

Transfer of Knowledge on the Art of Changsha Shadow Puppetry

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to explore: (i) the Changsha Shadow Puppetry Performance Art Form Development History, and (ii) the process of transferring this knowledge to students. This research employs qualitative research methods including literature review and field data collection through surveys, interviews, observations, group discussions, and workshops. Analysis is conducted, based on information provided by 45 participants, and the results are presented in a descriptive analytical manner in line with the research objectives. The research findings are as follows: (i) Shadow puppetry has a long history spanning China's long-term changes. At present, it remains a cultural heritage that has been passed down but has encountered problems due to economic and social development that has caused people to change their tastes. The original forms of the performance were those of shadow puppetry, literary lyrics, and accompanying music. This performance is related to worship and entertainment in almost every festival of an agricultural Chinese society. (ii) Students to whom knowledge was transferred were informed about the history of shadow puppetry throughout the processes of creating characters, lyrics, puppetry, and accompanying music. However, since its traditional performance was not consistent with the students' learning context, this study found that the methodology had to be adjusted by improving the story, lyrics, and characters. This was combined with modern music and shadow puppetry techniques so that students had the opportunity to participate in fun activities at the same time. New findings can be shared with students about digital technology innovations, enabling them to better understand and learn. In conclusion, this research can be applied to the transfer of knowledge about the Changsha Shadow Puppetry performance culture.

Key words: Transfers, Knowledge, Art of Changsha, Shadow Puppetry

INTRODUCTION

In the trend toward global economic integration, China has attached great importance to the protection and inheritance of its cultural heritage. The Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development has a long-term goal for completion by 2035. The central people's government of the People's Republic of China has clearly stated the need to promote excellent traditional Chinese culture and systematically improve the protection of intangible cultural heritage. Since 2021, the Central Office of the State Council and the Central Office of the State Council has issued a policy concerning "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage," emphasizing that intangible cultural heritage is an important factor along with the protection, inheritance and utilization of cultural heritage. It also emphasizes the carrying forward of historical traditions and the building of a strong cultural nation (Liu et al., 2018). The Chinese people have a great variety of art and cultural traditions, one of which is shadow puppetry.

Shadow puppetry is an important cultural heritage, and its performance form is a valuable and profound cultural

heritage. After UNESCO promulgated the "Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage" on October 17, 2003, it protected the concept of "intangible cultural heritage." The State Council of China approved the second batch of national, intangible cultural heritage traditions, including 12 shadow puppets, of which an example is Hunan shadow puppetry. In 2011, China's shadow puppetry was listed by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity, which has attracted international attention. At present, China has 37 shadow puppetry sites, which highlights the important status of shadow puppetry in Chinese culture (Guo, 2020). Shadow puppetry is an art form that combines the creation of characters from animal skins, literature, singing and music. These three factors convey by way of entertainment, historical knowledge, folk customs and religion to the audience. Changsha City is the political, economic and cultural center of Hunan Province. Changsha Shadow Puppetry plays an important role in local folk culture, once serving as the main form of entertainment in rural areas, and is now often used at weddings, funerals, birthday celebrations, temple fairs and other important events

in people's lives (Li, 2008). In the 1950s, there were more than 1,000 shadow puppet artists in Changsha. As society changed, the number of traditional performers gradually decreased. The inheritance of shadow puppetry was not passed down from the older generation to the younger generation, which put the shadow puppetry art at risk as the elderly practitioners aged (He, 2009). In 2016, a survey by officials at the Changsha Wangcheng District Cultural Center found that there were only a few folk shadow puppet troupes left, with fewer than 20 registered performers. Due to the changing economic, social and cultural contexts, shadow puppetry has become less popular, so it is necessary to transfer knowledge to students.

This research aims to study the forms of artistic meaning and cultural performance for knowledge transfer to students (as the new generation inheritors of shadow puppetry culture), both outside and inside the education system.

Objectives

1. To study the Changsha Shadow Puppetry Performance Art Form Development History
2. To study the process of transferring this knowledge to students.

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as follows:

1. The researchers studied the content of documents related to shadow puppetry, both domestically and internationally. This includes policy documents, theoretical concepts and research for use in studying and analyzing the results of the study. The criteria for selecting Changsha Shadow Puppetry is because it has a long history and is widespread, but its popularity has declined.
2. The researchers surveyed the study areas of Wangcheng District, Changsha District, Xigcheng Experimental School, Zhongling Primary School, and the Shadow Puppet Museum. The informants consisted of 5 key informants, 5 casual informants, and 35 students.
3. The researchers surveyed the areas by contacting relevant stakeholders, selecting communities where shadow puppetry was performed, venues for presentations, schools teaching basic arts subjects from primary to secondary levels, and those interested in shadow puppetry culture training programs. They also designed activities to engage youth.
4. This research used qualitative research by collecting data from documents and the research area using surveys, observation, interviews and focus group discussions. The related informants were divided into experts, practitioners, and the general public who were interested in shadow puppetry. After receiving the preliminary information, the researchers organized activities for students. The research team used the data verification process to ensure that the data was correct before analyzing the data.
5. The data obtained from the study in the research area are categorized in order to interpret the data according to all

collected objects, leading to the analysis of the results, qualitative descriptive analysis.

6. The content is organized and synthesized from the research topic and research objectives. The researcher analyzed the research results, presented and summarized the research results, presented the research data in a descriptive and analytical manner, and prepared the article for publication in an international journal.

RESULTS

Changsha Shadow Puppetry Performance Art form Development History

The history of Changsha Shadow Puppetry can be traced back to 1636, with its gradual development during the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, reaching a golden age of prosperity in the 1950s. However, with the diversification of entertainment forms, Changsha Shadow Puppetry has faced severe challenges. The three development periods of Changsha Shadow Puppetry (1637-1937, 1938-1948, and 1949-2024) reflect the evolution of social structures and cultural concepts in Changsha.

Changsha Shadow Puppetry evolved through rituals that were closely related to Changsha's agricultural society, acting as a medium to collect customs, becoming the soul of its agricultural society, becoming part of the collective memory and promoting cultural inheritance.

The shadow puppetry performance is organized by the temple fair committee to thank the gods for bringing peace and prosperity. Before the performance, the organizer places offerings such as seeds and sweets on the altar. The person performing the ceremony kneels down, lights incense and recites the words of worship. After that, the shadow puppetry performance officially begins.

The performance setup is simple, using long benches, wooden doors and bamboo as a stage, with a shadow screen made of white paper in front and an oil lamp inside for lighting. Although the shadow puppetry is a ritual worshipping the gods, especially on the festival day (the fifteenth day of the lunar month), the people also pay respect to their ancestors. This shadow puppetry is performed almost all year round, depending on the people's preferences. Changsha folk shadow puppetry scripts can be divided into two main types. The first type is called the "iron shadow puppet script" which consists of lyrics for the entrance and exit of a scene. The lyrics and dialogues in a shadow puppet script are fixed, with little or no change. The singing is composed of a set melody, and the performers must sing each line with precise pronunciation according to the music. A performance usually may have between five and eight actors, but sometimes three, or even one. Changsha Shadow Puppetry is distinctive in its setting, division of roles, acting style, execution techniques, singing, accompaniment, and the types of themes and songs used.

The transmission method of Changsha Shadow Puppetry is like the traditional performing arts, using an apprenticeship system. To master a skill, one must study under the supervision of a master, usually from a young age, and follow the master every day. Through continuous exposure to art in

daily life, the disciple will gradually develop their skills. The disciple will live and eat in the master's house, and in addition to daily learning, they must also help with housework and farm work, gradually assimilating into the master's family. In learning traditional performing arts, mastering the basics is very important. Only when one has a solid foundation can one advance one's skills to a higher level. This principle also applies to shadow puppetry. Students must master every step correctly, from preparing the puppets, to carving, painting, and to managing the singing puppets. Modern drama is created as a result of the development of shadow puppetry to enable urban youth (including young children, primary and secondary school students) to learn the content of folk tales as well as stories about real-life characters, conveying traditional values and lessons through modern stories. Fairy tale plays often create new forms based on cartoon fairy tales to attract students' interest.

Many shadow puppet performances have moral teachings, using the performance to instill traditional virtues such as gratitude, loyalty, trustworthiness, propriety, honesty, and shame from doing evil. The performances have a particularly educational effect on young viewers, encouraging them to distinguish between good and evil, and conveying praise and criticism through stories that help the people aspire to higher moral standards.

Process of Transferring Knowledge to Students

In building an education and training system for inheritors, efforts should focus on building a systematic educational curriculum to ensure that inheritors comprehensively master the various skills involved in Changsha Shadow Puppetry. This art form encompasses multiple techniques, including performance, vocalization, carving, and painting shadow puppets. Inheritors need to receive comprehensive artistic training, mastering not only the operation skills of shadow puppets but also delving into the knowledge of music, vocal styles, and storytelling in shadow puppetry performances. Additionally, understanding the rhythm of performances, the structure of traditional operas, and the narratives of traditional stories is essential. By establishing a multi-level and modular curriculum, inheritors can gradually enhance their overall qualities, thereby better grasping the essence of this ancient art form. Second, in terms of training methods, a combined approach of traditional and modern practices should be adopted. On one hand, maintaining the traditional master-apprentice system ensures the transmission of shadow puppetry skills. This approach allows apprentices to learn directly from the inheritors while also experiencing the cultural and spiritual values behind shadow puppetry. On the other hand, modern teaching methods, such as video instruction and online courses, can help mitigate the time and spatial limitations of the traditional master-apprentice model. The introduction of these new methods can expand the audience base and allow learners to study high-quality instructional videos repeatedly, deepening their understanding of shadow puppetry techniques.

Organizing exchanges and visits among inheritors is essential to promote mutual learning and improvement

of skills. Inheritors from different regions possess unique stylistic features in their shadow puppetry techniques. By hosting shadow puppetry skill exchange meetings and seminars, inheritors can share experiences and discuss challenges faced in performances, drawing on the strengths of other schools of thought. This not only aids in skill enhancement but also fosters emotional connections among shadow puppetry inheritors from various regions, collectively committing to the preservation and transmission of this traditional art form. Fourth, regarding support and incentive mechanisms, government and relevant institutions should provide financial and social support to inheritors. As vital guardians of intangible cultural heritage, inheritors need to invest significant time and energy in learning and teaching shadow puppetry techniques, yet their economic income often remains unstable. Therefore, it is essential to offer stable financial subsidies to ensure they can focus on the transmission of shadow puppetry skills.

In addition to financial support, providing social welfare benefits such as medical insurance and retirement benefits can alleviate their concerns. Furthermore, establishing an "Outstanding Inheritor Award" system to honor and reward those who excel in skill transmission can enhance their social status and foster a sense of professional pride and mission. In order to inspire more young people to engage in the transmission of shadow puppetry, activities such as shadow puppetry competitions and training workshops for inheritors should be created to encourage youth to join the ranks of inheritors. These activities can provide a platform for showcasing skills while creating learning opportunities for potential apprentices, sparking their interest in shadow puppetry. By integrating these activities with local cultural festivals and school education, broader community participation can be attracted, injecting new vitality into the transmission of shadow puppetry techniques. Fifth, the cultivation of inheritors should also emphasize enhancing their cultural dissemination abilities. The transmission of shadow puppetry is not just about skills; it also includes the dissemination of cultural connotations. Inheritors should possess the ability to explain and communicate clearly, articulating the history, background stories, and cultural values of shadow puppetry to audiences. Through systematic training, inheritors can interact more effectively with viewers, enhancing their understanding and interest in shadow puppetry, thereby elevating its influence and recognition within society (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

The research results can be discussed as follows:

Background and Significance of the Research Subject

The study of Changsha Shadow Puppetry performance comprises research of a traditional folk art form in the central and southern regions. It has a long history and is rich in cultural meaning. It combines visual, auditory and performing arts, becoming a unique symbol of local culture with social and cultural value. In line with this study, Li (2008) has indicated that there are several reasons why Changsha Shadow

Puppetry is selected as the research subject. First, as a highly representative intangible cultural heritage of Hunan, it holds significant historical, cultural, and artistic value. Its artistic features include exquisite shadow puppet-making, unique puppet manipulation techniques, and flavorful local music.

The results of this study are similar to Long's, suggesting that it showcases the diversity and sophistication of traditional Chinese art. Studying Changsha Shadow Puppetry helps one to better understand its historical origins and unique status in local culture, providing theoretical support for the protection and transmission of intangible cultural heritage (Li, 2022). Second, Changsha Shadow Puppetry has faced serious cultural heritage challenges in the process of economic development and expansion. The living space of traditional culture continues to shrink with the loss of audiences and the lack of skilled successors threatening the survival of traditional culture. In the face of the influence of multi-ethnic culture, the role of shadow puppetry in social memory and cultural identity has declined. Changsha Shadow Puppetry is different from puppetry traditions of other regions.

Changsha Shadow Puppetry art is different from other regions as scholar Dong (2023) has said: Northern shadow puppetry often uses leather as the main material, with intricately crafted puppets that are richly colored and expressive. Changsha Shadow Puppetry, on the other hand, mostly uses paper puppets, with simpler designs that emphasize the movement of characters and the emotional expression of the story.

Conservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

This is consistent with and close to the results of the study by Li (2020), which pointed out that the conservation of Changsha Shadow Puppetry is not only related to the protection of skills, but also to the conservation of cultural ecology. Changsha Shadow Puppetry is not only a performing art, but also a cultural activity of the community. The performance venue, the performers and the audience in the community form a living cultural ecosystem. Therefore, the conservation of Changsha Shadow Puppetry must start from multiple aspects, such as the performance venue, the transmission mechanism and the participation of the community, in order to build a multi-level and multi-dimensional conservation effort. The second aspect is that digital technology brings new forms. Zhao and Liu (2023) comment that the digital method system not only preserves the material form of shadow puppetry but also enhances its dissemination through multimedia performances and interactions. The use of modern digital technologies can transform the production process, performance formats, and story content into digital files, creating virtual performances and interactive platforms that enable shadow puppet culture to cross geographical and time boundaries, thus reaching a wider audience. Tian (2020) discusses the importance of cultural space in the preservation of ICH. This author argues that cultural space is an irreplaceable social function for Changsha Shadow Puppetry performances. The research of Li (2022) found that the transmission of the shadow puppetry tradition can enhance people's cultural pride and social identity. For Changsha

Shadow Puppetry, the preservation of shadow puppetry in the process of transmission of shadow puppetry allows the community to inherit the skills and participate in performances and activities. This results in a greater awareness and pride in cultural heritage. In conclusion, using the concepts of "social memory," "cultural ecology," and "shadow puppet conservation" facilitates the study of conservation, transmission and development of shadow puppetry, providing a systematic and comprehensive research perspective.

Research Strategies and Future Outlook

Strategies to protect and pass on the influence of shadow puppetry through cultural tourism and school education are effective ways to disseminate culture. They must create a traditional culture curriculum that can be taught at both primary and secondary levels, with shadow puppetry as part of the curriculum. They can integrate classroom instruction and hands-on activities that allow students to learn about the history, production processes, and techniques of shadow puppetry, which can help spark interest in traditional culture. In addition, activities such as having students attend shadow puppet shows, or even perform shadow puppetry, can help increase students' understanding and appreciation of this art form. The community should strengthen participation and create feelings to enhance cultural identity. The community is an important foundation for the inheritance and development of Changsha Shadow Puppetry. Organizing performance and training activities within the community can enhance members' understanding and appreciation of this traditional culture. Organizing training on shadow puppet-making and performing skills can attract the younger generation to participate in learning these traditional skills, as well as feel connected to the local culture.

Shadow puppetry and innovation can be adapted within the context of modern development. In the context of modern development, Changsha Shadow Puppetry needs to improve its performance methods to adapt to social changes and audience demands. Normally, shadow puppetry performances are mainly held at temple fairs and festivals. However, in modern society, it can also be integrated into cultural tourism, school education, and community cultural activities. Further, it can be promoted through skills training and performance activities in schools and communities, which provides opportunities for students and residents to learn and experience traditional culture.

Maintaining the vitality of traditional culture through dynamic adaptation to keep up with modern society can be done by incorporating innovation in performing skills through the use of interesting lighting, sound, and staging systems. Modern techniques are used to make shadow puppets more delicate and durable in terms of performance. The integration of modern music and dance can enhance the expressive power of shadow puppet performances, making them more appealing to today's audiences. Shadow puppetry should use modern media and digital technology to expand its online reach. For example, performances and background stories can be shared with a wider audience through the internet and social media platforms. In addition, virtual



Figure 1. Youths join in sharing knowledge of shadow puppetry.

reality technology can also be used to provide an immersive viewing experience, allowing viewers to better appreciate the charm of shadow puppetry.

Shadow puppetry is a combination of puppetry techniques, musical accompaniment, voice acting and singing. It is considered an advanced skill that must always be practiced. Learning takes place by one observing while the teacher is presenting. The teacher will be skilled in both narrating and singing. The important thing is to be smart and quick-witted to present the content more interestingly. It is similar to the study results of Wiset and Champadaeng (2023) whose research results found that learning in a real way from the teacher's transmission in a way that entertains the audience. As to this issue, high-level singing skills must be transmitted anciently and then be further developed according to one's abilities. This is because being a professional Morlam singer requires good wit and finesse. Such knowledge will be guided by experienced teachers and musicians. The method of transferring through the form of learning resources is the transfer of performing arts that have been stored for the benefit of knowledgeable teachers. Examples are artists in each Morlam-Ruang in Ubon style, who want to pass on knowledge, dissemination of information produced through online media such as YouTube. Thus, part of learning more makes learners more skilled. In summary, twenty people who have inherited knowledge can sing.

Shadow puppetry is a popular performance in the past as a cultural heritage that should be passed on to society. The study found that it needs to be modernized and less connected to the younger generation. In addition, it can be changed to a curriculum to convey information to students' learning. Printed media documents and digital archives can create a database. In addition, the creation of educational programs and digital platforms are channels that lead to learning shadow puppetry. The results of this study provide valuable insights into balancing modernization with preserving cultural heritage. Consistent with the results of a study by You and Prathumchan (2024), these results highlight the declining prevalence of Wuyue due to modernization and generational disengagement. However, the shift towards literacy-based transmission, including written documentation and digital archiving, has played a crucial role in preserving Wuyue. Educational programs and digital platforms offer promising avenues for revitalizing this tradition. The

study suggests further integration of Wuyue into formal education and the development of innovative digital strategies to engage younger generations. These findings provide valuable insights into balancing modernization with cultural heritage preservation.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study can provide theoretical references for the conservation, development and inheritance of Changsha Shadow Puppetry, which can help fill the gaps in knowledge conservation and inheritance guidelines. This study also provides suggestions and references for the Changsha Municipal Government to develop cultural industries and education to bring students to share knowledge in a new dimension of Chinese cultural society.

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