *Gao Qingwang* was employed by the *Long Ying* Cultural Commodity company in *Gansu* province which provided local cultural heritage gifts for local government officials to bring and present on their travels; the master puppeteer *Wu Haitang* from *Xiaoyi* made a living by performing for tourists at the famous *Yungang* Buddhist grottoes in nearby city of *Datong*, *Shanxi* province.

Ironically, ritual practice and performances for the community that are attached to custom and ceremony, which were suppressed during the Communist and Cultural Revolutions, had been making a comeback around the country in the last few decades. "Beginning in the early 1980s, there has been a great revival (and sometimes reinvention) of local ritual traditions, which has continued unabated" (Mair and Bender 180). It may seem that this resurgence in ritual practice would support the same growth in shadow puppetry activity and while it may have for a short period in the 1980s and 1990s, the situation has become more complex in recent decades.

Kenneth Dean notes the increase in ritual activity since the 1980s as well, but contextualizes its relativity.

Despite the extraordinary vitality and contemporaneousness of local religion in certain areas of China, it is nevertheless essential to realize the extent of the devastation and decline of many communal practices since the turn of the 20th century...communal rituals are performed, if at all, on a miniscule scale...This deterioration is the result of a combination of pressures, including political suppression of popular and ritual specialist of all kinds, and economic pressures. (343)

The volume of ritual practice within a given community is important here and is one of the major factors in shadow troupe activity even if a shadow troupes' performances are not solely tied to ritual events. Shadow troupes are not commonly supported by the commissions of just one village, but of a network of villages from an area. With such devastation in ritual activity, indeed minuscule in comparison to pre-1949 levels, the robust schedule that the remaining shadow puppet troupes were used to had floundered. While the majority of shadow troupes in the countryside had always performed only part-time, the frequency of performances enabled more money and time be invested back into the troupe's repertoire, puppet upkeep, and rehearsal time. With only a handful of performances, troupes are now asked to make-do with much less which disables mastery, creativity and innovation. The economic pressures are, still, significant.

Referring again to Donald Sutton's research analyzing the cultural and ritual suppression and subsequent standardization by the Communist government, not only was there a devastating decline in ritual activity (despite appearances that it was experiencing a revival) but there was heavy regulation of the rituals that did occur. Sutton reminds us that the Communist government has been very successful in producing a "high degree of cultural unity" (5). The homogenization of ritual practice, which combined with a steep decrease in overall activity and scope of performances, ultimately cleaved shadow puppetry from its long history of ritual practice within the countryside. While shadow puppetry had previously continued to find performance opportunities when there were economical pressures, due to the relatively inexpensive nature of the form and its connection to ritual practice, the pressures were now too great.¹⁶⁰ In my

¹⁶⁰ Shadow puppetry was the economical choice compared to more elaborate performance arts, like opera. The number of performers in a shadow puppet troupe was significantly reduced and the entire stage, scenery and costuming could be carried on the back of a single donkey in one or two trunks.

fieldwork survey of nine provinces between 2011-2016, out of an estimated total of forty active troupes, those that were still performing in their local village's ritual practices could be counted on one hand.¹⁶¹ The Tengchong Shadow Puppet Troupe in Yunnan, The Huanxian Shadow Puppet Troupe in Gansu, the Bazhong Shadow Puppet Troupe in Sichuan, the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe in Shaanxi and the Changsha Shadow Puppet Troupe in Hunan were the only troupes, as of 2016, that still had at least one performance for their local community.

The stark contrast between the Huaxian Shadow puppetry troupe's local performance schedule in 2008 versus 2011 was undeniable. The troupe's quietly sagging spirit in 2011 suggested that they felt closer to huashi (fossil) and further from huo (living). The puppet carvers, on the other hand, were enjoying a true boom in business. The banners around the Yutian campus were, essentially, there to promote their product, not the performances. The carving studio was teeming with new apprentices, there were faster turn-around times for product and a dedicated room nearby where puppets were finished and mounted into frames for eventual sale to national and international tourists at local and national markets. This division in realities, between the performers and the figure-makers, was indicative of an inherent contradiction within the medium of puppetry and a central issue that remains unanswered when forms of puppetry are pushed from huo to huashi.

¹⁶¹ For a full list of the companies and artists I worked with during my fieldwork tenure, please refer to page xi in the front matter.



Figure 4.6. The leather cutting studio is always a buzz with practitioners, new and old. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 4.7. A new finishing and fulfillment room has been created to help fulfill orders. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

A Contradiction of Ontology

The changes at *Yutian* in 2011 signaled a distinct shift in the trajectory of Chinese shadow puppetry in the last decade. Whereas in the early 2000s the form and practitioners were supported by endeavors in commodification, using the proceeds of shadow figures' sales to support the traditional troupes' activities, the troupe was now almost solely there to support the sale of shadow figures. Huaxian Shadow Puppet troupe's lack of performances for their own community that summer, perhaps partially triggered by their displacement and full-time employment with a cultural commodity company that kept them separate from their village since 2005, signaled to me that the living fossil was no longer necessary to contextualize and enrich the object that survived it.¹⁶²

The cultural commodity subverting the importance of the cultural practice that bore it is not the only sign that shadow puppetry was experiencing a steep and swift decline. My claim here is

¹⁶² Edward Shils' seminal book *Tradition*, chapter 2, is a useful guide here.

that the lack of apprentices is the most indicative issue of a form that has reached the end of the line. During my fieldwork between 2011-2016, I found no full-time performance apprentices and only a handful of full-time leather figure carvers that were being employed by larger commercial endeavors, capitalizing on shadow puppetry's rising status among the intangible cultural heritage forms.¹⁶³ All of these changes signify a conflicting ontology within the form of puppetry that is exacerbated when it is pushed to preservation: the ephemerality of its performance and the permanence of its performing objects. Matthew Reason, a scholar from the UK who focuses largely on issues of live performance in the archive, writes saliently in his book *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representations of Live Performance* about the issues of archiving performance. Reason begins, "more than simply being short-lived, or lacking permanency, ephemerality describes how performance ceases to be at the same moment as it becomes" (Reason "Documentation" 1). Performance, especially ritual practice and shadow puppetry, is ontologically impermanent and immaterial. Reason is one of the many scholars, such as myself, greatly influenced by preceding thinking on performance and ephemerality by performance studies professor Peggy Phelan. Phelan theorizes it this way:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance. (Phelan 146)

If, according to Phelan, performance "becomes itself through disappearance" then the performing object, or in this case the leather shadow figures, are ontologically contradictory. "Like a word printed on a page, the puppet is infinitely reproducible and malleable: multiple copies of the same puppet are signifiers of the same meaning" (Smythe 256).

The complicated divide between the ephemerality of puppet performance and the permanence of its puppet figures is exemplified by the superstition that Chinese shadow figures retain fragments of characters' souls that pass through them during performance. Shadow puppet figures (and other ritualized performing objects) blur our understanding of animate and

¹⁶³ The majority of these full-time leather carving apprentices were in Shaanxi, as the province was and is still the center of commodified shadow puppetry production.

inanimate objects. The ritualized shadow puppet in Chinese tradition possesses spirit, affect and autonomy *through* its usage in live performance. When possessing fragments of soul and spirit, can an object still be considered inanimate? The practitioners in China do not consider them as such, as indicated by their reticence to leave the shadow puppets whole while in storage. Still, the ritualized shadow figure that is circulated beyond its performance context is widely considered as just that, inanimate.

While blurring the lines between animate and inanimate, shadow puppetry also blurs the lines between object and immateriality.¹⁶⁴ In what Kaplin has phrased the "object-image gap", the object (shadow puppet) is not on display in a performance: its shadow is (The Eye of Light 92). The gap between the object and its shadow is not just theoretical, but physical and spiritual, for this in-between space is where the shadow becomes the conduit between the audience and the world beyond. So, between the object and its shadow, which is also its own autonomous object, what do you preserve? The object or the shadow cast? How do you capture a ghost? Can you even preserve a shadow?

In 2016, I traveled to rural Lijiang in Yunnan province to explore these questions surrounding ghosts and preservations for one month at the Lijiang Art Residency Studios. I spent the month experimenting with projected silhouettes, stillness and animation, and varying projection surfaces in order to ascertain the deeper layers of ephemerality and liveness within the shadow, the shadow figure, projected light and the resulting silhouette. The work was moving for me and helped clarify my previously held beliefs on the (im)possibilities of ghosts and their preservation. As I moved from location to location in the countryside throughout the month, I gravitated towards a singular spot, an abandoned shed, in the middle of a local grazing spot just north of *hainan* lake. While not a traditional spot for shadow puppet performance the shed felt newly repurposed from animal housing to teenage hangout, as illustrated by the spray painted messages inside its whitewashed walls. The many lives of this small shed, surrounded at night by the darkness of rural life and nature, echoed in its bones. If I could make a shadow live in stillness, anywhere, it would be here. I set up a number of contraptions that enabled me to leave a projected silhouette and its accompanying shadow scenography within the abandoned structure.

¹⁶⁴ Frank Proschan's introduction to *Semiotica's* special issue, *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects from Semiotic Perspectives*, is a founding text for scholarly thinking on performing objects, including my own here.

Some days I animated it, some days I did not, and some days I left it dark. Others came to watch occasionally; often there was no one there to witness it.



Figure 4.8. *before/ghosts/after* installation stills. Lijiang, Yunnan, 2016. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins.

After my two week experimental installation in the shed, the project, entitled *before/ghosts/after* or 前 / 鬼 / 后 , confirmed the impossibilities of preserving the shadow medium in anything other than an animated state. When I witnessed my own shadow figures, frozen in place, but lit from behind, they remained unmoving and unmoved. When I chose to animate them, my hands connected with theirs through those fine bamboo rods and the transference of my touch, energy, and movement seemed to awaken what was resting dormant within them. The life in the liveness and animation is what catalyzes an otherwise limited medium to otherworldliness. There was nothing that could replicate the puppet's immediate liveliness in the throes of illuminated animation, just as nothing could enliven the static shadow projected onto the shed's walls. The contradiction of this (im)possibility is also on display within this thesis as I attempt to document and transmit my own lived experience and performances through the printed word and picture.

Any effort in preservation is made more or less easy by the thing to be preserved. Chinese shadow puppetry exquisitely resists the transition to the traditional archive of things, the institution, and nearly any effort in preservation in a number of key ways: it utilizes ritual performing objects, immaterial shadows, and it is transmitted through non-verbal apprenticeship and situated learning. Phelan would say that these elements and their unsuitability for the regular archive is shadow puppetry's strength. When "performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology" (46). But in its inability to be reproduced, shadow puppetry also feels unable to be preserved.

The (Im)possible Archive

My first summer of apprenticeship in China with the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe in 2008 was an eventful one. I had no idea it would be the beginning of such a long journey and I was unprepared for just how intense, stimulating and enlightening it would be. All I had brought with me to document the experience was a camera with a small memory card, which unknowingly became corrupted just a few days before my return home. All I had to "remember" the trip by were the few pictures that I had managed to email home to my parents during the summer.

The experience of losing my photo documentation of that summer, however painful at the time, lent me new insights into the fragility of any archive and its promises. With only a handful

of photos from the first week of my 2008 trip to China and another handful of photos that I managed to email during rare trips to an internet cafe (emailing, I discovered, is another sort of archive), I was forced to rely on lasting emotions, impressions and memory. What sifted down through my head and heart over the following years could not be corroborated with any visual documentation, but neither could that documentation supplant or amend my original memories. Over nine years of fieldwork, it is no wonder that my memories of summer 2008 remain the most indelible.

The desire to document my experience is not unique. It is what American Art historian Hal Foster has called the "archival impulse" and performance studies scholar André Lepecki has phrased the "will to archive". Nowhere, perhaps, is this will and impulse stronger than in regards to live performance. "The desire to document performance is a strong though contradictory thread running through the live arts. It is a desire motivated by an awareness of the inevitable disappearance of live performance" (Reason "Archive or Memory" 82). The acute awareness of both the disappearance of each performance (as it happens) and the entire performance form that generates these ephemeral performances doubly intensifies my desire to capture Chinese shadow puppetry as it exists today, in *this* moment. To suspend and to preserve: "disappearance and documentation go hand in hand" (83). Even with the knowledge of inherent flaws and broken promises, my archival impulse resurfaced during all my subsequent fieldwork, knowing that I would always and forever desire to return to documentation once I had returned home. This is the "archive fever" that Jacques Derrida summarizes so eloquently in his influential text *Archive Fever*:

It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive...It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. (91)

Long ago, this archival impulse or fever might have manifested in cave paintings or a community storyteller, but recently, it has manifested as the institutional archive - the archive that touches our North American lives through libraries, repositories, museums, and historical societies.

Marlene Manoff, head of the MIT Humanities library and author of an instrumental survey of the institutional archive and its history in the West, reminds those of us connected to any educational

institution that "all scholarship is implicitly a negotiation with, an interpretation of, and a contribution to the archive (Theories of the Archive 13).

In the last few decades critiques of the institutional archive have begun to multiply. Derrida's *Archive Fever* continues to influence archival theory and practice with his statement: "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (4). Derrida's work helped subvert the widely held belief that archives were neutral and factually superior by acknowledging, "the contingent nature of the archive - the way it is shaped by social, political, and technological forces. If the archive cannot or does not accommodate a particular kind of information or mode of scholarship, then it is effectively excluded from the historical record" (Manoff "Theories of the Archive" 12).

Much of this exclusion lies in the hands of the archivist, or the mandates of their institution, who consciously or unconsciously selects the objects and items to be archived. Archives are only a positive record and cannot preserve or present what they do not possess. What does the archivist deem important enough? What modes of knowledge dissemination do they deem worthy? What physical limitations must the archived goods adhere to: material, size, temperature control, etc. In all archives, the positionality of the archivist who creates and curates the persistent record remains invisible unless intentionally explicated.

One of the most pervasive invisible biases of the archive has been its scriptocentrism, for "the space of written culture then, as now, seemed easier to control than embodied culture" (Taylor "Archive" 17). Taylor, in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, deals with this political aspect of the archive head on. Both in a literal sense of paper and ink versus bodies and iterations, but also in the political sense. Textual writings are always edited and mediated, they can be rewritten or destroyed when necessary, and they can be copied and widely disseminated if desired.¹⁶⁵ Bodies, on the other hand, attached as they are to their individuals, cannot be edited or easily mediated, cannot be rewritten (although they can be destroyed), and cannot be copied or disseminated widely. This scriptocentrism and the privileging of words over bodies has left many vernacular practices, especially performative ones, undocumented and, therefore, unimportant in the eyes of the archive.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Taylor "Archive" 36-37.

As I critique the archive, I am equally grateful for its existence and very aware of how the archive has made this research possible. While primary fieldwork drives my line of inquiry, I corroborate my embodied knowledge with the knowledge archived by others who have come before me and told their stories in the form of writing and other reproducible means. Even while this dissertation questions dominant archive theories and methods, it hopes to add to that important and irreplaceable repository of thinking and writing. Without this tangible (and now digital) archived history, accumulative knowledge would be solely dependent on presence, proximity, and oral or embodied transmission. However, it is imperative to remember that all archives are incomplete and that forms of knowledge that depend on presence, proximity, and embodied or situated transmission, remain elusive to the tangible archive and as a result are "effectively excluded" (Manoff "Theories of the Archive" 12).

Finding Chinese shadow puppetry in the archive is like chasing ghosts. When the form has been documented in the archive, mainly through literary publication, the chasm that lies between the written text and the embodied practices, non-verbal modes of transmission, and ritual significance is vast. So much is lost in translation, not only because of the contradictory mediums but because that which is not easily accommodated in the archive is naturally excluded. Although small revolutions in archival theory arise when new technologies are invented and integrated (such as photography, audio recordings, video recordings, digital photographs and the internet) these mediums are still far "easier to control than embodied culture" and still far away from capturing the "live". While no longer slaves to the printed word in the archive, we are still slaves to reproducible media, which Phelan reminds us will only ever be something other than "performance". The expansion of documentation techniques and technologies that can now capture modalities other than the printed word (visual, aural and temporal) can often overextend the promise of their abilities to provide an unmediated link to the past.

The issues of the archive are not limited to the issues of institutions or scriptocentric biases. Reiterating Diana Taylor here, "the rift...does not lie between the written and the spoken word, but between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge" (Taylor 19). Previously, archives of the performing arts (and performance) were considered with the same archive theory as everything else:

The performing arts archive represents the officially sanctioned collecting, cataloguing, preserving, and consecrating of traces of past performances...theatre programs, brochures, leaflets, photographs, video and sound recordings, press releases and cuttings of reviews, details of marketing strategies, figures for ticket sales, contracts with performers and confidential budgets, correspondence, details of sponsorship arrangements, venue plans, set and costume designs, stage and lighting plans, production notes, annotated scripts, interviews with directors or actors, actual costumes and examples of stage properties and so on... (Reason "Archive or Memory?" 83)

In live theatre, at best, the archive may capture these "traces of past performances", or as Reason terms it: "detritus" (83). Detritus is certainly not the performance, nor is it ephemeral. The archive defaults to the tangible, even when trying to preserve the intangible. But what can the detritus of a performance tell us about a performance - one that we, who are accessing the archive of it, will (probably) never witness live? Contradictory to my experience losing my own photo documentation, the persistent archive of the performing arts will eventually supplant the original experience. "The archive does not aid memory but replaces it. The original experience...becomes devalued as subjective, inaccessible, unauthoritative, and unempirical" (85).

Philip Auslander, who writes about digital representation and the concept of liveness, rejects the idea that these two things are ontologically different. "Liveness is not an ontologically defined condition but a historically variable effect of mediatization. It was the development of recording technologies that made it both possible and necessary to perceive existing representations as 'live'" ("Digital Liveness" 3). Here I must disagree. Even if it took the advent of recording and reproducing technologies to necessitate the articulation of the concept of "liveness" this does not mean that "liveness" did not previously exist nor does it change the ontology of performance and liveness itself. Certainly, the degree to which something is perceived as "live" or "ephemeral" versus "permanent" and "reproducible" will change over time as cultural norms shift with the introduction of new technologies. And as participants in the living archive of performances pass away, so do their embodied collective memories and the accessibility to these past experiences.

Again, these distinctions between ephemeral, reproducible, liveness and permanence are further complicated when applied to Chinese shadow puppetry. The ontological and practical tension between the ephemeral and the reproducible is nowhere more apparent than in the archival efforts of puppetry and performing objects. Puppets are not detritus or "traces of past

performances". They are not the costumes, scenery, programs, posters, scripts, ticket stubs, performance reviews or photographs. They are a performances' lead actors and storytellers. They are not supportive of, but central to the interaction between performance and audience and even between the audience and the other. A puppet's representable and metonymic value of any given puppet performance is high and, more confusingly, reproducible. Ostensibly, puppets lend themselves well to the archive: they are reproducible inanimate objects. In this way, archiving the puppets would seem to answer the dilemma of how to preserve works of puppet theatre and performance.

Puppets and all other objects, however, are not persistent or unchanging. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, a performance studies and Jewish studies scholar, museum professional and professor, who has contributed widely on the issues surrounding vernacular arts and presentation within the institution, is a central figure in my consideration of cultural intangibility and presentation. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes often about mediated cultural objects and importantly reminds us that, "things are events, not inert or deteriorating substance" (Metaculture 59). The perception of an object's permanence is only in juxtaposition to the temporality of most other things. As an embodied performer, the puppet is both an archive *and* the repertoire: a living, permanent testimonial to the ephemeral experience, or, embodied memory. Puppet scholar and enthusiast Kenneth Gross adds that through storytelling, the medium of memory transmission, "...the thing (puppet) acquires a life" (1). The puppet as artifact must be considered as different in both taxonomy and ontology from that of a typical "object". It must be considered as active, animate and embodied as well. It is a mistake to think that puppets and performing objects can be cleaved from the ephemerality of their context in performance. In many ways, it is a greater disservice to assume that taking a puppet out of its performance context for preservation purposes is less ontologically problematic than taking the performance out of its "live" context. Matthew Isaac Cohen, celebrated Indonesian shadow puppet scholar, observes that "the intimate bond between puppet and puppeteer is usually severed when puppets are accessioned by museums" (Wayang in Museums 361).¹⁶⁷

The contradiction in puppet forms' ephemerality and persistence complicates the already complicated task of archiving and preservation. In shadow puppetry, this issue is compounded

¹⁶⁷ For more on Cohen's research on Indonesian shadow puppetry within collections and museums, see "Dr. Walter Angst".

when the performing object in question is an immaterial shadow and *not* the leather shadow figure that is the object archived. For Chinese shadow puppetry, this contradiction has meant that before the last few decades, preservation efforts were largely restricted to historical written accounts of the form as experienced by outsiders working in urban areas within mainland China and the preservation of leather shadow puppets for display in ethnographic museums around the world. For so many other vernacular performance forms, dependent on generational transmission for continuance, similar predicaments persist.

Critiques and alternatives to the scriptocentric archive have run concurrent with dominant methods for over a century and have finally gained significant ground in recent years. Challenging the common conception of the archive as authoritative and complete in the early 1900s, well-known philosopher and essayist Walter Benjamin began compiling an intentionally fragmented collection of reflections and writings about Paris' arcades, hoping that this fragmentary archive might be a truer history and reflection of such a chimerical site.¹⁶⁸ Contesting the notion that arts forms are best preserved through their objects, Japan introduced a new program in 1964 entitled, "'Living National Treasures'...(wherein) such individuals have received an annual grant of two million yen each from the government in order to help them to train successors, further develop their skills, and make records of their techniques" (Aikawa-Faure 41). In essence, this program attempted to create a living archive with master craftspeople, not their products.¹⁶⁹ To combat accessibility issues of the archive, the Hemispheric Institute, which focuses on political performance and the Americas, is one of the many institutions and organizations who have created an extensive digital video library online of relevant work, which is free and open to anyone who has access to the Internet.¹⁷⁰ Others, such as the Smithsonian Institution, are doing the same, spending a considerable amount of funding and effort to democratize access and participation in the archive.¹⁷¹

American libraries are also working to increase access, such as the Digital Public Libraries of America project, which aggregates all digitized materials from a consortium of American

¹⁶⁸ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*.

¹⁶⁹ This project was then adopted by UNESCO and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, rolled out as the "Living (Human) Treasures" in the late 1990s. See Chapter five, page 234 for more details on the program and its issues.

¹⁷⁰ The Hemispheric Institutes online archives are accessible here, <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/hidv1>.

¹⁷¹ Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives are accessible here, <https://sova.si.edu>.

libraries and makes it accessible on an open and free website.¹⁷² Worldwide, the *Human Library* movement, where humans can be "checked out" in person and talked with for a period of time by any library patron, in order to prove the adage, "don't judge a book by its cover" (humanlibrary.org), have grown in popularity, even finding a permanent home in brick and mortar library systems such as in Toronto, Ontario.¹⁷³ Also changing the role of museums as object libraries and repositories are living history museums that recreate a physical history and contextualize that visitor experience with costumed performative docents and interactivity, are on the rise.¹⁷⁴ The popularity of these experiential museums have led to a "general movement(s) in museum practice from collection and display to pedagogy and participation" (Bennet "Theatre & Museums" 8).

The institutional trend away from preservation's historical dependency on objects and texts, towards a more inclusive practice that utilizes participation and performance, has been on a steady incline within the last decade.¹⁷⁵ These continued efforts in archive alternatives mean that oral histories, performances and other ephemeral practices are better able to be considered for the archive, but as these new mediums come into consideration, the limited extent of our archival theorization remains inadequate to deal with these progressive changes - especially in regards to ritualistic and immaterial performance passed down through apprenticeship. The need to theorize newer archival "content" and their current and future preservation methods is pressing. At the international level, the most influential organization theorizing preservation practices of ephemeral, oral and other "intangible" content is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) project, which was created in 2003.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

In late 2011, as I was finishing up nearly a year of fieldwork on the mainland during my Fulbright fellowship, the shadow puppet community received some thrilling news: Chinese

¹⁷² Access the Digital Public Library of America here, <https://dp.la>, which has over 21 million items as of May 2018.

¹⁷³ See more about the worldwide Human Library movement here, humanlibrary.org.

¹⁷⁴ For more information, see Magelssen "Living History Museums".

¹⁷⁵ Susan Bennet's *Theatre & Museums* is a thorough account of the museum's shift from static display to engaged and performative.

shadow puppetry had been officially inscribed on the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) list. My cell phone was abuzz with text messages that spread the good news and doubled the excitement. I was happy for my friends, colleagues and many teachers because they were happy. In a moment of pause, however, I realized I didn't really know what being inscribed on the list of intangible cultural heritage meant, nor did I understand just what the list was supposed to do.

The term *feiwuzhi wenhua yichan* (非物质文化遗产) or "intangible cultural heritage" was a term I'd heard thrown around all year, in all regions. Anyone, it seemed, who was connected to shadow puppetry had the ICH project and its "list" on their mind. What I didn't know, partially because the term and concept was not in circulation during my 2008 apprenticeship, was that the practitioners had been hoping for this outcome for a few years. *Tang Dayu*, who runs the China Puppet and Shadow Art Society based in Sichuan province and is now the head of UNIMA Asia, prepared the involved application for shadow puppetry's inscription. She corralled a number of high profile state agencies with interests in shadow puppetry to collaborate, such as the China Art Academy, Chengdu Shadow Puppet Museum of China, Intangible Cultural Heritage Center of Hebei Normal University, Chengdu TV Station, Editorial Department of China Puppet & Shadow Play (UNESCO "Nomination File No. 00421"). Since 2010, this Chinese shadow puppet nomination application had been laying in wait for UNESCO's November 2011 ICH international convention where an official inscription verdict would be decided upon by a chosen committee. And even though only 25 regional shadow troupes and theatres were listed on the nomination form, all the shadow puppet troupes and theatres that I worked with were hoping that an inscription verdict would bring about a tidal wave of attention and support to the form at large.¹⁷⁶

Up until the early 1990s, preservation efforts for Chinese shadow puppetry were largely individual. Missionaries, mainly from Europe, were the first to purchase collections from out-of-work shadow puppeteers in the late 1800s. Germany still boasts the largest Chinese shadow

¹⁷⁶ The nomination form and other documents pertaining to Chinese shadow puppetry's inscription on the ICH list can be found at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/chinese-shadow-puppetry-00421>. Accessed 4 Dec 2017.

puppet collection outside of China.¹⁷⁷ Sinologist Bertold Laufer and artist Pauline Benton were among the first to acquire collections for display and performance in North America in the early 1900s.¹⁷⁸ In the mid 1900s, these efforts were put on hold as China closed itself off to foreign research and involvement. Internal and institutional preservation didn't resume until well after the Cultural Revolution era in the 1980s and only now has the movement of cultural reclamation reached critical mass with the launch of UNESCO's Cultural Heritage projects.¹⁷⁹ Three lists comprise the collection of these projects: tangible, natural and intangible. In 2003, UNESCO created the last category, Intangible Cultural Heritage.

As early as the 1970s, UNESCO was aware that preservation efforts naturally prioritized the objects over the process and the people that made them and was looking for a way to amend or add to their tangible and natural categories of preservation to resolve this oversight.¹⁸⁰ The phrase "intangible cultural heritage" was eventually coined during a UNESCO conference in Mexico in 1982 and following that decisive meeting, new measures were rolled out to try and tackle the issue, including the Living Human Treasures program in 1994.¹⁸¹ By 2003, UNESCO felt ready to pose a definitive document for the Intangible Cultural Heritage project, which was written by Member States representatives and ratified by a vote during the Switzerland Convention of that year.

In UNESCO's language, intangible cultural heritage means "traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts" (UNESCO "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?"). Sub-categories under the ICH umbrella include: oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning

¹⁷⁷ The Offenbach Leather Museum in Germany has the largest collection of Chinese shadow puppetry outside of China.

¹⁷⁸ For more information on their collections, see Benton "Shadow Figures of Asia", Laufer "Oriental Theatricals".

¹⁷⁹ Chen "For Whom" 308.

¹⁸⁰ Again, Taylor's article "Performance and Intangible Cultural Heritage" is a thorough overview of UNESCO's evolving approach towards ICH.

¹⁸¹ Leimgruber 163.

nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship.¹⁸² In an effort for international organizations' policies to remain locally relevant, the ICH language encourages adding further sub-categories to their proposed categories wherever needed: "They (member states) may add further domains or new sub-categories to existing domains. This may involve incorporating 'sub-domains' already in use in countries where intangible cultural heritage is recognized, including 'traditional play and games', 'culinary traditions', 'animal husbandry', 'pilgrimage' or 'places of memory'" (UNESCO "Intangible Heritage domains in the 2003 Convention").

The result of this widely distributed and highly influential interpretation of intangible culture is impossible to quantify, but since its ratification in 2003, 117 countries have inscribed nearly 400 practices on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and 28 countries have inscribed 52 practices on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.¹⁸³ At the very least, these 117 countries have read, processed and followed the established definitions and parameters laid out by the ICH project and the corresponding Convention. As the program has grown and shifted over the last fifteen years, UNESCO has tried to remain responsive to the feedback from their participants and reflexive of their policy's effects on diverse lands and cultures:

The term 'cultural heritage' has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

While fragile, intangible cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Up-to-date statistics on the ICH list are available on UNESCO's website, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists>.

developing States as for developed ones. (UNESCO "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage")

While UNESCO and the ICH project has certainly brought much needed attention and support to intangible cultural heritage practices and its practitioners, it has also brought new challenges and changes. Alongside mixed reactions from the communities who are seeking preservation assistance and support, there are, "mixed reactions from the academic community - ranging from hesitant support of the goals and measures all the way to the harsh rejection of the concept (of Intangible Cultural Heritage) as vague, unscientific, politically reactionary, and dangerous" (Liemgruber 165). Philip W. Scher, whose research focuses on culture of the Americas, critiques the ICH Convention as "well suited to the perpetuation of a neoliberal political economy" (200) as private and localized cultures, practices and objects become national economic engines through the Convention's push for designated heritage. These legitimate concerns and critiques surrounding UNESCO's ICH program are also evident in the program's implementation in China. But, irreconcilably, alongside these issues, is the blatant fact that without such a global, visible and economically-incentivized program such as ICH, China would have likely remained much more passive about their intangible cultural heritage's present issues of continuance.

The People's Republic of China was the sixth country to sign up with the ICH program in 2004 and immediately begin enlisting their intangible cultural art forms.¹⁸⁴ The term *huohuashi* (living fossil) was co-opted for cultural purposes soon after. As illustrated by the current Premier of China's statement, "protecting historic and cultural heritage...is like cherishing our own lives" (Duan "Xi Jinping"), China understands that the ICH project and the branding of their cultural heritage is a powerful new currency in the global market.¹⁸⁵

The initial bump of excitement that I witnessed among the practitioners after the 2011 inscription was what Michael Dylan Foster, folklore professor at University of California Davis focusing much of his research in East Asia, has called "the UNESCO effect" (66). But on the heels of that confidence and excitement was a slow defamiliarization between the practitioners and their practice that comes with "considering one's own tradition through the eyes of another"

¹⁸⁴ China ratified the UNESCO ICH convention on December 2, 2004, just over a year after the first ICH convention was ratified in 2003. "China and the 2003 convention" Unesco.com. See Schreiber 51.

¹⁸⁵ See Schreiber "Soft Power".

(66). Or, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains it, "all heritage interventions...change the relationship of people to what they do" (Metacultural 58). In subsequent years, during my many returns to fieldwork and apprenticeship with practitioners around China, the disparity of what the UNESCO ICH inscription and being designated "heritage" has catalyzed is as diverse as the regional strains of shadow puppetry itself.

Designated "Heritage"

Every time I return to China for apprenticeship, I make a stop at the famed Muslim Quarters in Xi'an city. The Muslim Quarters is the biggest tourist market in Shaanxi province. The buzz here never stops. Morning, noon and night, the waft of steaming foods presented seductively on the sidewalk edges begs you to take a taste; voices and chants of must-haves and deals ping your ears at every step; tantalizing trinkets dangle just above your head and just within your reach. To visit the Muslim Quarters' maze of winding alleyways is to surrender to an intoxication of the senses and to the emptying of your wallet.

The quarters have always been like this. Rumored to be the termination point of the northern Silk Road, which ran between Xi'an city and the Taklamakan Desert just east of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, these alleyways have been buzzing for over two thousand years.¹⁸⁶ The name, Muslim Quarters, was deemed such by the influx of Muslim traders the Silk Road brought with it, who eventually settled at the marketplace. Today, the vestiges of their continued residence remain: a Great Mosque towers quietly on a back street, Arabic phrases compete with Chinese script on signage, and the cuisine is a delicious fusion of both cultures. The Chinese Muslims are still high in numbers here and wear their religious affiliation proudly with their white Taqiya fabric hats and beautiful headscarves.¹⁸⁷

Although traces remain, much has changed in the quarter's commerce in the last two millennia. Historically, the quarter's sellers were smart and unapologetic; the buyers worldly wise and just as unforgiving. Today's sellers are the same: pushing shrewd to new levels. But buyers, while well traveled, are of a different ilk. In the last thirty years, the Muslim Quarters has

¹⁸⁶ Trade expeditions began westward out of the then-capitol city of Xi'an during the Han Dynasty, a few hundred years before the turn of the common era. For further reading on the long and complex history of the silk road, see Luce Boulnois.

¹⁸⁷ China's 1990 census reported over 17 million muslim Chinese that identified with 10 ethnic minority groups, see Dru C. Gladney "Study of Islam in China" 23.

transformed into a global tourism market catered to the momentary cultural tourist from near or far, just off the tour bus for a few hours, to fill their sacks and get back on again. Spices have been replaced by panda hats and silk bolts by miniature Great Walls.

China's travel and tourism economy is set to overtake that of the United States in 2027.¹⁸⁸ The government has been working tirelessly to lay the groundwork for this projection, investing "well ahead of the curve in high-speed trains, hotel complexes and airports to absorb growth within the middle class" (Christiansen "A Look at Global Travel Trends"). It also means that tourist destinations are already expanding. Within the last decade or so, Chinese shadow puppets were introduced to the Muslim Quarters. In 2008, during my first visit to the market, there were just a handful of stores specializing in "Chinese cultural artifacts" that included decent selections of the handmade translucent leather puppets. These shops would display their wares behind prestigious looking framed glass, tacked to paper stamped with an array of indecipherable red characters. Their elusive beauty made them an easy contender in the Muslim Quarter's popularity contest. Any interested buyer who was keen on owning their very own piece of Chinese cultural history could do so for between \$15-30 (CAD) a piece.

¹⁸⁸ President and Chief Executive of the World Travel and Tourism Council, David Scowsill, presents the statistics. See Christiansen "A Look at Global Travel Trends".



Figure 4.9. Two of the few shops in the Muslim quarters in 2008 selling shadow puppets along with other cultural commodities. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.



Figure 4.10. Machine-made puppets are clearly packaged and priced and marketed as toys for children. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2008.

In 2011, when I returned to the market, the number of shops that carried shadow puppets had easily doubled. In 2014, the number of shops selling shadow puppetry had at least quadrupled from the 2008 numbers and now there were around a dozen shops that sold *only* shadow puppets to an increasing diversity of local, national, and international tourists of all ages. The swift transformation taking place in the Muslim Quarters, and in many other tourist markets around Mainland China,¹⁸⁹ is a reflection of a number of changes occurring among China and the world's cultural economy since the introduction of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage project and especially since the inscription of shadow puppetry on ICH's list in 2011. Since the ICH project became common knowledge in China, the term “heritage”, or *yichan* (遗产), has also come to denote a new and higher valuation.

Heritage, in this context, is the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct. Heritage is created through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display). Exhibition endows heritage thus conceived with a second life. This process reveals the political economy of display in museums and in cultural tourism more generally...Heritage is a "value-added" industry (and) produces the local for export. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Destination Culture" 149)

Chinese shadow puppetry has, relatively speaking, ceased to be economically viable. The form is fading and there are no full-time apprentices to inherit the practice. As China reaches for indisputable economic power and broader recognition of this power and their culture on a global scale,¹⁹⁰ the government is increasingly looking for ways to turn their cultural heritage into global capital and soft power.¹⁹¹ One of these ways has been to "transvalue" outmoded cultural forms, forms that are outmoded largely because of the current governments repression in the mid-20th century, and rebrand them as essential to China and Chinese culture. Heritage, the world over, is making a comeback.¹⁹²

Chinese shadow puppet's appearance away from its intended use in performance, as ethnographic object in the museum or the curio shop, is the first step in the trajectory from

¹⁸⁹ *Pangjiayuan* in Beijing, *Jinli Ancient Street* in Chengdu and *Yuyuan Gardens* in Shanghai, to name a few.

¹⁹⁰ Evans "Brand China".

¹⁹¹ Schreiber "Soft Power".

¹⁹² See Smiers *Arts Under Pressure*.

culture to “heritage”. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states, “ethnographic artifacts are objects of ethnography. They are artifacts created by ethnographers. Such objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached and carried away by ethnographers” (*Destination Culture* 17-18). The Chinese shadow puppets, thinly cut pieces of leather with translucent paint applied, when taken out of their context for the purposes of conveying a larger cultural story, become an ethnographic artifact. They are no longer serving their original purpose to entertain and educate the masses or strengthen community and cultural bonds. For better or for worse, the leather shadow figures now fill the role of figurative ambassador for the entire performative art form: a means to represent something larger than themselves, an essentialization of Chinese heritage:¹⁹³

The paradoxes of heritage are well understood: it recuperates a dead tradition of the lifeworld (if even killing off a living one) in order to bring it to a second life in print, in the museum, or onstage. There the tradition no longer serves ordinary social purposes but is an object of veneration in its own right, a monument of cultural identity; its form, 'protected' from decay or corruption, becomes frozen in time. (Noyes 247)

Now, it is not necessarily the ethnographer who is making the heritage object through decontextualization and transplantation, but UNESCO and their "list".¹⁹⁴ UNESCO's ICH list supplants the ethnographer and broadcasts the new heritage valuation on a global scale - its growing body of accompanying literature is ostensibly accessible to anyone with internet access and a computer. As soon as a vernacular art form is inscribed on the list, the transition to heritage is inevitable.¹⁹⁵ China has capitalized on turning culture into heritage with 39 inscriptions on the ICH list as of 2018, "placing it at the forefront in terms of the number of inscribed elements of intangible cultural heritage... (China) is the leader in terms of promoting its cultural heritage in the international forum, which allows it to rise significantly up the soft power ranking" (Schreiber "Soft Power" 51). The National Cultural Heritage Day, which began in 2005, is celebrated nationally on the second Sunday in June every year.

¹⁹³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett *Destination Culture* 30.

¹⁹⁴ See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Metacultural" 55.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

China's early adaptation of UNESCO's ICH program hasn't been an entirely smooth process.¹⁹⁶ To begin with, in the early years of ICH, Chinese scholars and officials had wildly different interpretations of what intangible heritage was: "This type of word formation is not Chinese but English... Therefore, in Chinese the opposite of 'tangible' should be 'spiritual' or 'conscious'... we must be aware that the expression 'intangible cultural heritage' is not generated originally from Chinese, but published by UNESCO as a regulation" (Liu "Indigenising" 127). Arguments around inclusion and exclusion on the list slowed the process and made it even more bureaucratized. Even more complicated, were the ways in which societal divides were exacerbated by these policies:

China's severe rural-urban divide, nonetheless, epitomizes urban intellectuals' anxiety over the disappearance of national cultural traditions, and, lately, over the disappearing rural landscape, rituals, and forms of lives. These urban yearnings ironically spurred folk cultural productions, which also become the means for economically impoverished villagers to respond to emergent opportunities. The result is that production of folk tradition is, on the one hand, increasingly linked to rural economic developments catering to urban nostalgic desires; yet on the other hand, it is continually intertwined, and contesting with, the party-state agendas and various governments' campaigns. (Wu "Reinventing Chinese" 6)

Chinese shadow puppetry practitioners are navigating these divisions between urban and rural and the choice between economic development and supporting party-state agendas. In any of these scenarios, the practitioners are left with no agency of their own in the heritagization process. Writing about temple rituals in *Hongtong*, *Ziying You's* fieldwork observations mirror my own:

It is ironic that the local tradition was 'protected' and transmitted primarily by the... Center for the Safeguarding of ICH instead of by members of the communities who have long practiced it. Of course, the conundrum here is that the Center has not historically contributed to the tradition, but is now charged with safeguarding it; in contrast, the... associations that have maintained the tradition have no voice in the safeguarding process. (You "Shifting Actors" 265).

Ziying You found that inscription onto UNESCO's ICH list did not change the daily lives of her fieldwork participants in any significant way, but greatly effected the organizations and

¹⁹⁶ It is important to note here that studies on UNESCO and ICH in China, specifically, are very recent. The International Journal of Intangible Heritage's first volume on China published in 2017.

government bodies that worked for that inscription in China. "In the process of heritage making, global, regional, national, and local actors interact and compete with each other, which can cause a series of transformations that disempower old owners and users" (263). So, while an inscription can sometimes bring about positive changes, they are often temporary and almost always out of the control of the practitioner who has inherited and propagated that tradition.

The proliferation of shadow puppets for sale, in places like the Muslim Quarters, and the accelerated decline of performance by practitioners *in situ* are a manifestation of the rift between the archive and the repertoire and the uneven outcome of the coveted heritage designation. While an inscribed intangible cultural heritage practice as a whole is given a new valuation, what often directly benefits is the reproducible artifact and *not* the ephemeral performances and its practitioners. The business entrepreneurs in the Muslim Quarters are profiting on the increasing popularity of the shadow puppet while those who have worked to make that object valuable have returned to farming and other agricultural practices as the demand for their artistry has faded. This is, obviously, not the predicted or desired outcome for the practitioners. UNESCO has done well to listen to critiques about this imbalance and the convention has continued to revise language and guidelines as the feedback comes in.¹⁹⁷ When I perused the UNESCO website for information in 2011, most of the website (and downloadable literature) was dedicated to "the list" and focused less on how ICH practices on that list were supposed to carry out the mandate of preservation. But recently, on a webpage entitled, "Safeguarding without Freezing," a shift in methodologies was evident with a new emphasis on transmission methods and a conscious separation from the ideas of "freezing", preservation, or stasis that has so long been the goal of archivists:

To be kept alive, intangible cultural heritage must be relevant to its community, continuously recreated and transmitted from one generation to another. There is a risk that certain elements of intangible cultural heritage could die out or disappear without help, but safeguarding does not mean fixing or freezing intangible cultural heritage in some pure or primordial form. Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is about the transferring of knowledge, skills and meaning. Transmission – or communicating heritage from generation to generation – is emphasized in the Convention rather than the production of concrete manifestations such as dances, songs, musical instruments or crafts. Therefore, to a large extent, any safeguarding measure refers to strengthening and reinforcing the diverse and varied circumstances, tangible and intangible, that are necessary for the continuous evolution and interpretation of

¹⁹⁷ See Leimgruber "Switzerland and the UNESCO convention".

intangible cultural heritage, as well as for its transmission to future generations. (UNESCO "Safeguarding Without Freezing")

"Safeguarding" was a strategic change in language and one that works to shake off static perceptions of "preservation" or "archiving". Additionally, the "shift from artifacts (tales, songs, customs) to people (performers, artisans, healers), their knowledge and skills" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Metacultural" 53) works to put the focus back on the living practitioners and the traditional modes of transmission, works to move from huashi (fossil) to huo (living). The change is a positive one, but what is perhaps even more pressingly needed in UNESCO's growing body of ICH literature are answers to the most important question: *how?* How exactly does one safeguard a transmission method? How does one strengthen and reinforce "the diverse and varied circumstances...that are necessary for the continuous evolution and interpretation of intangible cultural heritage, as well as for its transmission to future generations"? While I am in line with Taylor's statements that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is "paradoxical" and "maybe even irresolvable", I am inclined to work towards a concrete recommendation that would act as a guide for those working towards safeguarding Chinese shadow puppetry and other intangible cultural heritage forms.

Intangible Fossils

All vernacular performance forms, traditional or not, are never fully free from political ecology, the mobility of its audience, or pure economics. Here, though, the mass scale of intervention by the national government, aided by UNESCO's international influence, is disturbing a system with diverse participants by creating a closed loop of cultural impetus and engine.¹⁹⁸ The closed loop of governmental and commercial interventions in vernacular art traditions have meant that safeguarding initiatives are often endogenous to the loop.¹⁹⁹ Policies are created top down, often from outsider cultures and institutions, and implemented without co-theorizing alongside a form's practitioners.²⁰⁰ Even with a conscious effort to update the

¹⁹⁸ Smiers *Arts Under Pressure*.

¹⁹⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Metacultural".

²⁰⁰ Taylor's article "Performance and intangible cultural heritage" relays her experience developing ICH recommendations with other scholars on behalf of UNESCO. It is interesting to note that while she critiques UNESCO for their methods in unconscious exclusion, she does not

language and the recommendations, blindspots in the policies remain, such as requiring cultural forms to affiliate with only one nation regardless of their regional territories and not allowing *any* entries from nations not recognized by UNESCO.²⁰¹

Despite safeguarding policies and their issues, the artists I have worked with over the years still consider recognition with any local state, national, or international entity, to be an artistic accomplishment, despite the issues that may come with inscription. Ruizendaal also found this to be true with the marionette artists in *Fujian* province: "There might be occasional criticism toward certain government policies...but identification with the authorities is generally regarded as a confirmation of one's status as a performing artist" (Quanzhou Marionettes 73). For with this status comes a promise of attention and support from governments and organizations that seem much more equipped to uphold the "safeguarding without freezing" mandates than anyone else. The lack of clarity and oversight of the methods in place, however, has proved frustrating for many living practitioners of Chinese shadow puppetry. Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA), the world's largest puppet organization, which affiliated with UNESCO in 2009, has stepped in to help by assisting with ongoing classification of puppetry for the ICH project, but the project is far from complete. While the convention may emphasize, "safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is about the transferring of knowledge, skills and meaning", more often than not the safeguarding efforts do not include a consideration of the ephemerality of performance, ritual and shadows or the complexity of what is being learned and transmitted during an apprenticeship.

This chapter examined the ways in which the form of Chinese shadow puppetry has begun its role as a living fossil in recent years and how the form and its practitioners have converged with current safeguarding policies and efforts in recent years. With a short history of the archive and a closer look at how shadow puppetry's peculiarities are resistant to current safeguarding policies and efforts, it is now imperative to present a spectrum of recent case studies that illustrate the range of effect these policies and methods have had on practitioners and their form within the last ten years. A close examination of the range of shadow puppetry safeguarding endeavors will

acknowledge her own part in it - as a university professor developing safeguarding policies for other "folk" artists.

²⁰¹ For more on the controversial issue of requiring art forms to identify by nation, see Foley "No More Masterpieces".

assist in ascertaining acute problem areas in theories and policies in order to develop an additional theory that may improve upon current methods and recommendations.

Chapter 5: A Continuum of Continuance

留传

(liu-chuan)

to pass down through generations

Thus far in this thesis, I have argued that the practice of Chinese shadow puppetry is traditional, vernacular, immaterial and transmitted through situated and tacit means and that these aspects make it resistant to archival impulses and current preservation methods. But just as the word "tradition" has come to be redefined through the last few decades as constantly changing and in motion, so too can the notions of "preservation", "safeguarding" and the "archive". In the last few decades, museums and other institutions traditionally dedicated to preservation and dissemination have been reimagining how objects and culture are safeguarded and propagated. Additionally, creative artists from outside the shadow puppet lineage have been increasingly inspired by, collaborating with and refashioning encounters with the traditional form. This chapter presents a range of current case studies between the most commonly practiced safeguarding methods in China and the application of shadow puppetry in the field of creative art in order to survey the spectrum of approaches and argue for a new method of preservation based on three tenets: (1) transmission through apprenticeship, (2) practitioner-led creativity and (3)

performance as the central mode of dissemination. Considering these three tenets in future safeguarding endeavors would help to ensure that living practitioners were supported to *pass the form down through the generations*.

The word for "tradition" or "traditional" in Chinese, *chuantong* (传统), is already more indicative of action than its English counterpart: *chuan* meaning to pass, hand down, spread or impart; *tong* meaning interconnectedness, interrelatedness, to gather into one, to unite.²⁰² Both of these characters evoke a sense of connection between generations and inherent change.²⁰³ There is nothing between the character strokes that touches upon stasis, preservation or protection. It is what UNESCO has belatedly come to promote:

To be kept alive, intangible cultural heritage must be relevant to its community, continuously recreated and transmitted from one generation to another...Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is about the transferring of knowledge, skills and meaning...any safeguarding measure refers to strengthening and reinforcing the diverse and varied circumstances, tangible and intangible, that are necessary for the continuous evolution and interpretation of intangible cultural heritage, as well as for its transmission to future generations. (UNESCO "Safeguarding Without Freezing")

Related to the word *chuantong* is another Chinese word that has surfaced throughout my years of fieldwork and the many conversations I've had with practitioners about continuance. Most memorably, Lu Tianxiang of the Lu family cutters in Tangshan used *liuchuan* during my interview with him and his struggling family practice as he wondered aloud what would happen to the tradition in the generation after his.²⁰⁴ While *chuantong* is often used as a clarifier preceding *piyingxi* (shadow puppetry) to denote a form that is part of a long lineage, there is another word that is used more often when talking about the future of *chuantong piyingxi* - the future of traditional shadow puppetry. The word is not oppressive or dutiful, but simply the summation of a connected action through time: 留传 *liuchuan* or, *to pass down through generations*. This verb, *liuchuan*, is used to express an act of transference and a through-line of generations all in one. Upon returning to fieldwork in Tangshan to visit the Lu family in 2013

²⁰² For more on the Chinese word for tradition, see the Introduction, page 14.

²⁰³ Interestingly, even though the word does not possess the same connotations in English, the latin roots of the word "tradition" are also verbs: "handing over" or "delivery". See Noyes 234.

²⁰⁴ Lu Tianxiang 2016.

and discuss their specific questions of continuance, the word presented itself for the nth time. This time, though, I finally felt its difference and irreplaceability in the context of Chinese shadow puppetry.

The English translation for the pair of characters *liuchuan* (留传) is "to pass down through generations", but as compound characters they are both a summation of their parts within individual characters and as they are coupled together. The second character, 传 *chuan*, is the same *chuan* in *chuantong*, meaning to pass, hand down, or impart. The character is made up of two elements: the radical for person 人 *ren* and the radical for 专 *zhuan*, meaning specialized, concentrated or expert. Put together, this character is usually reserved for human transmission of a skill or knowledge. *Chuan* seems easy enough, but the word's first character, 留 *liu*, puzzled me for a long while. *Liu* is anchored by the radical, 田 *tian*, which represents a farmer's field. This character element often represents to stay or to cultivate - something a farmer must do to take care of their crops and land. *Liu*, depending on what other characters it is paired with, means to remain, to stay, to reserve, to save, or to let grow. Common usages of the word in other pairings are: 保留 *baoliu* (*bao* meaning to protect), to retain; 留存 *liucun* (*cun* meaning to accumulate or gather), to preserve. This character's combination of "to remain and cultivate" coupled with "to pass" is key to understanding a vernacular traditional practitioner's approach to transmission and preservation.

It could be said then that this word for *passing down through generations*, is made up of oxymoronic concepts: to remain and let grow and to pass. Yet, *both* characters are verbs and *both* are embedded in and necessary for this tricky act of transmitting shadow puppetry through multiple generations. Something of the form and practice *must* remain to be cultivated while something *must* also change and grow. These seemingly conflicting but indeed complementary elements are both necessary to "continuously recreate, evolve and interpret an art form to future generations". But, working with the shadow puppet practitioners over the last decade has taught me that "to remain" and "to let grow" and "to pass" aren't difficult in and of themselves. What is difficult is to find a method of safeguarding that cultivates both of these aspects, together.

Chinese shadow puppetry's sustained decline is due to a number of convergent factors over the last century, including significant political, cultural and economic shifts. In current efforts to preserve and safeguard shadow puppetry in mainland China, the majority of applied methods cleave the necessary combination of "to remain" and "to pass" and end up on either end of the spectrum and often accentuate the existing pressures. In this chapter, I present case studies of the four most commonly applied methods of institutional safeguarding through (1) museums, (2) tourism and festivals, (3) commodification of cultural artifacts and (4) educational endeavors, and an analysis of how these methods place a decided emphasis (if not total restriction) on the "to remain" aspect of preservation by inadvertently restricting enactors to an "authentic" and "traditional" (static) form of shadow puppetry or by excluding the practitioners altogether. I also present alternative methods of shadow puppetry dissemination and propagation that are being carried out by creative artists and others from outside of the apprenticeship lineage of shadow puppetry, who push the form through collaboration and refashioning. While these creative methods are not sponsored by official institutions or policies of preservation, they certainly do contribute to a sprawling lineage of shadow puppet influences and engage the traditional practitioners in creative endeavors within their craft. These un-official projects comprise a growing movement of continuance that leans more towards the "to let grow" and "to pass" end of the liuchuan spectrum, which the majority of practitioners have responded to with enthusiasm. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett remains a guiding theorist for my comparison of these divergent case studies and my argument for the inclusion of a combination of these methods and elements within each.

This concluding chapter addresses and answers my second research question, "how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms?", by showing that the *combination* of "to remain" and "to pass" of liuchuan is needed in the safeguarding effort and both approaches contribute to the continuation of the form through the generations. This chapter shows that by including (1) the continuance of an apprenticeship system, (2) practitioner-driven creativity in response to community, and (3) performance as the central mode of dissemination as tenets to any safeguarding method, the two binaries of "to remain" and "to pass" may co-exist to support the existing lineage of practitioners and to *pass down through generations*.

Museum Metonyms

Between the years of 2008 and 2016, I visited Chinese museums exhibiting shadow puppetry wherever I went. The range of exhibition spaces dedicated to these leather figures was wide: small regional collections on display with for-profit commodity companies to the recently formed Chengdu National Shadow Puppet Museum.²⁰⁵ I also viewed countless private collections that every practitioner possesses, some of which are comprised of just a few special figures passed down from ancestors and some rival the collections of any small museum. All exhibits, public or private, differed wildly in their presentation, clearly influenced by economic circumstances, safeguarding philosophies, and the politics of involved governmental parties and few of the existing collections retroactively support practitioners and the craft of shadow puppetry. The spectrum of presentational styles and preservation theories on display reminded me that no archive is unmediated and of, "another myth(:)...that the archive resists change, corruptibility, and political manipulation" (Taylor "Archive"19). In the last decade, the number of shadow puppet museums and exhibitions in China has outnumbered any other safeguarding effort.

²⁰⁵ In China, there can only be one national museum for any specific category and the process to win this national designation is competitive. Jiang Yuxiang reported that Chengdu city (which is the most profitable city in the province of Sichuan) was eager to have a national museum designation of their own and thought that shadow puppetry would be their best chance (due to the low cost of acquiring pieces at the time). They won their national designation in 2004 and single-handedly changed the market value of shadow puppets with the volume of their acquisitions.



Figure 5.1. Cecilia Wang and Chen Wenjing show me around Chengdu National Shadow Puppetry Museum's temporary facilities. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

From this wide array of exhibition experiences, there are two specific visits that are important to present as they illustrate the spectrum of approaches to the collection and display of shadow figures in China. The first of which is the Chengdu National Shadow Puppet museum (*zhongguo piying bowuguan* 成都中国皮影博物馆), which owns the biggest collection in the world with over 200,000 shadow puppets.²⁰⁶ As of the museum's official opening in 2016, it also became the largest platform for dissemination and knowledge transfer of Chinese shadow puppetry around the globe.²⁰⁷ During my visits to the museum in 2011 and again in 2014, the collection was still being housed in temporary facilities and they were still closed to the public. Thanks to professor Jiang Yuxiang and his former student *Chen Wenjing*, who works as a

²⁰⁶ The Chengdu National Shadow Puppet Museum's literature reports this number often. See "Puppets, Shadow, Theatre" 2012.

²⁰⁷ Previously, the largest collection of Chinese shadow puppetry was owned by the German Leather Museum in Offenbach - a testament to the politics and economy of late 1800 and early 1900 China.

program developer at the museum, I was allowed to see a fraction of their immense collection set up in a make-shift office space on the west side of Chengdu city. Even in those poorly lit row of rooms that were no bigger than the square-footage of a small two bedroom apartment, it was clear they had amassed a comprehensive collection. Where local museums and collectors specialized in their own regional aesthetic and history, the national museum had *everything*. It was impressive.



Figure 5.2. This panel displays dozens of female shadow puppet heads. On the left are those from the Northern Central region, on the right are those from the Northeastern region. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 5.3. These puppets from *Yunnan* are estimated at over 200 years old. They are finest specimens of *Yunnan* style shadow puppetry that I have seen. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

Between my site visits to the temporary national museum offices in 2011 and 2014, the museum erected a temporary public exhibition in conjunction with the UNIMA (Union International de la Marionette) International Congress and Puppet Festival, which took place in Chengdu city in 2012. *Tang Dayu*, president of UNIMA Asia and leader of the effort towards Chinese shadow puppetry's UNESCO ICH inscription, made a convincing pitch for Chengdu city to host the largest international organization dedicated to the promotion of puppet arts for their 21st congress and festival.²⁰⁸ With national and international guests numbering in the many thousands, the Chengdu national shadow puppet museum used this opportunity to erect an exhibition that featured pieces from all of China's long-inherited puppetry traditions, entitled:

²⁰⁸ The 21st UNIMA Congress and festival lasted eight days and presented more than 700 puppetry performances to the public. For more see Luo 2018.

Hand, String, Rod and Shadow. Shadow puppetry, however, was clearly the celebrated centerpiece.²⁰⁹ The exhibition was also impressive in its size and scope.



Figure 5.4. The UNIMA 21st Congress and Festival entrance. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

²⁰⁹ In addition to 200,000 shadow puppets, the museum has 10,000 additional figures of Chinese rod, marionette and hand puppetry.



Figure 5.5. This poster text at the entrance to the Chengdu Shadow Puppet Museum's UNIMA exhibition is the entirety of their contextualizing efforts. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Shadow Puppet Heads

Chongqing, Shaanxi, Qing Dynasty, Cattle Leather

Figure 5.6. A collection of beautiful shadow puppet heads of varying male archetypes and regional styles (above) is simply given this caption (below). Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

In the exhibition catalog, the museum states that their mission is to, "collect, preserve, study and display Chinese shadow puppets and puppet relics (artworks) of different periods, as well as to extensively collect, study, preserve and disseminate Chinese shadows and puppets to other countries" ("Puppets, Shadow, Theatre"). This singular focus on the collection and display of the performance object was evident in their presentation style at both of the exhibits I took in. Crammed onto large display boards were a confounding number of leather shadow pieces with

little labeling or informative text and even less contextualizing.²¹⁰ In both the temporary exhibit and the exhibit at the UNIMA festival, there was no apparent educational outreach, community engagement, or even the utilization of other mediums to convey the complexity of Chinese shadow puppetry in practice and in performance. During my conversations with Chen Wenjing in 2011 and again in 2014, it was confirmed that there were no plans in place for the museum to include educational outreach and only vague plans for utilizing the network of living shadow practitioners.²¹¹ Mary Hirsch, a Chinese shadow puppet scholar, play translator and museum consultant, visited the newly opened museum in 2016. Hirsch emailed me with her impressions of the new space, which she felt did include a number of thoughtful additions to the exhibition, including dioramas and video, but ultimately still depended largely on aesthetic spectacle rather than information context or text.²¹²

On the other side of the spectrum, exhibiting shadow puppetry through a wider range of mediums and methods, is a small regional museum in *Luanxian*, Hebei province. Luanxian has been aggressively expanding their small city's infrastructure and utilizing shadow puppetry as a star cultural player since 2010 in hopes that new waves of rural immigrants from the surrounding countryside would choose their city over the bigger megacities in the next wave of urbanization.²¹³ I first visited Luanxian in 2011 and met *Guo Xiufen*, who was busy fundraising to build a brand-new county shadow puppet museum as a local cultural destination. By the time I visited again in 2016, I was able to visit the grey brick building in the heart of the city, emblazoned with slick metal letters that read, *Luanxian xuanchuan wenhua zhongxin* (滦县宣传文化中心) or *Luanxian Cultural Dissemination Center*.

²¹⁰ The lack of contextualization is not due to the fact that this exhibition was presented to locals. Most locals, under the age of 70, have never seen a live shadow puppet performance and only vaguely know its history.

²¹¹ The museum officially opened its doors on their new facility in 2016.

²¹² Hirsch 2018.

²¹³ The central Chinese government prioritizes larger cities with resources and favorable policies. For more on China's "urban bias in policymaking" see Ren *Urban China*.



Figure 5.7. The *Luanxian* Cultural Dissemination Center. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2016.

The generous exhibition halls presented a solid Northeastern regional collection of shadow puppetry from Luanxian and Tangshan districts more comprehensively than any other exhibit I'd seen in China. There were rows and rows of beautiful pieces accompanied by corresponding stories and character histories, videos with headphones and other contextualizing materials. Past the shadow figure displays were 3D dioramas with realistic wax figures that showed a shadow puppet artist and his family at work. Beyond the diorama, a display of shadow puppetry's lighting instruments through the centuries, other shadow puppet paraphernalia, and even a collection of vinyl recordings of popular shadow puppet tunes.²¹⁴ And along the entire adjacent meters-long parallel wall, a new leather "mural" had been newly commissioned and created by local shadow puppet masters, which used the leather medium and cut-out technique of traditional shadow puppetry to present a visual slice of shadow puppetry in its vernacular element: shadow performances happen in and amongst the other happenings of a given rural community. At the

²¹⁴ Matthew Cohen notes that puppets are most often presented without their paraphernalia in museums, "Wayang in Museums" 362.

end of the exhibit, visitors could even try some leather figure replicas on a shadow screen for themselves.



Figure 5.8. Displays were grouped by character archetype and were accompanied by lengthy labeling (some not pictured). Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2016.



Figure 5.9. Additional displays showed shadow puppets and their scenic elements posed in various scenes from popular shows. Below the displays were lengthy label descriptions alongside a video with headphones that played a re-created shadow performance by the local *Luanxian* Shadow Puppet Troupe. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2016.



Figures 5.10-5.12. Scenes from the large leather cut mural depict local *Luanxian* life, including an outdoor theatre performance (below). This mural work is a beautiful example of how current practitioners can adapt their work to new modes of art and display. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 5.13. A diorama of a family of shadow puppet practitioners at home (at the very back of the room) leads to more wax figure dioramas of shadow puppeteers at work in the studio. On the far side of the wall are vinyl recordings of popular shadow tunes. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2016.

The comprehensive approach to exhibition and contextualization that the Luanxian museum showed was encouraging. The inclusion of the hand-cut leather shadow mural was, to me, the most visionary inclusion, for it represented an approach to shadow puppetry and preservation that did not rely on stasis or "authenticity", but in the understanding that shadow puppetry could and would move forward into new arenas. And it did this with the input and collaboration of local shadow puppet artists.²¹⁵

Throughout the entire tour, as excited as I was, I noticed that there hadn't been any other visitors besides me. I belatedly learned that the museum had ostensibly closed in 2015 (the year after it opened) without enough visitors or funding to keep it staffed. Luanzhou's population didn't take off like the city had hoped and the continued wave of immigration from rural to urban centers had, at least for now, gone to other cities. With a small local citizenry and no tourists,

²¹⁵ Guo Xinfeng noted that several shadow puppet artists collaborated on this piece, although I was not given their names and Lu Fuzeng (of the Lu Family puppet carvers) was not among them.

few visitors want to come for a second tour. For now, the place remains a secret garden of treasures.

In both of these museum examples of shadow figures on display, when the puppet is placed within the medium of exhibition and put on display for the world to see, the issues are similar to those that lay between any repertoire and archive: mainly, how do we contextualize and present this static trace of a very complex traditional vernacular live performance form? On display within China, shadow puppetry and its figures are almost always presented as a single regional form with one aesthetic style and bracketed in time between just a few dynasties.²¹⁶ It is too often detached from its thousand year history, its reign as one of the most geographically widespread folk art forms in China and its diversity of performance styles. Only occasionally is it presented as partner to its necessary animator, the puppeteer.²¹⁷ As Matthew Isaac Cohen has discovered through his work with Javanese *wayang* puppetry in museum collections, "the intimate bond between puppet and puppeteer is usually severed when puppets are accessioned by museums" (*Wayang in Museums* 362). In other words, the performing objects are most often without their performers and always out of context.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett delineates the differing presentational approaches between the National Chengdu Shadow Puppet Museum and the Luanxian Cultural Dissemination Center as metonym versus mimesis: metonym considers that,

...the object is a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be re-created. The art of the metonym is an art that accepts the inherently fragmentary nature of the object. Showing it in all its partiality enhances the aura of its 'realness'...The art of mimesis, whether in the form of period rooms, ethnographic villages, re-created environments, reenacted rituals, or photomurals, places objects (or replicas of them) in situ. In situ approaches to installation enlarge the ethnographic object by expanding its boundaries to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica, after the object was excised from its physical, social and cultural settings. Because the metonymic nature of ethnographic objects invites mimetic evocations of what was left behind, in situ approaches to installation tend toward environmental and re-creative displays. (*Destination Culture* 20)

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett warns us, though, of being too seduced by the "realness" and "authenticity" perceived in mimetic displays, such as Luanxian's exhibits: "in-situ installations, no matter how mimetic, are not neutral" (20). In addition to their seductive authenticity, "mimetic displays may

²¹⁶ With the exception of the Chengdu National Shadow Puppet Museum.

²¹⁷ These conclusions are drawn from fieldwork between 2011-2016.

be so dazzling in their realistic efforts as to subvert the curatorial efforts to focus the viewers attention on particular ideas or objects. There is a danger that theatrical spectacle will displace scientific seriousness, that the artifice of the installation will overwhelm the ethnographic artifact and curatorial intention" (21). In other words, some mimetic displays can actually detract and overwhelm the significance and meaning of the singular object.

China's exquisite leather shadow puppets have been anointed as the form's metonym within most museums, burdened with the task of showing more than they can tell. And though there is much to glean from these figures, their coloring, aesthetic and symbolic designs and patterning, this too must be contextualized to the uninitiated. While the modest Luanzhou exhibition leaned closer to mimesis than metonym, as evidenced by the presentation of a wide range of contextualizing materials that help to flesh out shadow puppetry's relevance and meaning within a community, there is still a stark distance from the living practice and performative nature of the form. The National Chengde Shadow Puppet Museum, on the other hand, continues to present the performing shadow object as both static and total, confident in their metonymic power. As the largest repository of shadow puppets in the world, the museum's current exhibitions of shadow pieces with little contextualization entrench the shadow figure as the unquestioned "ethnographic fragment" (Kishenblatt-Gimblett "Destination Culture" 18).

Just like the transference of knowledge from its context in the workshop to the decontextualized formal learning classroom, the transference of shadow puppets from ephemeral performances in situ to the institutional museum leaves much lost by the wayside. Matthew Cohen, writing again about issues of presenting Indonesian shadow puppetry in museums reminds us that, "these puppets are not only tools of the trade, but are means for communing with ancestors and the sacred, and are themselves hallowed and insistent of a degree of respect not always accorded when disembedded from traditional contexts" (Wayang in Museums 362). Nowhere in the exhibition context have I seen an ephemeral component, the puppet presented as an actor or ritual conduit, or a living practitioner present to animate or enlighten the general audience about their necessary inclusion in the form's practice. Most importantly, museum presentations rarely, if ever, create support for the form and its living practitioners. In this way, museums assist shadow puppetry "to remain" and do little "to pass" it onto the next generation in a way that could perpetuate the practice.

Re-presenting Culture through Tourism and Festivals

One solution to including more live performance and living practitioners in archival and safeguarding practices and conveying the shadow puppet as something much more than a typical ethnographic object is local and international cultural tourism and festivals.²¹⁸ Here, the context need not be belabored in a label or pamphlet as the participant and the presentation is already in a kind of context. China has been pushing cultural and ethno-tourism since the 1980s, Yunnan province being one of their most successful examples.²¹⁹ The entire Southwest region of China, including Yunnan province, is home to the highest concentration of the country's 56 ethnic minorities as well as non-industrialized natural environments that appeal to the urban dwelling Han majority.²²⁰ In late 2011, I traveled to *Tengchong*, Yunnan province, to meet the Tengchong Shadow Puppet Troupe. Tengchong is a small city that lies so far west in Yunnan province that it's almost Myanmar (Burma). You can sense its diminutive size just by looking at a map of it; instead of a mind-numbing web of streets and endless ring roads like most major cities in China, there are just a few main roads that carry you all the way from end to end. The city would have likely had even fewer streets had it not become a tourist destination just a decade or so earlier. The naturally-occurring hot springs that were found just outside of Tengchong city proper had quickly become a tourism hotspot and was commodified for the local and national government's larger push for tourism to the growing middle class.²²¹

Besides the hefty investment in travel infrastructure, the government had invested well in its culture and heritage projects, including small local troupes like the Tengchong Shadow Puppet troupe. In 2011, the troupe was employed by a larger government-affiliated tourist company to perform nightly shows in two beautifully designed heritage restaurants that stand side by side in a small cultural shopping complex. I watched as the troupe spent their days rehearsing or fixing puppets, managing a small shadow puppet shop, and convened in the restaurants for their nightly performances. For the evening's performances, the first was the familiar *The Turtle and Crane*,

²¹⁸ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes about issues of the cultural festival in *Destination Culture*, pages 57-78.

²¹⁹ Wang "The Social Life of Scripts" 425; Donaldson "Tourism, Development and Poverty" 335.

²²⁰ For a succinct summary on China's majority and minority ethnic groups, see Mair and Bender 3.

²²¹ See Christiansen "A Look at Global Travel Trends"

the Communist government's first Chinese shadow play.²²² The second performance of the night was a local story about the origin of the region's most famous dish, *Er Kuai*. Besides these two well-performed short plays, there was nothing else to contextualize the form or frame its presentation that evening. During the performances, Chinese tourists groups ate hungrily and took in the show casually while they chatted with their fellow group members.



Figure 5.14. The troupe's permanent theatre set up in the restaurant's traditional open-air courtyards. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

²²² For a more thorough explanation of *The Turtle and Crane* shadow show, see chapter 2.



Figure 5.15. A behind-the-screen photo of the *Er Kuai* show. In front of the Emperor and his hostess are two plates of delicious *Er Kuai* that are about to be consumed. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

When the troupe wasn't working and passing time in the city, they headed home as a group to fold back into their village community in *Liuzha Zhai*. Unlike the Huaxian Shadow Puppet troupe who could only return to their respective villages for a few days a month, the *Tengchong* troupe members returned at least every week, making the transition between both worlds much smoother. The best example of this inhabiting of both worlds was when *Liu Ankui*, one of the young leaders of the troupe, was milling the family's dried corn harvest for the year while simultaneously bemoaning Steve Jobs' recent passing. Liu Ankui had long admired Steve Jobs' visionary innovations and entrepreneurial spirit. That evening, Liu Ankui and the rest of the troupe instigated a village-wide music jam in the upper floor of the village's ancient ancestral hall. Here, the young and old made loud merriment together until the wee hours of the morning.



Figure 5.16. The main troupe members of the *Liu* family take a break from milling dried corn in their courtyard. The dried corn hanging on the second floor balcony is the family's provisions for the winter. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 5.17. Members of the *Liu* family and many villagers young and old cycle through the jam session all night long. *Erhu* two-string bowed instruments alongside flutes and percussion are the most popular instruments. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

After my few weeks working with the troupe's busy schedule between their village and the smaller tourist-centric city, I declared it one of the best and most sustainable situations of any that I had come across in my fieldwork; the government used the troupe as stewards of Tengchong's historical culture but left them time and funding to create new work and continue their traditional performances for their village community. They even had some young apprentices who were beginning to study performance techniques and showed interest in beginning puppet making.

When I returned in the summer of 2014, just a few years later, everything had changed. The troupe's contract at the local ministry of culture's tourist restaurants had ended (it was unclear whether this was because the restaurants themselves were not successful or whether the shadow puppet troupe was replaced with different entertainment). The troupe was now employed by *Heshun* Ancient Village (*heshun guzhen* 和顺古镇). This ticketed and gated ancient village, categorized as a "living fossil of Chinese architecture" (Baidu "Heshun Guzhen"), is part of a

growing tourist trend around China. Modern cafés, jade shops, restaurants and clothing shops lined the small winding streets and cobblestone alleys all the way from the parking lots to the mountain's bottom and to the water's edge. The Heshun Ancient Village was then a developing project masterminded by an enterprising Chinese businesswoman who bought visitation rights to the original Heshun village and developed its surrounding areas for tourism. The main gate ticket is 80 yuan (about \$10 CAD) and gains you entrance to the historical sites.²²³ If you just want to shop, of course, no gate ticket is required.



Figure 5.18. A view of *Heshun* Ancient Village's main gate and parking lot. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.

²²³ Historical sites include: Heshun Library, Yuanlong Pavilion, Ai Siqi House, Wenchang Palace, Beverly House Museum, Burma Anti-Japanese War Museum, Huasun Alley.



Figure 5.19. The entrance area past the main gate, mainly a large gift shop and cultural exhibition site. Visitors must pass through this area to get to the rest of the “village”. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.

The Heshun Ancient Village is a beautiful scenic area, set just between the water and the mountains in a misty corner of verdant Yunnan. Worn looking temples dot the craggy mountains and there is the sound of running water nearly everywhere you go. But although the development is one of the most beautiful I’ve seen, it’s still a development. The local population has remained steady at around 6,000, while the growing number of non-Heshun native residents now outnumber them by two to one.²²⁴ I visited in the rainy season of June, which meant I was often the only person at a restaurant or on the road and there were so few tourists that shop keepers didn't even solicit my attention as I passed. I couldn't figure out if the ghost-town feeling of the Ancient Village was due to the weather, the off-season, or the fading success of the overall project. I never did locate where the native Heshun's lived or figure out how they now identified with their villagers.

After texting with *Qiuju*, the Tengchong Shadow Puppet Troupe's youngest member all day, I walked to meet them at the empty shadow puppet store near Heshun's main gate. The troupe

²²⁴ Baidu.com "Heshun Ancient Village" cites the number of foreign Chinese residents at 12,000.

was on their way for the 4:30pm afternoon performance. The troupe of four arrived at 4:27pm, said their brief "hellos" and "welcome backs" to me with much grinning; then, with a slick efficiency, the four flicked on the lights and CD player to set up for... *The Turtle and Crane*. Next up? The story of how *Er Kuai* got its name. These were the same shows they'd performed nightly in 2011. I realized slowly that the troupe had been performing these shows twice a day, nearly 365 days a year for (at least) the last three years.



Figure 5.20. A scene from *The Turtle and Crane*. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.



Figure 5.21. A scene from *Er Kuai*. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.

After the shows were over, the group's new leader, *Fu Guanguo*, a middle-aged cousin of Liu Ankui, and her young helper, Qiuju, and a few others headed to tea and dinner. The troupe explained that they moved to the Heshun Ancient Scenic Area, employed as a local Tengchong cultural act, to enliven the tourist area and help validate that 80 yuan entrance fee and sell product. Their job was simply to perform the same shows seven days a week at 9:30am and 4:30pm and if no one came, which they very often didn't, they didn't have to perform. They didn't return home as often as before. During the performances I had seen, a mother had entered halfway through with her daughter and had left swiftly after the second show had ended. With decreased income from lack of demand and almost no audience, the Tengchong Shadow Puppet troupe divided.

The main master, *Liu*, had retired in the transition. Master Liu's direct descendants, who were the core of the troupe in 2011, had returned to labor jobs in order to provide for their families. Fu Guanguo, who was just an assistant in 2011, alongside her young nephew *Liu Chaokan*, Qiuju

and her friend *Liu Rong*, had taken over the troupe's activities as these four were not the main income earners in their families and could therefore afford to keep working as part-time puppeteers. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett elegantly explains why the initial benefits of repeated performances through tourism may eventually accelerate the form's demise:

While an artifact may be viewed as a record of the process of its manufacture, as an indexical sign - process is there in material traces - performance is all process. Through the kind of repetition required by stage appearances, long runs and extensive tours, performances can become like artifacts. They freeze. They become canonical. They take forms that are alien, if not antithetical, to how they are produced and experienced in their local settings, for with repeated exposure, cultural performances can become routinized and trivialized. The result may be events that have no clear analogue within the community from which they purportedly derive and that come to resemble one another more than that which they are intended to re-present. (Destination Culture 64)

Performing *The Turtle and Crane* and the story of *Er Kuai* multiple times a day for years upon years had frozen the process of creativity and evolution that traditional shadow puppetry had always had in response to their community. The repetitive and canonical repertoire of just two shows and their inability to keep practicing within their home village, stagnated the Tengchong shadow puppet lineage of story and practice. As indicated by the four younger troupe members that now took up the mantle, these apprentices had only ever performed these two shows with the same choreographed movements and recorded soundtracks. Just like the kebanshi apprentices at the Longzaitian Troupe in Beijing, without an opportunity to create and evolve within the form, these apprentices would never graduate to mastery and would never have the tools to carry the form forward to future generations.²²⁵

In the midst of witnessing these changes, I was curious to see how Master Liu was doing. I headed out to *Liuzha Zhai* and found him mumbling to himself in his own courtyard. The master had been drinking heavily at lunch, he had a terrible cough and he was listless. I started our conversation by gently asking him about the troupe, his nephew Liu Ankui, and the recent changes. “How many performances do you have per year now?”, “Not many”; “How is the troupe doing?”, “The young people don’t like to participate anymore.” His answers were patient, but curt. We small talked further about big stuff: how many shadow puppet players from his generation are left, the power TV seems to have over the young people and his nephew. The

²²⁵ See chapter three, Modern Kebanshi Apprenticeship, page 121.

answers were clear enough. Fan Pen Chen wrote about a similar situation in 1995 when she visited the Beijing Shadow Troupe.

This Beijing troupe performed almost daily from a permanent stage at the *Minsu Guan* (Gallery of Folk Culture) at *Liulichang*, a tourist attraction center. Their innovative repertoire presents the modern versions of shadow plays which were popular in certain cities during the 1950s and early 1960s. Unlike traditional shadow theatres in the countryside, children seem to be their target audience. (Temple of Guanyin 62)

Even if Fan uses the word "innovative", she notes the use of a modern shadow puppet repertoire, the tourist audience and the institutional host.



Figure 5.22. Master *Liu* talks with me about the troupe's end and his lifelong work in shadows. Photo by Yung Chang, 2014.

In my fieldwork, I witnessed this kind of arrangement between traditional troupe and cultural tourism development in a large number of provinces, such as the 144 Beiyuanmen Shadow Puppet House in Xi'an city's muslim quarters, the *Tai'an* Shadow Puppet Troupe in Shandong

and the *Xiaoyi* Shadow Puppet Troupe at the *Datong Yunyang* Grottoes in Shanxi Province.²²⁶

And while these performances were often a lively and engaging way to disseminate and transmit live vernacular performance traditions, they were often mistaken for the traditional form, unadulterated.

The living quality of such performances does not make them any less autonomous as artifacts, for songs, tales, dances, and ritual practices are also ethnographically excised and presented as self-contained units, though not quite in the same way as material artifacts. You can detach the artifacts from their makers, but not the performances from performers. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Destination Culture" 64)

Performances for tourism absolutely solve some of the issues inherent in the divide between archive and repertoire, but they can be seductive in their promise of authenticity, just like mimetic museum displays. No matter how mimetic, the performance is still a fragment of a form, tradition or practice, just as the ethnographic artifact is. Additionally, what is presented as performance fragment for tourists is often a government-sanctioned story or performance, homogenized and nationalized for the promotion of a cultural brand rather than a locally born tradition. For the troupes from Tengchong, Xi'an, Tai'an and Xiaoyi, and I suspect Fan Pen Chen's Beijing example as well, *The Turtle and Crane* show is presented among their repertoire as "heritage". Certainly, this shadow show has its place in the history of the tradition, but without contextualization it is incorrectly considered part of the traditional lineage, born out of local communities. This top-down government mandated performance, forced upon troupes to the expulsion of their own repertoire, is now a universal metonym for the diverse traditions of shadow puppetry in China. Not only do performances for tourism often support similar non-traditional iterations of a form, they concurrently stagnate the heterogeneous vernacular practice. Fan Pen Chen concludes her story of the Beijing Shadow Troupe with the news that the Minsu Guan's presentations had ended as of 1997 for lack of business. I, myself, wonder how sustainable the Tengchong Shadow Puppet Troupe's performance arrangement at the Heshun Ancient Village is, too.²²⁷ Most importantly, the projects that promote cultural heritage development for tourism in order to support local cultural practitioners have been shown *not* to

²²⁶ Incidentally, the Datong Yunyang grottoes are a UNESCO world heritage center. this value-added world heritage site is being enriched with the added-value of CSP's cultural heritage with daily performances for tourists.

²²⁷ As of August 2018, the troupe's contract at *Heshun* village was still active.

benefit the locals or practitioners but instead exacerbate the economical disparity between the two²²⁸.

Puppetry performances for tourism and cultural festivals provide an alternative to experiencing culture through the metonymic performing object on display within the museum and the mimetic displays of diorama and video accompaniment. Instead of trying to convey liveness through a static object and its contextualization, a curator or presenter can now offer a live experience through performance: "public and spectacular, (folkloric performances and) festivals have the practical advantage of offering in a concentrated form, at a designated time and place, what the tourist would otherwise search out in the diffuseness of everyday life" (Kirshenblatt Gimblett "Destination Culture" 59). But as intangible cultural heritage practices transition from in situ performance to presentational performance for outside community members, the practitioners begin to develop, "a complex consisting of an audience separate from the performers, the development of professional performers and economic needs imposing a situation in which performance are made to please the audience rather than according to a fixed code or dogma" (Schechner 218). With performances no longer performing in or serving their community, they become more stagnant and frozen like the persistent objects, they entreat the form "to remain". This stasis, in turn, is exactly what freezes the form and its future transmissions - even though these presentational endeavors were explicitly created to counter this stagnancy.

Heritage for Sale

In 2011, anticipating the boost that Chinese shadow puppetry's inscription on the UNESCO ICH list would have on the demand for shadow puppets in the commercial market, the Yutian Wenhua Cultural Commodity company decided to open a new branch in addition to the converted school campus on the side of the country road in Huaxian. This new branch was located in the heart of Xi'an city, Shaanxi province's capital. "City governments have poured tremendous amounts of capital into building cultural facilities, such as museums, opera houses, exhibition centers, stadia and libraries" (Ren "Urban China" 171), as a part of a larger scheme towards cultural enrichment in top-tier cities. Xi'an's population of nearly ten million potential customers, poised for the cultural enrichment movement, must have seemed like the next logical

²²⁸ See Donaldson, "Tourism, Development and Poverty", page 351.

step for a growing cultural commodity company specializing in goods from Shaanxi.²²⁹ Yutian's new branch took up residence in a newly constructed *Tang Dynasty West Market* (*datang xishi* 大唐西市), which was basically a giant outdoor mall and complex that included an amphitheater and small museum on the grounds.²³⁰ Although the center boasted the promotion of Tang dynasty and Shaanxi tangible and intangible culture as their main mission, much of the center was comprised of a modern shopping mall and an individual vendor area that sold cheap antique knockoffs. The entire complex was designed with a now familiar aesthetic of new/old China: a soaring modern complex with a hint of quaint ancientness. The Tang Dynasty West Market and the cutting room in the new Yutian branch is where I spent much of my year of fieldwork in 2011.



Figure 5.23. *Datang Xishi*'s main public square and central building. Photo from Baidu.com, 2018.

²²⁹ Baidu, "Xi'an".

²³⁰ Baidu, "Datang Xishi"



Figure 5.24. A sample of *Datang Xishi*'s architecture. Photo from Baidu.com, 2018.



Figure 5.25. The entrance to Yutian's Datang Xishi branch says, "*feiyibolancheng*" or "Shaanxi lost culture exhibition city". Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 5.26. The performance hall for shadow puppetry and other folk arts from the region gets a major upgrade in Yutian's Datang Xishi branch. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

Wang Tianwen, Shaanxi's most famous living shadow puppet carver who had leased his credibility to Yutian since 2008, had also made the move from Huaxian to Xi'an.²³¹ My closest mentor, the young woman named Wangyan, who was the finest cutter in Yutian's Huaxian studio also came. In this larger Xi'an branch, catering to heavy amounts of tourist foot traffic, Yutian began to divide the labor of the shadow puppet making process in order to support less training time per skill and pay less for more unskilled positions. Instead of being able to carve the leather, paint the puppet and finish the puppets with sinew and millet rods, a prospective apprentice would now need only choose one of three main jobs: cutter, painter, finisher. This transition from a holistic puppet making activity to a division of labor that served a for-profit model was the beginning of the artifact's mechanization: "this process replaces what was previously an integral activity, rooted in craft tradition and experience, animated by the worker's own mental image of, and intention toward, the finished product" (Crawford 39). The introduction of the shadow puppet assembly line began to change the attitudes in the studio. The skilled puppet makers,

²³¹ For more information on this relationship, see Chapter 2, page 81-87.

many of whom I worked closely with at Yutian's Huaxian branch in 2008 and at their Xi'an branch throughout 2011, began to lose interest in the craft as their wages were undercut by less skilled workers. They were also discouraged by a decrease in creative agency that came from the increase in recreating a more limited number of popular designs.

The heritage designation of the ICH inscription in 2011 quickly began to change the market for shadow puppets and, ultimately, work for the practitioners. But as frustrating as the division in labor and the decrease of creative agency in the shadow puppet making process seemed, the increasing demand and continually climbing heritage value would cause the puppet makers' situations to worsen. When I returned to the Muslim Quarters in Xi'an in 2011 after my initial visit in 2008, the Quarters had swiftly changed. In just three years, the few curio shops carrying hand-cut puppets along with other trinkets had expanded to about four dedicated shadow puppet shops selling figures at decreasing prices. In 2014, the number of shadow puppet shops had *tripled* from 2011. In my tour of the quarters, I counted a dozen shops that sold shadow puppets and shadow puppets only. Their signs and blinking light boards boasted *shougong diaoke piying* (手工雕刻皮影) or "hand-cut shadow puppets". I was thrilled that the demand seemed to be pushing supply to new levels. But upon closer examination, I noticed that the products in these news shops were not shadow figures made by artisans but machine-made leather cutouts. Their quality ranged wildly from sloppily painted kids' toys to collectible decorative centerpieces with stunning design. I scoured every shop to see if I could find a handmade shadow puppet on the wall. I couldn't find one.



Figure 5.27. A photo collage of nine shadow puppet shops in the Muslim Quarters. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.

In 2011, I noticed machine-made leather shadow puppets, but at that time, these products were so clearly below the handmade puppet quality level that it seemed unlikely that the two markets would compete. The machine-made puppets had cartoon-like designs and were made out

of poor quality leather.²³² With a price tag of around \$2 CAD, they were aimed at the 10-and-under demographic. But three years of technological advances had changed the supply and, therefore, the market. The sophisticated laser-cut leather specimens were nearly impossible to differentiate from their handmade ancestors.²³³

By 2014, the ubiquity of these machine-made shadows had spread all over the country. Shaanxi province, as the anointed originator of shadow puppetry style in China, enjoyed the largest commodity market in the nation. This demand drove their innovation with a machine-made supply and since their recent technological improvements, their products had flood the entire shadow puppet tourist market. In 2014, I found machine-made Shaanxi-style shadow puppets for sale as far away from their origin point as the northeastern cities of Beijing and Tangshan, the southeastern coast of Shanghai and the northwest edge in Gansu.²³⁴ The Shaanxi-style machine-made puppets had also, indeed, made it all the way to the very southeastern edge of China on a little shelf in the small Heshun village store that supported the Tengchong shadow troupe. Although I could tell the difference, I was sure that any non-specialist wouldn't know or maybe even care that their local souvenir was actually from a different province a few thousand kilometers away.²³⁵

²³² When shadow puppeteers hand scrape leather hides for puppets, they get rid of the inner layers of skin and sinew. The optimal layer of leather for shadow puppetry is the outermost layer. Machine-made leather hides for puppetry cut the topmost layer for sale to the best cutters and use subsequent layers for cheaper machine-made puppets. The inner layers of animal skins are less rigid and more prone to curling in humidity and heat.

²³³ More information and a downloadable pdf on how to distinguish between a handmade and machine-made shadow puppet is available at

<https://www.chineseshadowpuppetry.com/handmade-vs-machine-made>.

²³⁴ In my interview with Chang Liu, she talks extensively about how the machine-made market in Huanxian Gansu took over quickly as the shadow puppets were most often used as gifts between government officials and these officials had no need to authenticity and preferred to save money on the machine-made versions.

²³⁵ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes about the "hereness" that a heritage object represents. For most national and international tourists, the local aesthetics of shadow puppetry are unknown. Instead, the "nationalized" Shaanxi-style stands in as "hereness" for China and culture, not the region. See *Destination Culture*, pg 153.



Figure 5.28. The *Tengchong* Shadow Puppet troupe's performance room and gift shop, featuring the *Shaanxi*-style machine-made shadow puppets for sale. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.

When shadow puppets were first put up for sale to the general tourist market, in the 1980s and 1990s, they were handmade replicas cut by skilled makers. Often, the makers were shadow puppet artists on performance hiatus, living in the countryside, selling their winter's worth of shadow puppet work to the highest bidding middleman. The better the cutter, the better the price. And though creativity was still encouraged to a degree, the pieces recreated were exactly those characters that were highlighted in the museum dioramas: emperors, beautiful goddesses and famous clowns. Nowhere could you find a foot soldier or peasant character for sale.

Still, the commodified Chinese shadow puppet model was set up with financial incentives that encouraged apprentices to continue to refine their work. For twenty or so years, the market grew slowly but steadily, with an increase in both international and local tourism from China's burgeoning middle class.²³⁶ Apprentices increased in number and so did the sellers.²³⁷ In order to

²³⁶ This market history was told to me by Wei Jinqun during my apprenticeship in 2011.

²³⁷ Nearly all the high-level apprentices I have worked with (mostly in Shaanxi province) began their work in the early 1990s.

garner bigger profit margins, larger companies and corporations began to form and compete in the handmade shadow puppet market. The difference between a handmade and machine-made shadow puppet to the untrained eye may seem insignificant; the puppets are still made out of leather and enchant with translucency when held up in front of a light. And yet, there is a fundamental difference in what these puppets represent and communicate as compared to both the handmade reproduction and the ethnographic artifact:

...The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object produced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition, which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. (Benjamin 221)

With machine-made shadow puppet reproductions comes the appearance of abundance, which supplants an understanding of rarity and uniqueness and as the practitioners struggle with continuance, the appearance of abundance is a dangerous misnomer. Additionally, because the machine-made puppet is detached from the "domain of tradition", both physically and economically, the profiteers stand to gain less by including shadow puppet practitioners in the work than they do by excluding them. The machine-made shadow puppet sellers have not yet turned to support the form from which their profits were derived.²³⁸

Far east of Xi'an and the Muslim Quarters, the Lu family in Hebei province felt similar effects on the demand for their puppets around 2011 due to the heritage designation. Master Lu Fuzeng's son, Tianxiang, began cutting around 2002 precisely because the popularity of the figures for sale began to pick up again.²³⁹ But less than ten years later, the demand for their product had shifted greatly, partly due to the higher volume of machine-made puppets for sale. Tianxiang has never let go of his day job fixing computers in order to ride such an unstable market and create without commercial pressures. "The machine-made shadow puppetry has no personality. It's

²³⁸ Once exception to this standard is in Shaanxi where master cutter Wang Tianwen's nephew has started up a machine-made shadow puppet company. Profits are reportedly shared amongst the entire family.

²³⁹ The UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage project was ratified in 2003 and China joined the program shortly thereafter. Awareness of cultural heritage in general was rising in the early 2000s.

changed (the market). I keep cutting, but if no one buys my shadow puppetry, I don't have to stress too badly because I still have other sources of income. I can continue to make it original and authentic. This is how it's been until now" (2016).

Many of the few cultural commodity companies who tried to leverage the "authentic" handmade artifact, have toppled. As of 2012, the Yutian Wenhua branch in Xi'an city has closed and the Huaxian branch was faltering. This closure, triggered by the introduction of machine-made reproductions into the market, affect the demand for work by the remaining shadow puppet makers. Even with a division of labor of the handmade process, the methods and techniques of accumulated experimentation and refinement are, at least, still in practice and capable of transmission through apprenticeship. With machine-made puppets, the transmission of skills is lost. The heritage industry, with initial intentions to support a struggling intangible cultural heritage form, may ultimately be the largest contributor to its permanent stasis.²⁴⁰

Classroom Transmission

In UNESCO's "safeguarding without freezing" verbiage, "transmission – or communicating heritage from generation to generation" is emphasized over any other safeguarding effort. Due to the current inviability of shadow puppetry's apprenticeship transmission in situ, the most feasible and immediate solution for transmission to the next generation is enabling shadow puppet practitioners and other cultural workers to tap into existing educational systems.²⁴¹ I first began to notice efforts in transmission within the institution of education among a few dedicated practitioners who were teaching at schools in their local regions.²⁴²

In 2011, I visited Master *Fan Zheng'an* and his family of performers in Tai'an, Shandong province. During my stay with them, Master Fan's son *Fan Weiguo* took me to a local public school where they occasionally taught shadow puppet classes. On this particular day, the students in the fourth grade stayed in their desks after a rigorous math class and Fan Weiguo handed them photocopied shadow puppet designs that they were to simply trace. The students

²⁴⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Metacultural" 58-59.

²⁴¹ UNESCO's literature on "safeguarding without freezing" notes that "formal schooling may also be seen to constitute a threat to traditional institutions and forms of transmission", because it prevents apprentices from spending time with elders and practitioners in situ. See UNESCO "Transmission and education: a cumulative in-depth study of periodic reports".

²⁴² For issues of teaching vernacular arts in North America, see Kristen G. Congdon's articles.

looked pleased to be working on something other than math and Fan Weiguo explained that this small portion of the activity was part of a longer residency project that would eventually task the children with creating their own paper shadow puppets. They had no performance plans in the curriculum.



Figure 5.29. *Fan Weiguo* stands at the front of the classroom, explaining the day's activities. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.



Figure 5.30. The classroom hard at work. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.



Figure 5.31. A student hard at work, tracing the shadow puppet pattern with her pencil. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.

In 2016, I followed *Longzaitian* veteran performers *Liu Weiwei* (刘维维) and *Wang Yueyue* (王永跃) to their teaching residency at a school far outside the already enormous metropolis of Beijing. The facilities at Beijing's 101 Middle School (*beijing yilingyizhong* 北京一零一中) were far above those that I saw in Tai'an, but the activities were similar. Liu and Wang conducted a two-hour long class in leather painting. The session was meant to fulfill a fine arts requirement, which restricted the content taught to craft tasks.



Figure 5.32. Wang Yueyue and Liu Weiwei pose in front of Beijing's 101 Middle School. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2016.



Figure 5.33. The classroom received instruction from *Wang Yueyue*. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2016.



Figure 5.34. The shadow puppet craft packet includes a machine-cut leather head, a frame, four bottles of water color and a brush. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.

Of all the educational outreach projects that I have witnessed during fieldwork, the prioritization of fine arts and crafts over any other aspect of the shadow puppet form is the norm for courses taught in grade schools. The craft aspects of shadow making work well for individual formal school desks and individual learning. Additionally, the tangible heritage product produced by these activities are just the kind of presentable outcomes that school officials and governmental parties value. In all formal institutions of learning where Chinese shadow puppetry is taught, even if a traditional artist is at the helm, the material is necessarily decontextualized and little, if any, collective tacit learning is imparted.²⁴³

Even though the craft-focused fine arts approach to shadow puppet transmission in formal schools is the norm, there are exceptions. Lu Tianxiang, one of the few apprentices still studying in the *jiayupei yang* method in Hebei province, first told me about his residency with a local school in *Damengang* in 2011.²⁴⁴ In 2014, I was able to visit the charming countryside school, the elementary students and observe Tianxiang at work. Funded in part by the local ministry of culture and in part by the school itself, Tianxiang has been visiting periodically for some time and his rapport with the students was evident.

In collaboration with a few progressive educators in *Damengang*, Tianxiang had been testing and developing shadow puppet curriculum with the school for a few years. The program has been a success from the beginning, engaging students in multidisciplinary activities such as history, arts and crafts, and performance, all with the collaboration of local traditional artists. At the beginning of the day's visit, I saw samples of student work laid out in the school's library. Later during our tour, I was privileged to meet the artists themselves: a large class of middle school students worked studiously, carving leather pieces on wax boards and painting the finished parts with watercolor. In the music room, there was another group of middle schoolers manipulating shadow puppets with the help of a local shadow troupe and when they saw their teacher Tianxiang had arrived, they readied themselves for a performance. We were treated to a short set of shows with students at the helm of each. Beautifully, the young students and the traditional troupe members worked *together* behind the screen.

²⁴³ Lave "A Comparative Approach" 181.

²⁴⁴ For more on Lu Tianxiang's apprentice story, see chapter 3, page 116-120.



Figure 5.35. Students working diligently on painting their leather shadow pieces. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.



Figure 5.36. *Tianxiang* gives earnest guidance to students learning leather cutting techniques on the traditional beeswax boards. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.



Figure 5.37. Young students receive guidance from and perform with local shadow puppet practitioners. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2014.

In higher education, there have been a smattering of single classes in Chinese puppetry offered in large fine arts universities, such as the China Central Academy of Fine Arts. The only academy, however, to offer a fully accredited four-year program in puppetry is the Shanghai Theatre Academy (STA). STA is China's largest, "comprehensive university of performing arts, with...a history of almost 70 years" ("About us"). The academy is co-sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of China and the Shanghai Municipal People's Government. The program in puppetry was founded in 2004, offers training in rod, string and shadow puppetry, and has graduated nearly 300 students in its 12-year duration. In 2016, I sat down with Qinfeng, department head of the puppetry program and he spoke with me about the program's aims and epistemology.

When asked about the STA's current curriculum, Qinfeng explains that the program loosely follows the *kebanshi* method of training, or the method of apprenticeship that does not require familiar ties beforehand and often takes place in larger troupes or companies:

Our teaching method is the same as the traditional *kebanshi* method. There is one teacher who works with the students. It begins with demonstration and observation, then practice, then they work on manipulation groups and then as individuals, then we add body and voice for the overall result of performing a complete show. They (training methods) must all be based on this philosophy. We are still doing this. We can never change this. This is Chinese drama and Chinese culture's base. It comes from passing on through words and teaching through the body (*yanchuan shenjiao* 言传身教).

However, even if STA's curriculum is based on the *kebanshi* apprenticeship method, it is missing one crucial aspect: it does not employ masters as educators. The students, therefore, are actually detached from the "domain of tradition" without the opportunity for situated learning from those who are still practicing in situ and they will not absorb the collective tacit knowledge that these practitioners unconsciously impart. The economic cycle of rising heritage value here also excludes the practitioners and awards the institution.

In my four fieldwork examples of Chinese shadow puppetry in formal education, Lu Tianxiang's work is the best model for "safeguarding without freezing" methods of transmission within the institution of education as it still employs situated learning as its epistemological basis.²⁴⁵ The incorporation of traditional practitioners and a prolonged and holistic engagement of the form from craft through to performance encourages the transference of "knowledge, skills *and* meaning". Only practitioners of the form who are already steeped in the somatic and collective tacit knowledge of the practice can impart this to their students, especially if the environment within which they do so is not the traditional vernacular. *Liuchuan* is in effect when the local shadow puppet practitioners are able to support their continued work and performance beyond the school walls with funds from their formal school employment.²⁴⁶ From the comprehensive coverage of transmission activities alongside the collaboration of living practitioners, Tianxiang's program is the closest safeguarding effort that actually "remains" and "passes" shadow puppetry of all the examples I have presented in this chapter so far.

²⁴⁵ Additional critique on the "mismatch" of learning and context that happens when traditional knowledge is passed in formal classrooms without situated learning, refer to Jean Lave "Situated Learning", page 114.

²⁴⁶ As of 2018, Tianxiang reported that the school had hired a full time local *erhu* player in the music department. This musician also plays for the shadow puppetry rehearsals.

Living Treasures

From museums to tourism and festivals to commodification and institutionalized education, current safeguarding efforts in China are plentiful and diverse. Each case study of each safeguarding method presents illuminating ways in which the mission of safeguarding may succeed and where it may prove more detrimental to the mission. Safeguarding outcomes also depend heavily on funding, time, support, collaboration, personal attitudes from practitioners and context. In all of my case studies, the "heritage value" of the metonymic and tangible puppet is succeeding past its original creator, the practitioner. In the museum, the shadow puppet is solely presented. In cultural tourism and festivals, while performance is often showcased, it is not ultimately the medium that benefits. Instead, the value of these cultural performances is added to the cultural commodity and, eventually, the performances become unnecessary to support the product. In the classroom, the majority of case studies show a heavy emphasis on the craft aspects of shadow puppetry for transmission, avoiding the messier performance counterpart altogether. In nearly *all* examples, living practitioners are not included in the efforts or economical industry that heritage creates. While some of these safeguarding measures support living practitioners financially, none of them support ongoing apprenticeships in situ with those practitioners.

In an effort to rectify this imbalance, UNESCO's adopted the Living (Human) Treasures program in 1993, modeled off Japan's own National Living Treasures program, which began in 1955.²⁴⁷ The National Living Treasures program of Japan,

...decided to recognize individual or collective bearers who possessed the highest levels of skill and technique, designating such individuals... (to receive) an annual grant of two million yen each from the government in order to help them to train successors, further develop their skills, and make records of their techniques. (Aikawa-Faure 41)

In many ways, this is closer to a model of safeguarding that the practitioners envision, and yet, within the Living Treasures programs, stasis and freezing still occur. "These forms of art, which are strictly formatted, stylized and documented and leave little room for change, are selected under criteria requiring the maintenance of authenticity at the time of inscription, artists and practitioners are not allowed to express their creativity" (44). Moreover, "in some cases, the two

²⁴⁷ Aikawa-Faure 41.

million yen paid annually to older Living National Treasures who may be largely or wholly inactive appears to be a modest pension from the state that at the same time blocks more active and perhaps younger candidates" (44). The program too often rewarded past accomplishments over present and future efforts for continuance as no Living Master once deemed such could be removed of the title, except upon death. The Living Treasures program, however, felt closer to a solution to the issue of safeguarding a vernacular traditional performance form, so much so that it was widely adopted after UNESCO implemented their program in 1993: France created a "Master of Art" program in 1994, the Czech Republic founded "Bearers of Popular Arts and Crafts Traditions" in 2001, and Senegal, Nigeria, Cambodia, and Mongolia, the Philippines and Thailand have all adopted the UNESCO program in the past decade.²⁴⁸ However, upon more recent conclusions of its inefficacy, UNESCO retired the program in 2003 and China has never adopted it.²⁴⁹

Even if China had adopted the program, it doesn't feel likely to improve the realistic lack of apprentices, for who can afford to give their life over to a form with little stability and a tenuous future? Although a method of safeguarding that values an elder practitioners' knowledge and the situated learning from apprenticeship is closer to addressing the transmission needs of a traditional vernacular performance form, there is still much to be considered. "All heritage interventions...change the relationship of people to what they do...Change is intrinsic to culture, and measures intended to preserve, conserve, safeguard, and sustain particular cultural practices are caught between freezing the practice and addressing the inherently processual nature of culture" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Destination Culture" 58-59). While all of the current safeguarding methods do preserve, conserve, and safeguard shadow puppetry in some measure, no method currently in place utilizes all three of the tenets I consider central: (1) the continuance of an apprenticeship system, (2) practitioner-driven creativity in response to community, and (3) performance as the central mode of dissemination.

Alongside the recognized efforts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage and shadow puppetry, unofficial "acts of transfer" are occurring with increasing frequency within the creative

²⁴⁸ "Living Human Treasures" unesco.org.

²⁴⁹ The cause for the program retirement is not known, other than it was largely viewed to be unsuccessful.

arts sector.²⁵⁰ Creative artists and their projects, in a variety of mediums, are inspired and influenced by shadow puppetry's aesthetics, social function and performative traits. Even if these projects and artists do not consciously consider themselves a part of the preservation movement, their work performs similar acts of dissemination and propagation, albeit in a sometimes unrecognizable form. It is important to consider what role these creative works inspired by shadow puppetry play within the theory and practice of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, for even if they will never be considered official safeguarding methods, they do indirectly contribute to the transmission of intangible cultural practices.

Inspiration and Refashioning

Pauline Benton was performing adapted Chinese shadow puppet plays for American audiences as early as the 1930s.²⁵¹ Benton's company, the *Red Gate Players*, toured the states extensively (including a stop at the White House) bringing Chinese culture and shadows to the uninitiated.²⁵² From an outsider's perspective, it may have seemed as though Benton was simply interested in recreating traditional performances for new audiences, but like all artists, she absolutely made creative choices to update and innovate the form for her own context.²⁵³ Collaborating with well-known experimental musician Lou Harrison and trained Chinese instrumentalist William Russel, Benton refashioned the traditional form to suit current needs and new audiences.²⁵⁴ The effort was certainly the first of its kind for Chinese shadow puppetry in North America.²⁵⁵

In recent decades, as Chinese shadow puppetry has reached a more diverse demographic of interlocutors through the global platforms of heritagization and tourism, contemporary artists and

²⁵⁰ Diana Taylor names instances of transmitting intangible cultural heritage performance as "Acts of Transfer", see "Performance" 92.

²⁵¹ For my introduction of Benton and her work, see chapter 1.

²⁵² For a full history of the *Red Gate Players*, see Hayter-Menzies, chapter 4.

²⁵³ Benton writes extensively about her own involvement with the form in her unpublished manuscript, entitled *China's Colored Shadow Plays*. I obtained this manuscript from her biographer, Grant Hayter-Menzies, who wrote about her in his book, *Shadow Woman*.

²⁵⁴ Hayter-Menzies 134.

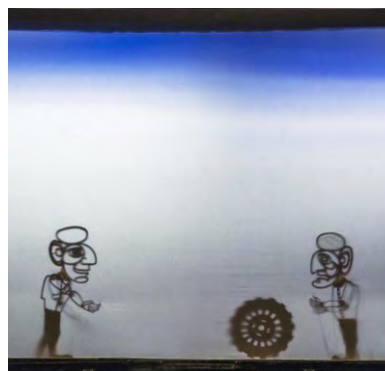
²⁵⁵ Chinese Theatre Works, a theatre group in New York City, inherited Benton's commissioned shadow figures, which are comprised of subjects unique to Benton, such as urban modern everyday people of Beijing.

projects inspired by the form have become more numerous. In 2011, the Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company, a Taiwanese puppet theatre, creating an original shadow puppet play entitled *Shadows of Love*. The Taiyuan Company has a long history of working with traditional Chinese hand puppetry (布袋戏 *budaixi*) but expanded their scope to include shadow puppetry with this production, continuing their overall mission to perform "traditional puppet theatre while finding new and creative ways to further enhance the beauty of this traditional art" ("Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company"). But in this production, Taiyuan didn't just stick to Chinese traditions of shadows: "*Shadows of Love* is an unprecedented three-way collaboration between Taiyuan, the Cengiz Ozek Shadow Theater of Istanbul and the Beijing Shadow Puppet Theater Company" (Bartholomew 2012). One of the co-directors, *Wu Shanshan*, explains, "we were writing a piece about the silk road and these two traditions have similar histories...but the way of playing and storytelling is very different. Having both shadow puppet cultures on one stage was intended to build an invisible silk road, to bring far near, and seeing the exchange between two masters was very exciting" (Shanshan 2018). The performance had a successful but short run, premiering at the Taiwan International Festival of the Arts in 2012 and then touring internationally at a few festivals.





Figures 5.38 & 5.39. Still photos from *Shadows of Love* rehearsals in Beijing. Photos by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figures 5.40 & 5.41. Two production stills from *Traktor*. Photos by Ariel, 2015.

German director Mattias Becker's 2015 production of *Traktor*, which was presented in China to a mixed audience of locals and expats.²⁵⁶ This shadow collaboration, based on a German theatre text by Heiner Müller, utilized the shadow puppeteering talents of *Hanfeizi*, a young shadow puppet company based in Beijing run by a young brother and sister duo alongside a

²⁵⁶ "Traktor".

contemporary sound designer, *Huong Hao*, and stage designer, *Zhang Daming*.²⁵⁷ Becker was inspired to use shadow puppetry because of his own training in contemporary puppetry and after discovering Chinese shadow puppetry during a *Red Gate* residency,²⁵⁸ he wondered why more artists hadn't begun to use it in contemporary contexts.²⁵⁹



Figures 5.42. Production still from *Guizhou en marche*. Photo by Julie Peters Desteract, 2014.

²⁵⁷ Becker 2018.

²⁵⁸ This *Red Gate* Artist Residency has no relation to Benton's *Red Gate Players*.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*



Figures 5.43. Production still from *Guizhou en marche*. Photo by Julie Peters Desteract, 2014.

Julie Peters Desteract, a textile and puppetry artist originally from France, created a performance in 2014 entitled *Guizhou en marche* (*Guizhou On Its Way*) in collaboration with a young shadow puppeteer named *Maomao*, who is currently employed by Beijing's only shadow puppet cultural boutique hotel in *Shichahai* district. Desteract's fieldwork and apprenticeship in *Guizhou* province, studying traditional *Miao* minority methods of batik and indigo dyeing, inspired the narrative content for the production, but she was at a loss for how to convey the deeper spiritual meaning of the patterns and designs embedded in those storytelling textiles as well as the more complex stories of displacement and change in Chinese society. Desteract turned to shadow puppetry in part because she, "wanted to explore the traditional form in a

contemporary and experimental way as well as to question the evolution and place of traditions in modern Chinese lives" (2018). Using shadow puppetry as a storytelling medium was a meta-statement of evolution between traditional and modern Chinese society. Together with Maomao and a lead *Miao* actress, Desteract created a stunning performance that wove Miao minority textiles, shadow puppetry and personal narratives together to create an experience that conveyed the complexity of modernizing local practices and cultures in today's age of globalization. The production was performed with five artists from three different countries and was "presented in the alternative art space 'Zajia' within the festival *Croisement*, organized by the French Embassy in Beijing, and then in the *Wuzhen* festival" (Desteract 2018).

Contemporary collaborations with shadow puppetry and its practitioners aren't just being instigated from international artists. Local Chinese artists and troupes are also finding inspiration within the millennium-old Chinese shadow puppet tradition. Chinese researcher, *Zhang Shaorong*, cites a recent "refashioning" happening in mainland China:

Recently, artists...created a new type... of shadow theatre dance (皮影舞 *piying wu*) and established a dancing group named "charming sunset"(俏夕阳 *qiao xiyang*). Actresses get on stage in single file, moving arms or shoulders and deliberately make their movements rigid, exaggerated and in sync (just as shadow puppets would move). Besides movement, "charming sunset" copies music and clothing from the shadow puppet aesthetic. Such a combination of modern dance with traditional shadow theatre proved to a huge success. (Shaorong "Characteristics" 15)

Before I read this passage in Zhang Shaorong's book, I had seen a similar performance on CCTV in 2011 and giggled at its premise.²⁶⁰ But even with its robotic dance movement, the dance was oddly captivating and honorific. For the Chinese audience, that captivation was universal. "Huge success" is not hyperbole for, "in 2006, this group won first prize during the Spring Festival Gala in CCTV" (15).

²⁶⁰ See "Charming Sunset" for a video link to this performance.



Figures 5.45 & 5.46. Photos from the *Metamorphosis: The Ancient and Present Phases of The Legend of White Snake* exhibition, curated by Fan Di'an and Sun Xuguang. Used with permission. Photos by Chang Liu, 2015.

Shadow puppetry has even begun to infiltrate fine arts practices in China, as evidenced by a 2015 collaborative project entitled *Metamorphosis: The Ancient and Present Phases of The*

Legend of White Snake (白蛇传的古本與今相).²⁶¹ The exhibition was sponsored by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Department, which is housed under the Ministry of Culture, and the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. The presentation featured the ancient White Snake legend and its envisioned modern expression in contemporary works of leather shadow cuttings, collaborative painting experiments, and even a performance. Chang Liu, who consulted on the project and is a fellow researcher of traditional Chinese shadow puppetry, applauded the efforts. Liu described the collaborative work between contemporary fine artists and traditional masters as successful as the project supported traditional artists and gave them an opportunity to evolve their tradition by responding to their modern circumstances.

The examples of creative works I've given here are, of course, not representative of the entire spectrum of recent collaborations between the traditional form and contemporary performance artists, however they help to answer my second thesis research question: how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms and can creative artists outside the lineage of Chinese shadow puppetry contribute to this endeavor? I believe these creative artists and their work can contribute by showing those interesting in safeguarding an alternative pathway for shadow puppetry's evolution and transmission. The projects I've included here illustrate a few points that highlight these projects' key strengths: (1) they utilize ephemeral performance and immaterial shadows as a method for dissemination; (2) they contribute to the working life and continued study for practitioners by providing direct financial support;²⁶² (3) they invite current practitioners to innovate and create within their expertise of shadow puppetry. It is important to clarify that while these creative projects do contribute to the transmission of Chinese shadow puppetry in some ways, they are not considered by the practitioners to be a literal *liuchuan* or *passing down through generations* of the traditional lineage.²⁶³ In an interview with Tianxiang, who has worked repeatedly with Danish artists Serge Onnen on his leather shadow figures for animation, he mentioned that "what Serge is doing is copying the form and translating it to his work. We don't understand his work. But, I think when he performs for his people, they must understand it. It definitely made me

²⁶¹ Chang Liu 2016.

²⁶² As I have been the negotiator in a few of these agreements, international and contemporary artists usually pay between 3-5 times the local rate.

²⁶³ Lu Tianxiang 2016.

think. For instance, I've realized that we really have to adapt each form to suit our own markets and audience" (2016). Again, Tianxiang feels strongly that what Onnen is creating is not Chinese shadow puppetry, but the work has influenced the way Tianxiang now approaches *his* own work within the traditional lineage and has given him funds to pursue his work in Chinese shadow puppetry. Within a few of my closer apprenticeship relationships, such as with Tianxiang and Master Wei Jinqian in Huaxian, it was easy to see how the reflections after contemporary art collaborations not only bolstered energy to infuse back into the traditional work, but the traditional artists felt fulfilled by the request to enact their creativity.²⁶⁴

Truly Traditional

Chinese shadow puppet practitioners and current apprentices of the form are also refashioning traditions to respond to new and changing audiences, locally and globally. The artists I meet simply want to be working and relevant. They are performers in search of an audience. But the funding structures for vernacular art forms, as they are currently constructed in China, primarily reward just three types of projects: (1) foreign funding for foreign artists to collaborate with traditional Chinese artists, for presentation to foreign audiences or an urban audience within China; (2) local and national funding for intangible cultural heritage efforts; (3) funding from government bodies for modern performing companies to play to a populist audience in urban China, most often the middle class family. Projects that do not fit into these categories, that occupy that murky in-between or anything else entirely, must fund themselves or be independently successful. For most Chinese shadow practitioners who are trying to *liu* ("to remain" and "to let grow") and *chuan* ("to pass") in a rapidly changing political, economic and socio-cultural landscape, none of these funding models are viable options.

The rigid boundaries of these funding categories and the tension that they create between artists and communities was clearly evident during the 2011 Huanxian Shadow Puppet Festival and Conference in Gansu province. The majority of the attendees were traditional troupes with varying degrees of professionalism and support from their local ministries of culture.²⁶⁵ The

²⁶⁴ Shadow puppet artists *Maomao* at the Shichahai Shadow Puppet Hotel and the troupe *Hanfeizi* also acknowledge their relief and invigoration during and after creative collaborations.

²⁶⁵ Important to note here that there were many more artists and troupes that were not in attendance because they either didn't have governmental connections, financial means, or hadn't been active in recent years.

traditional troupes cobbled together their attendance with hitched rides, borrowed screens (from local performers), and other compromises. In the minority were a few shadow troupes from healthily-funded provincial theatres. The young members of the governmentally-funded troupes rolled up in shiny buses, freshly pressed costumes and tons of energy for a spectacled performance.



Figure 5.47. Longzaitian performs at the Huanxian Shadow Puppet Festival. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 5.48. The Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe performs at the Huanxian Shadow Puppet Festival. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.



Figure 5.49. The Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe performs at the Huanxian Shadow Puppet Festival. Photo by Annie Katsura Rollins, 2011.

Longzaitian, the government-subsidized troupe of little people from Beijing, performed an innovative show on the festival's opening day that incorporated live actors, acrobatics and sunlit shadow puppetry. The audience was packed with traditional puppeteers, eyes-wide in an indecipherable combination of jealousy and awe. No traditional troupes approached or engaged with Longzaitian after the production nor did I ever see the groups mix throughout the entire five-day festival. The provincial troupes congregated and so did the traditional troupes, but they hardly ever interacted.

During the "traditional shadow puppetry" showcase the following night, master Wei Jinquan from Huanxian mumbled under his breath to me that he was ashamed to still be using an incandescent light source (which shows puppeteering control rods in shadow) while the other traditional troupes had transitioned to fluorescence (which hides control rods in shadow). Even in among the traditional troupes, the Huanxian troupe had comparably less resources to innovate with and they felt this showed in their antiquated presentation. The troupe was grateful for their subsistence, provided by the Yutian Cultural Commodities company, but their job there was to

perpetuate a conception of tradition that could not change. Beyond that consuming job, there was no extra energy, no additional time and no spare funding to take their work where it wanted to go next - even if it was a small and simple change such as the light source. Qinfeng, director of the Shanghai Theatre Academy's puppet program, considers this binary of modern and traditional a key complexity.

Right now China's biggest problem is its cultural collision, the traditional culture colliding with modern culture. Currently, (the traditional form) is difficult to express, to transmit, so we just keep on continuously moving towards newness and creation. But, China's puppetry forms - if we lose these traditional forms - our modern creations won't have any meaning or value whatsoever. Its value is absolutely in its traditional legacy. We want to honor the oldest iteration of the form possible, but we also need a modern audience to come and understand and accept the work. Its a complex contradiction. (2016)

Of course, traditionally, all troupes evolved their practice through their lifetimes and through generations. As already discussed, the static notion of tradition is a recent one.²⁶⁶ Traditionally, artists have always changed and adapted traditions to meet the changing needs of their audiences and their own artistic growth, but where the changes might have been incremental prior to the 1900s, it is now at a rate of change difficult to keep up with. Claudia Orenstein, writing about traditional puppeteers in Kerala India, says that,

Practitioners refashion these forms over time to accommodate new audiences or their own particular tastes and skills. Such artists must strike a balance between embracing the codes of performance that keep them within their traditional frameworks while meeting the dynamic circumstances that force transformation in their arts. During the last hundred years, rapid technological growth and globalization have put many traditional forms in danger as they lose audiences to television and film. At the same time, many practitioners feel the cultural contexts that previously gave their arts purpose eroding under their feet. Local traditions are changing in response to global artistic and economic pressures as much as local ones, bringing seismic shifts beyond more familiar incremental transitions... (New Dialogues 111)

Seismic shifts aren't just being felt in India, but in China as well. "Indeed, in terms of speed and scale and sheer audacity, China's urban revolution is off the charts of Western or even global experience" (Campanella 15). The artistic oppression and resulting hiatus during the Communist

²⁶⁶ See the Introduction of this thesis, page 11.

and Cultural Revolution adds to the width of the chasm that lies between pre and post-revolution economy, society and culture.

The Huaxian troupe's inability to innovate presents one of the dichotomous choices available to most traditional troupes in China. Salil Singh writes about the forced binary for traditional troupes in India, saliently stating that "the (traditional) puppeteer is torn between two alternatives: either to abandon precedent expediently, without recourse, to an equally powerful aesthetic which could propel the art into the future; or to repeat tradition without adapting it to today's cultural realities" (166). In some regions around the globe and for some puppet traditions, the option to "abandon precedent expediently" makes much sense, such as in the case of Malaysian *wayang kulit* and a recent production that incorporated Star Wars characters. This production, supported by collaborations with contemporary artists and presented for an urban audience was met with great success.²⁶⁷ But as I have followed the Huanxian troupe from 2008 until today, their art form is suspended in stasis not by choice, but by circumstance. They are paid to stay the same in their contract with the Yutian Commodities Company, paid to reiterate and to preserve. They are not paid to adapt, refashion or innovate. The majority of the traditional troupes I have worked with in China, between the years of 2008-2016, are in similar situations. They do not have the resources that change and innovation necessitate and whatever subsidy is offered is done so on the premise that they resist change - so they must remain the same while non-traditional troupes and foreign artists make inroads to modernize their tradition. The longer troupes remain in stasis, the harder it will be to catch up.

China is not the only country or region whose puppeteers are dealing with this dichotomy between traditional and modern. Globalization has helped to make this situation a common one. Shadow puppeteers in two other regions, India and Southeast Asia, which carry long-standing shadow puppetry traditions, are dealing with similar predicaments. Analogous to India, Indonesian wayang scholar, Miguel Escobar Varela, also notes that the wayang universe is divided between "innovators" and "upholders of the great traditions" (489). Political, economic and social differences between regions, however, have produced very different outcomes. In many ways, China's insularity in the mid-late 1900s paused the process of evolution that any art form must undergo in order to remain connected to its audience. Because of this hiatus, the country's vernacular puppet forms are behind in the sense that they are dealing with questions

²⁶⁷ Mayberry "Star Wars".

that Indian and Southeast Asian puppeteers have been working through, slowly, for decades. Indian, Indonesian and Malaysian puppetry are, among the entire roster of shadow puppet traditions, the closest comparables to the Chinese tradition in duration, ritual function and vernacularity. Where China has a noted absence of case studies and research that might illuminate the current conundrum of traditional versus modern, India and Southeast Asia provide.²⁶⁸

Salil Singh, writing about traditional Indian shadow puppetry at the National Shadow Puppetry Festival in 1996, profiles a particular attempt to modernize the form at the festival. Singh unsympathetically states that the multi-troupe shadow performance based on Gandhi's life story was "anticlimactic. Puppeteers in whose hands shadows of mythical heroes had danced and cavorted, accompanied by passionate songs and cascading music, suddenly found themselves struggling awkwardly with bland images of a national hero, uninspired and uninspiring. They tried valiantly to fulfill their commission, yet it was apparent that the 'experiment' was revealing only the futility of this attempt to take this traditional art 'forward'" (154). When I first read this article during a return in the US, sometime in 2013, I remember nodding my head in agreement, thinking back to all the awkward modern shadow puppet plays I had seen the large Provincial theatres perform. But, over the years, as I have returned to this article, my understanding has shifted and I now feel that although Singh might not have been wrong about the ultimate success of the production's reception, he misses a few other key points: the impetus for the production did not originate with the puppeteers and the success of the production is subordinate to the host of other lessons being learned in the creative process. Scholar Claudia Orenstein, whose work focuses on India and puppetry, refers back to Singh's article in 2014 and reiterates that the impetus for the Gandhi production was because "government agencies commissioned companies from five states to take episodes from the life of Gandhi as a new subject, hoping to reach out to contemporary audiences" (Orenstein "Forging New Paths" 205). Government agencies commissioned this production, the impetus did not come from the puppeteers. Edward Shils considers this type of change *exogenous*:

²⁶⁸ Robin Ruizendaal writes at length about Chinese puppetry's historic absence from written texts and the archive, see Ruizendaal 345.

A tradition does not change itself. It contains the potentiality of being changed; it instigates human beings to change it. There are endogenous changes, changes which originate within the tradition and are carried out by persons who have accepted it. Such a change is not 'forced on them' by external circumstances (exogenous); it is an outgrowth of their own relationship to the tradition. (213)

Similar to the provincial companies in China who receive their directives from government agencies, I believe that removing the creative control and responsive agency (endogenous factors) from the puppeteers is what ultimately made this production so "uninspired and uninspiring".

Singh's analysis, which focused so heavily on the performance's "success", does not consider the deep layers of situated learning that happen during any creative process. The traditional troupe, making their way through this experimentation, are given no permission for failure, no room for growth. The expectation that a traditional Indian troupe, performing familiar stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* for decades, can immediately respond successfully to a top-down commission with an entirely new subject, audience, and approach is unfair.²⁶⁹ The categorization of "failure" does not consider the troupe's successful tacit somatic, social and cultural learning acquisition and also ignores the learning curve an audience must also undergo when witnessing a "traditional" form in the midst of an evolutionary experiment. It is difficult to ascertain how this production affected the five troupes in the long term.

Claudia Orenstein partially answers this question of long-term effect in her 2014 article, "Forging New Paths for Kerala's Tolpavakoothu Leather Shadow Puppetry Tradition." Orenstein profiles the Pulavars, one of the five troupes that participated in that "uninspiring" shadow puppet performance of Gandhi in 1996. Since then, the Pulavars have worked to move their art forward with "a more hybrid style" (206). The troupe performs during old temple rituals while also testing out new materials for a secular and changing audience. While I can only speculate what catalyzed this new approach for the Pulavars, it is likely that the experience with the "failed" show in 1996 influenced their overall shift in approach. The beauty of a traditional troupe is that they are never considering just one production, but a life's work in the puppet theatre. For long-standing puppet traditions, this consideration extends to the entire lineage of

²⁶⁹ Both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are ancient Indian epics upon which the majority of Indian and Indonesian shadow puppetry narratives are based. For more, see Van Ness and Prawirohardjo 14.

generations. Orenstein notes that "the Pulavars choose to venture down many paths at once in their work hoping this multifaceted approach will both sustain and enrich the tradition for the next generation" (216), implying that they are *still* working through this unending question of "how" to evolve just as the next generation will have to as well.

Unlike India and China whose shadow puppet traditions appear to be limping along, Indonesia's traditional form and its practitioners lead in negotiating modernity, seismic shifts included. Throughout the political and cultural transitions of the 1900s, Javanese and Balinese shadow puppetry maintained popularity partially because the majority of the country's citizenry are, still, deeply religious.²⁷⁰ Indonesian *wayang kulit*, similar to Chinese shadow puppetry, is a ritualistic practice, connecting shadows and souls and the beyond. Any continuation of religious practice translates directly to shadow puppet patronage. With a healthy shadow puppet practice, Indonesia's practitioners have been able to welcome collaboration and experimentations with modernization just as China was closing itself off.²⁷¹ "The current generation of collaborators is more cosmopolitan and curious, experienced and agile in cross-art collaboration, hungry for enriching their practices and generating new expressive possibilities and linkages" (Cohen "Contemporary Wayang" 355). Matching the on-the-ground swell of puppeteer innovation and experimentation is a healthy team of Indonesian performance scholars that have created the most extensive body of scholarly work among Asian puppet traditions. Pulled from a breadth of examples, I single out just a few here to further examine experimentation.

Scholar Miguel Escobar Varela followed dalang (master puppeteer) *Ki Catur Kuncoro* for nearly a year of fieldwork as the artist entered into a new phase of creation: *Wayang Hip Hop*. "Wayang Hip Hop is a result of a five-hundred-year-old tradition reworked for the contemporary world and is part of a series of performances that can be classified under the term *wayang kontemporer* (contemporary *wayang*)" (482). While criticism has been brought by "older dalang (who) are not happy with the innovations" (502), its popularity is undeniable: Wayang Hip Hop is "a sensation among young Javanese people living in cities and this is very unusual for a troupe of wayang performers", who find their work is "increasingly unpopular with younger generations" (483). Answering the binary that Singh posed in his article, dalang Ki Catur

²⁷⁰ For a more thorough overview of religious effects on Indonesian shadow puppetry, see Van Ness and Prawirohardjo, page 10.

²⁷¹ Cohen "Contemporary Wayang" 338.

Kuncoro has opted out of "repeat(ing) tradition without adapting it to today's cultural realities" (166) and instead chosen to "abandon precedent expediently". Kuncoro "believes he is doing this in order to safeguard the tradition. At least in this way some aspects will be saved he suggests. If the traditional performance is left intact, everything will be lost since nobody will watch it" (Varela 502).

In Bali, dalang *I Made Sidia*, who developed a technique called *wayang skateboard*, in which puppeteers literally use skateboards to navigate behind the elongated screen, created a production of *The Theft of Sita* in 2000, which "mingle(d) the mythic universe of the *Ramayana* with contemporary social critique, gamelan music with jazz" (Cohen "Contemporary Wayang" 357). The production utilized digital rear-projections to depict a modern-day Jakarta. "The production garnered rave reviews...and successfully introduced wayang and Indonesian politics to European and North American audiences of contemporary performance" with its international tour. In Matthew Isaac Cohen's article "Contemporary Wayang in Global Contexts", he relays a handful of additional examples where Balinese and Javanese dalang (puppet masters) have successfully experimented and moved their traditional shadow puppet forms forward.

Cohen is, by far, the most prolific scholar on Indonesian wayang and its recent negotiations with modernity. As a *dalang* (puppet master) of wayang kulit himself, Cohen approaches the subject of traditional experimentation from a more empathetic viewpoint than Singh does. Cohen's recent article, "Traditional and Post-Traditional Wayang Kulit in Java Today", examines the evolution of wayang kulit in Java and notes that most artists are navigating the present circumstances with a "blurring" on the spectrum between traditional and modern. The blurring that Cohen refers to, however, is not a negative result of evolution. He insists that "innovation is not tradition's opposite; change is required to keep tradition vital and meaningful..." (Cohen "Post-Traditional" 178). Cohen is careful to categorize the iterations of innovation by their instigating sources:

Some post-traditional puppetry has been catalyzed by collaborations with agents coming from outside of traditions - as in *Tall Horse*, a collaboration between South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company and Mali's Sogolon Puppet Troupe. Other post-traditional puppetry has been the result of nonhereditary practitioners entering an established field of practice and remaking it according to nontraditional values... There are also examples of transformed tradition resulting from what (Edward) Shils calls 'endogenous factors,' the exploration by tradition bearers of new possibilities within the form, the radical rejection of

selected precepts, and the bringing of other cultural forms and values into the mix. (Cohen "Post-Traditional" 178-179)

"Endogenous factors" is an important distinction here and, contrary to the puppeteers in China, "endogenous factors have been the primary cause of change within the traditional (Indonesian) puppet theatres..." (Cohen "Post-Traditional" 179). Endogenous factors were not present in Singh's example of the shadow puppeteer's experimentation with Gandhi nor are they present within China's government-run provincial troupes, which is, I argue, partly why these productions are often so poorly received.

Cohen uses the term "post-traditional" to categorize this emerging strain of collaborative and endogenously-evolved work happening within the tradition of wayang kulit:

Post-traditional artists tap into the social and aesthetic forms of inherited art forms. Many, indeed, come from artist families and have grown up in intimate conversations with the stories, songs, movement and objects of tradition, though sometimes they are alienated from these familial and local traditions from formal education and travel. Post-traditionalists are 'at home in many homes', join cultural efforts *knowingly*, and are capable of experiencing intimacy with cultural orders while gazing upon them reflexively with the 'critical look of the outsider'. These inventive artists and their emergent communities of interest are demonstrating capacities to ignore any and all taboos, subvert norms, mix genres, and pastiche and fabricate new structures, estranging some audiences while gaining others. The post-traditional is not only an aesthetic development, but also a social, economic, and political transformation. Post-traditionality involves social reconfigurations of performance scenes, new boundaries for art worlds, emerging networks and novel horizons of expectation, and is related to the development of new communication technologies, including text messaging and Facebook. (Cohen "Global Modernities" 188-189)

I would argue that this "post-traditional" approach towards creation is also "traditional" at its core. If you read the previous passage and interchange the term "post-traditional" with "traditional", the paragraph reiterates my understanding of the traditional practitioner's approach as highly responsive to changes within the community environment, whether it be aesthetic, social, economic or political - or all four. Traditionalist artists "tap into the social and aesthetic forms of inherited art forms"; they are "at home in many homes" and "inventive artists"; when given the resources and support, traditional artists involve "social reconfiguration of performance scenes, new boundaries for art worlds, emerging networks and novel horizons of expectation" ("Global Modernities" 188-189). Traditional artists are the primary artists "deeply invested in (an art form's) transmission while hostile to repressive ideologies of 'traditionalism'" ("Post-

traditional" 178). It is only now, with seismic shifts in politics, urbanization, globalization and the current push towards safeguarding that "tradition" and its artists have been encouraged to preserve the form into permanent stasis.

Judging from the relative success of practitioner-led change and evolution in India and Indonesia's long-standing shadow puppet traditions, and the utilization of performance and apprenticeship as modes of transmission, this approach would serve to support the existing shadow practitioners in China and their continuation of the tradition to future inheritors. Where museums, cultural festivals, tourism, educational and commercial endeavors have largely resulted in pushing the Chinese shadow puppet form and the practitioners closer to preservation than continuance, a shift in approach, even by degrees, could garner significant results. The practitioners and their traditional vernacular performance forms are best served when safeguarding approaches focus on these three tenets: (1) apprenticeship, (2) practitioner-driven creativity and (3) performance as the central mode of dissemination. These tenets can be applied to revise existing methods of safeguarding, such as revising the Living Human Treasures program, or applied to developing new methods entirely.

Immaterial Remains

In Diana Taylor's book, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, she explains that, "there is an advantage to thinking about a repertoire performed through dance, theatre, song, ritual, witnessing, healing practices, memory paths, and the many other forms of repeatable behaviors as something that cannot be housed or contained in the archive" (37). Through ten years of fieldwork and apprenticeship with traditional shadow puppet practitioners in China, my trajectory of inquiry has come to the same resolution of viewing the performed repertoire as living archive of the vernacular traditional immaterial practice. This understanding drives my second research question, "how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms?" Or, rephrasing the questions to incorporate what we know of shadows and their meaning within China and puppet performances, "how do you preserve a ghost?" To me, this second question embodies the invisible (im)possibilities of safeguarding shadow puppetry well - the vernacular, ephemeral and immaterial practice, steeped in ritual. Both literally and figuratively, ghosts populate shadow puppetry's performances - you can feel them, literally feel them, awakening the wide expanse of the engulfing dark. They charge the space without light, finding tangibility in performance and there they carry with them

all past and future ghosts that have passed through those figures, those screens, and those in the audience. The audience, too, becomes apart of that ghostly session, touching in with their own history and future, their own collective memory.

My creative project entitled *Immaterial Remains*, is an multidisciplinary exhibition that presents the issue of preserving ghosts and Chinese shadow performance within our current frameworks for safeguarding. With ethnographic video, fine arts shadow boxes which are animated with automatic light, and a performative lecture, *Immaterial Remains* contextualizes and queries how shadow puppetry might continue if we rethink antiquated notions of preservation and vernacular performance. Similar to contemporary artists in "in Yogyakarta (Indonesia)...(who) mine traditions of wayang kulit (shadow puppet theatre) in their paintings, installations, and community projects for political parody, carnivalesque revelry, critique of heritage discourse and questioning of development policies" (Cohen "Global Modernities" 191), I also hope to incite deeper inquiry, shift heritage discourses and shape developmental policies with my work.

The series of shadow boxes (as described above) were first shown at Concordia's *Ignition 13* group show, at the Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery in the spring of 2017. Curators Michele Theriault and Shauna Janssen chose a diverse array of projects from a pool of graduate fine arts students for exhibition. The format was formal and fine arts based with minimal contextualization via a small label. With my background in narrative performance, I found the lack of context frustrating and the resulting dissemination amongst the audience unsatisfying. Guests read the questions, including "can you preserve a ghost?" and viewed my robotic animated shadow boxes, but none had the background upon which to base their viewing experience. My main take-away from that experience was my own desire for deeper contextualization and the crucial need to conjure ghosts through performance. While the advocacy for live performance as a tenet for performance preservation was already in my written thesis, I had not thought it necessary in this particular iteration of creation - but I was wrong. From my position as apprentice and advocate for the form, it feels a disservice to the tradition when shadow puppet figures are relegated to silence and stillness, so much so as to almost forfeit the entire project. Nothing but enlivening the shadow figures through performance could juxtapose the relative stillness of the framed, recorded and boxed pieces.

In the fall of 2017, I sought out Concordia's CaPSL (Curating and Public Scholarship Lab) team to collaborate with on the exhibition project. "Established in 2016 at Concordia University in Montreal, the Curating and Public Scholarship Lab (CaPSL) is a hub where faculty, students, and community and museum partners translate academic scholarship into on-site and mobile exhibitions that respond to critical social issues ("CaPSL"). Director Erica Lehrer has worked hard to cultivate the lab as a space "where research, creation, and exhibition meet diverse audiences" (website). Technical director, Lex Milton and research assistants, Alex Robichaud and SJ Kerr-Lapsley, carry out this mission with great expertise. With the CaPSL team's good guidance, my exhibition project is a pluralistic approach to dissemination and an act of intervention, hoping to infuse the conversation around safeguarding intangible cultural heritage with alternatives.

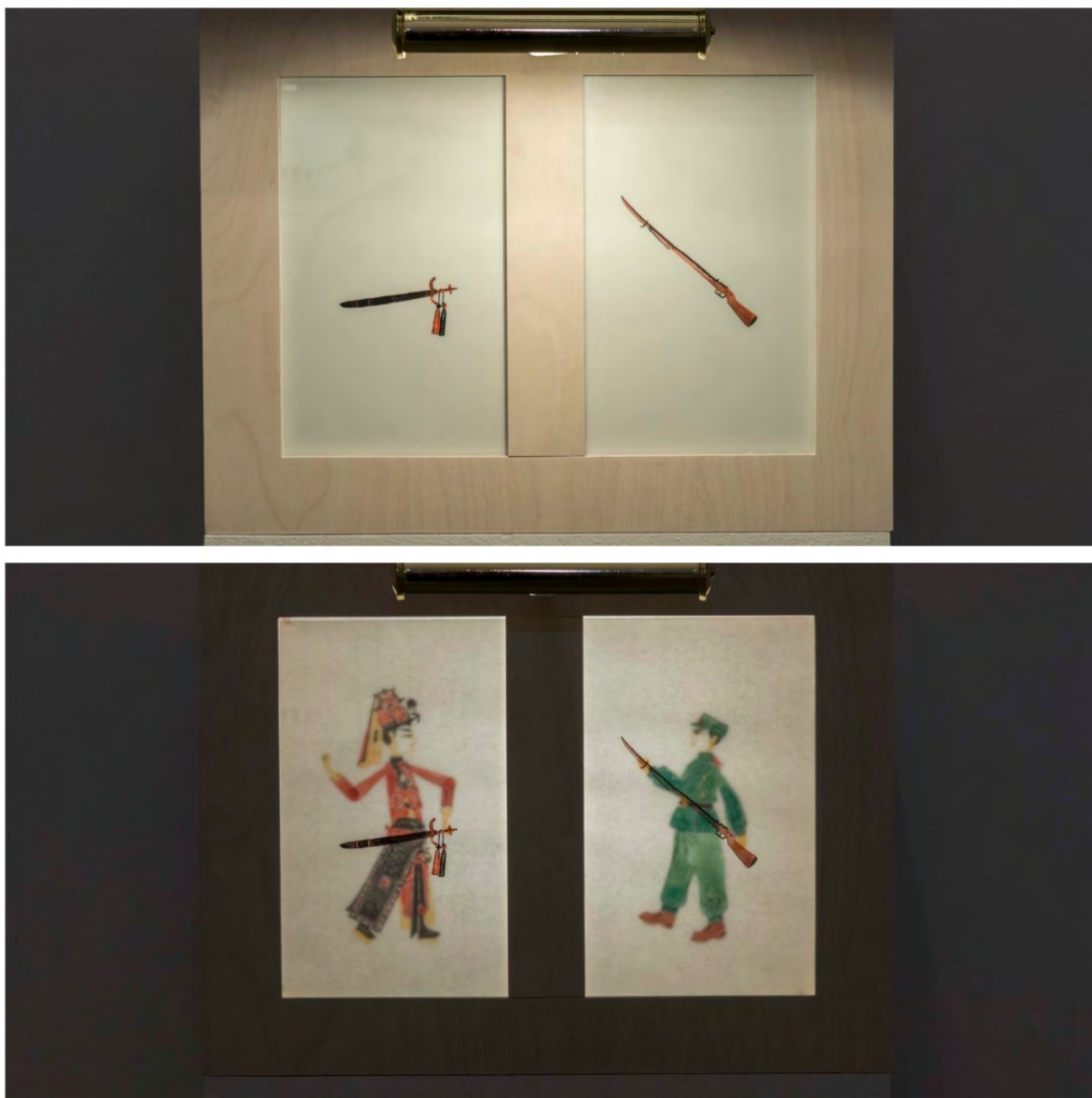


Figure 5.50. *Immaterial Remains* shadow box stills, front lit (top) and back lit (bottom). Photos by Paul Litherland / Studio Lux © Galerie Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University



Figure 5.51. *Immaterial Remains* performative lecture stills. Photos by Lex Milton.

For contextualization within the exhibit, large labels and projected text lead guests into the space, followed by a triptych of ethnographic videos which feature the practitioners at work in the studio, behind the screen and in performance. Accompanying the ethnographic elements are three "shadow boxes" which are wooden boxes measuring approximately 18 inches wide and 12 inches tall. Each display a painting by front light, depicting lonely scenes in a garden, at a dressing table, a floating gun. As the lights automatically toggle to backlighting (shutting off the front light in the process) a back-painted picture appears in conjunction with the front-lit painting to reveal a ghosted shadow puppet interacting with its perfectly preserved environment. The front and back lighting system is programmed to run automatically, giving the entire installation of the three boxes a cold and robotic feel. Just as you feel comforted and happy to see the empty scenes populated with beautiful shadow puppets, you are deprived of the scene again and again, increasing your anticipation. The boxes aim to challenge the notion of preservation as a "second life" for heritage objects. Sure, I challenge, but what kind of life? What is left and what remains?

In the center of the exhibition floor, away from the ethnographic videos and shadow boxes, a large bamboo shadow stage has been erected. Made out of long spans of bamboo and linked together with humble bike inner tubes, the cube stands skeletal in the space, covered on only one side with a white screen. This theatre is a traditional shadow stage and complements while it contrasts with the other representational pieces. Projected onto this stage's screen is a video that presents an overview of Chinese shadow puppetry and its current predicament and then invites viewers to come behind the screen and try puppeteering shadows for themselves. This screen is also where I present my performative lecture: a 25-minute long shadow wandering of my work in shadows, their difficult history in China and safeguarding issues. These main elements: ethnographic presentation, fine art "shadow boxes", an hands-on interactive prompt for the audience, and a performative lecture, are a complete picture of my research findings, my research methods and the (im)possibilities of safeguarding shadow puppetry in China.

Presenting *Immaterial Remains* and the performative lecture to a receptive group of attendees late on a weekday evening, when the regular buzz of Concordia's Library building had quieted down, I was transported again to that special space that darkness and shadow create, especially when shared amongst a community. Although behind the screen for most of it, my projected shadow connected me with those sitting in front of it in real time and with those in my archival research film projected from behind. The shadows do something different, for me at least, even if

the limitations of conjuring my research collaborators from my past ten-year tenure in China were palpable. The impossibilities felt as present as the possibilities for how we might move closer towards safeguarding the practitioners of a form, instead of just the form itself.

This chapter surveyed the four most common methods of safeguarding preservation for Chinese shadow puppetry alongside a growing trend towards utilizing shadow puppetry and its practitioners and techniques to create new works for art and theatre. Between these two strains of official safeguarding methods and unofficial works propagating and promoting Chinese shadow puppetry in new mediums to new audiences, my work falls somewhere in between. I am both an apprentice of shadow puppetry and deeply committed to seeing the form and its practitioners succeed in passing on the tradition to successive generations, while I also create works of theatre and art that are intended for my own vernacular in North America. It is with the guidance of my teachers and through this creative work that the critical tenets for safeguarding have presented themselves. This concluding chapter answers my second research question, "how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms?", by showing that the complex combination liuchuan's "to remain" and "to pass" is critical to passing the living tradition down through the generations. By considering (1) the continuance of an apprenticeship system, (2) practitioner-driven creativity in response to community, and (3) performance as the central mode of dissemination as tenets to any safeguarding method, cleaving practitioners from safeguarding efforts, stasis in the evolution of the form and the reliance on the archive of the performance form are greatly reduced.

Conclusion

Safeguarding Ghosts

Even years later, my memories of that first performance I attended with the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe in 2011 is indelible. The visceral recall of witnessing that wedding blessing performance is as strong as it ever was. Especially, the feeling of entering that secret shadow puppeteer lair, the glowing box of bamboo and fabric, set against the cool night air of the countryside. Crawling in from the dark and cool night air, the sweltering and luminous interiors of the puppet stage were as otherworldly as anything. The smell of baijiu, cigarettes and sweat mingled with sounds of performance oration and side conversations, but the puppets still held center stage: bouncing, bowing and battling. With their colored costumes and their impossibly alive movement, they easily transported me and the audience sitting in the dark night. The performers kept those puppets moving until well after three am. Their dedication to the performance seemed to outlast that of the audience, reminding me that the shadow troupe was there to bestow a blessing upon the wedding union and the better they performed, the better the blessing would be regardless of whether the human audience enjoyed themselves or not.

In the years since then, the Huaxian Shadow Puppet Troupe's performances within their own community have dwindled to just a few each summer. As they are currently unsupported by official or unofficial channels of funding, they do not have the time, resources or energy to push their performance form forward on their own accord. Most importantly, they have no full time apprentices through which to transmit the form. As Qinfeng, director of the Shanghai Theatre Academy's puppetry program, has regretted, "this problem grieves me. Especially because so many of the older puppet artists cannot subsist on their art anymore. They have to give up. But, it is the duty of this age, the government, society, to keep following these artists and these forms with close attention. Otherwise, all of these diverse forms are going to vanish. Later, when we want to go back and visit with them or see a performance, it will be too late" (2016).

At the outset of this thesis, I set out to query and answer the following research questions:(1) what are the particular ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry, a traditional vernacular puppetry form, is resistant to current methods of preservation (2) how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms? Ancillary to this, can creative artists outside the lineage of Chinese shadow puppetry contribute

to this endeavor? With a close examination of how Chinese shadow puppetry is analogous to and different from other forms of vernacular traditional performance, it becomes easier to identify ways in which the current safeguarding theories and methods could serve the form better.

Chapters one to three are geared towards answering my first research question, (1) what are the particular ways in which Chinese shadow puppetry, a traditional vernacular puppetry form, is resistant to current methods of preservation? In chapter one, I relayed the ghostly history of Chinese shadow puppetry and its many origin legends. The traces that remain of those legends in today's cultural vernacular point to the primary function of the form as a ritual that used the shadow medium to communicate between souls of those past and present. These customs of performance and craft, which have been entrenched for generations, continue their importance even if their conscious impact has long been forgotten. The chapter highlights the ways in which performance catalyzes the potential for shadow puppets to enact meaning.

In chapter two, I fleshed out an ontology of darkness and shadows in the context of Chinese culture. I also configured the ways in which shadows and ghosts in China are often synonymous, which means that Chinese shadow puppetry isn't just figuratively representing ghosts in shadow puppet performances - the shadows *are* the ghosts. This sentient darkness becomes the medium through which a lineage of collective memory is communicated and can be disrupted by top-down changes in artistic impetus, such as the Communist and Cultural Revolution (1949CE, 1967CE).

In chapter three, I mined the tacit ways in which this tradition of ritual performance with darkness and shadows has been transmitted through the apprenticeship process since its origins. Proximity, presence, and practice over time with practitioners who have done the same with their teachers for generations is the best way to continue such a ghostly lineage, with students steeped in context and situated learning. The situated nature of apprenticeship, versus decontextualized learning in the formal classroom, imparts social and collective teachings to the learner that inform the way they then evolve the form in response to their own community.

Chapters four and five focused on answering my second research question, (2) how can new preservation theories and practices be approached to better support traditional vernacular puppet forms? Ancillary to this, can creative artists outside the lineage of Chinese shadow puppetry contribute to this endeavor? In chapter four, I discussed the current state of shadow puppetry in China and its transition from living practice to heritage. Here, I present the tricky contradiction

in ontology of puppetry forms and how the combination of ephemerality in performance contrasts with the permanence of the performing object in preservation endeavors. UNESCO and the Intangible Cultural Heritage program are also given a thorough examination in order to ascertain their unparalleled effect on current safeguarding thought and approaches within China.

In chapter five, I critique the myriad ways in which our archival impulses and safeguarding efforts have manifested within China, including museums, tourism and festivals, cultural commodification and formal education. Even with recent shifts in safeguarding guidelines from UNESCO and the Intangible Cultural Heritage project which stress transmission and change as central to "preservation", the majority of methods currently in practice contribute to the form's stasis and demise in situ and profit from the form's heritage value while the practitioners do not. I contrast these "official" safeguarding methods with creative projects inspired by Chinese shadow puppetry and mine how these projects and approaches help inform a new approach to preservation theory for vernacular performance forms. Lastly, I survey Indian and Indonesian shadow puppetry traditions and their recent and current negotiations with preservation and modernization and identify ways in which their successes and failures can also help inform a new approach for Chinese shadow puppetry.

While suggesting a new theory or approach to safeguarding presents its own pitfalls, much like the vague but influential language of UNESCO's ICH program, it is important to present something more than a critique to current safeguarding theories and methods. In my survey of Chinese shadow puppetry and current safeguarding methods, official and unofficial, I have concluded that focusing any safeguarding approach on the following three tenets will help to lessen the negative effects on living practitioners and better support the future of the form in situ: (1) the continuance of an apprenticeship system, (2) practitioner-driven creativity in response to community, and (3) performance as the central mode of dissemination. While these elements sometimes exist in current preservation methods and in creative works made by outside artists, they are never present as a set. Inherent in the methodology that the inclusion of these three tenets would produce is a reclamation of what was already there and what was already being practiced, through generations, by the practitioners. "*Reclaiming* is an attempt to undo the opposition between tradition and modernity, and to reject the embalmed appropriation of tradition as heritage" (Levine 19); reclaiming attempts to place the agency and impetus of safeguarding methods back within the practitioner's control.

The first tenet, (1) the apprenticeship system and its transmission process, is dependent on a preponderance of proximity, presence and practice over time and is the core of any traditional vernacular practice. The passing down of performance rituals and forms from generation to generation requires transmission, not just of the somatic skills and design aesthetic that define a form, but of the spatio-temporal socio-cultural milieu of the community that supports it. Instead of simply transmitting a core set of skills to be applied universally, performance apprenticeships actually develop the skills to respond to a community *with* and *through* performance: it teaches responsiveness, engagement and change that take creativity to enact and continue. Without this responsiveness and mutual engagement with a community, no vernacular remains vernacular.

The apprenticeship system that transmits traditional vernacular forms is itself responsive to shifts in circumstance: "apprenticeship is not a unitary, unchanging system. Programs of training and learning, trade hierarchies and social relations between actors, and opportunities and trajectories for professional progress are all conditioned by the prevailing economic and political conditions of a time and place" (Marchand "Muscles, Morals" 247). The system of apprenticeship must model the flexibility that the resulting practice should have in order to remain relevant as *how* we learn is so embedded in *what* we learn. In this way, apprenticeship teaches vernacularity in two irreplaceable ways: by steeping the apprentice in a vernacular form's situated culture by tacitly learning how a practitioner responds to its constituency and changing environment and by adapting the learning model to change with these same shifts.

The second tenet, (2) practitioner-driven creativity, is the tenet least supported or considered in the current roster of safeguarding methods. Creativity is the least exalted aspect of traditional performance practice, but one that is central to its survival as a vernacular form. Creativity, among the three tenets of safeguarding I outline here, is the most disregarded of all because it is also the most misunderstood. The current methods of preservation and archiving discourage creativity, even those, such as the Living Human Treasures projects, that claim to focus on practitioner, apprenticeship and transmission.²⁷² Upon the designation of "preservation worthy", these art forms "requiring the maintenance of authenticity at the time of inscription, artists and practitioners are not allowed to express their creativity" (Aikawa-Faure 44).

What is most misunderstood, perhaps, is that any art form's change or evolution is an act of creativity enacted by its practitioners. As Richard Schechner explains, speaking specifically

²⁷² Aikawa-Faure 44 and Kurin 8.

about Asian performance forms, "creativity is the ability to introduce change, whether that change is collective or personal or sudden or gradual" (Between Theatre 253). Any tradition, which extends past a single generation by definition, has already undergone innumerable creative changes on a macro and micro level. "There is something in tradition which calls forth a desire to change it by making improvements in it. There is an unceasing striving in the strongest human minds for 'better' truth, for greater clarity and coherence, and for adequacy of expression of the perceived and imagined" (Shils 214). In shadow puppet traditions, changes are constantly being made for "greater clarity and coherence" both in content and in context. In Shandong province, master Fan Zheng'an recently converted many of his performances to the national standard of Mandarin Chinese, replacing his local dialect to shift with the changing tides of urban language. Additionally, master Fan has added a contextualizing preamble to his performances, acquainting his uninitiated audience members with the rare one-person Chinese shadow puppet tradition.

These creative decisions work best when they are practitioner-driven, intrinsic to the lessons and the situated contexts that apprenticeship has bestowed. In the number of examples I've put forth through the thesis, creative impetus driven by outsiders of the forms, including policy makers, cultural ministers, government bodies, or foreign and contemporary artists, are not necessarily bad, but they do not contribute to the continuation of the form by its practitioners within their community. Referring back to Salil Singh's example of the government-commissioned Gandhi epic, the medium of shadow puppetry was rendered "uninspired and uninspiring" (154) at the behest of others. Conversely, Claudia Orenstein's example of the Pulavar family, working from the inside out to change and adapt the form has proved successful and more sustainable.²⁷³ Within China, the *Turtle and Crane* show, created by the Communist government in 1952, is the most widespread example of detrimental top-down intervention within the form. No other singular production has been so effective at simplifying, secularizing and homogenizing the diverse ritualistic practice - in a sense, the *Turtle and Crane* was the beginning of shadow puppetry's non-vernacular lineage.

Lastly, (3) performance as the central mode for dissemination is essential to the transmission of shadow puppetry and its ritual meaning. Shadow performance is ontologically impermanent and immaterial and any translation to another medium leaves much lost in adaptation. Reiterating Peggy Phelan's thoughts on the irreplaceability of performance: "performance cannot be saved,

²⁷³ See Orenstein "Forging New Paths".

recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance" (Phelan 146). If, according to Phelan, representations of performance become something else entirely, then safeguarding measures for performance forms should stress this importance and insist on performance's usage wherever possible. Ward Keeler, writing about Javanese *wayang* confirms that, "the meaningfulness of a performance of wayang resides above all in the nature of the relations it establishes in the course of the performance itself" (Keeler 266). It is not before or after the performance that connections are made, it is during. In Chinese shadow puppetry performance, the ritualized shadow puppet communicates collective memory, past and present ghosts and affective darkness *through* its usage in live performance. Without performance to enliven the shadows, the deep relevance of ghostly conduits and ritual potency remain invisible at best and non-existent at worst.

Critiquing existing policies and positing a new theory for safeguarding vernacular performance forms is a necessary step towards re-envisioning what preservation looks like in the near future. However, what is harder, as evidenced by the interpretations of UNESCO's well-intended policies and verbiage, is *how* to create a policy or method that upholds these three tenets. Like UNESCO, I am cautious in proposing any safeguarding program that presents itself as concrete and final, as each form, practitioner and context would ideally adapt any policy to suit their idiosyncratic needs. But, in order to put some theory into practice, initial method ideas include regulating the shadow puppet commodities market and industry to siphon a portion of their proceeds to directly benefit practitioners financially (and ideally, creatively), which could in turn support the development of their creative work in situ and reinstate the viability of the apprenticeship system. Or, provincial theatres, healthy with their government funding streams, could divert financial and in-kind support to a few traditional troupes, allowing them to create and work in their own contexts in exchange for a few collaborations or performance. Using Tianxiang's model of collaborative transmission between practitioners and elementary schools in Hebei province, educational models of disseminating intangible cultural heritage forms can be structured to connect living practitioners and students and directly contribute to the development of the form as it lives and circulates within its vernacular.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ Tianxiang's comprehensive shadow puppet program is covered in-depth in chapter 5, page 230.

Chinese shadow puppetry and its practitioners have been navigating insurmountable pressures since the beginnings of the 1900s. And while safeguarding efforts are not the reason for their decline throughout the 20th century, they certainly have been a factor in the early 2000s. Any effort in preservation is made more or less easy by the thing to be preserved. Chinese shadow puppetry exquisitely resists archival attempts and efforts in safeguarding in a number of key ways: it is a vernacular practice, it is transmitted through non-verbal apprenticeship and situated learning, it is performance, and it is immaterial shadow. It is possible, however, to better support vernacular ritual performance practice and its ghostly lineage by enlivening its conduit shadow through performance and transmitting its art form through apprenticeship and encouraging practitioner-driven creativity. The practitioners in China, who have been working hard to keep shadow puppetry going since its origins, deserve to be directly supported through future safeguarding methods and approaches.

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APPENDIX

*Certification of Ethical Acceptability for
Research Involving Human Subjects Certificates
December 2014 - October 2018*



**CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

Name of Applicant: Annie Katsura Rollins

Department: Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: A Way of Knowing: Traditional Chinese Shadow Puppet Making Apprenticeship, Practice and Pedagogy

Certification Number: 30003862

Valid From: December 18, 2014 **to:** December 17, 2015

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Pfaus".

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee



**CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

Name of Applicant: Annie Katsura Rollins

Department: Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society
and Culture

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: Chinese Shadow Puppetry's Master-Apprentice
System

Certification Number: 30003862

Valid From: November 03, 2015 **to:** November 02, 2016

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. Pfaus".

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee



**CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

Name of Applicant: Annie Katsura Rollins

Department: Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society
and Culture

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: Chinese Shadow Puppetry's Master-Apprentice
System

Certification Number: 30003862

Valid From: October 31, 2016 **to:** October 30, 2017

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Pfaus".

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee



**CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

Name of Applicant: Annie Katsura Rollins
Department: Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture
Agency: N/A
Title of Project: Chinese Shadow Puppetry's Master-Apprentice System
Certification Number: 30003862

Valid From: October 10, 2017 **To:** October 09, 2018

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. Pfaus".

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee