



# *When The Heritage of Chinese Puppetry Meets The Future*

*by Simon Wong*



# Puppetry in 2000 years before

In 1978, in Laixi County, Qingdao City of Shangdong Province, a 193-centimeters tall movable puppets has been found. It has moving joints. The figure can sit, kneel, or stand. It even has small holes. Beside it was placed, a piece of 115 centimeter-long silver thread was found.





# How Puppet Begins

*A terra-cotta soldiers of Qin Dynasty (221 - 210 BC.)*



real humans burial ceremony was very prevalent in 770-476 BC.



figures



terra-cotta



# Puppetry starts from funeral and wedding

A book named Xu Han Shu (6th Century) said,



“Puppet had become popular at both wedding and funeral ceremonies at Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD)”



# Anecdotes about Spirits and Immortals (Sou shen ji)

Emperor Han Wudi (140 - 101 BC) missed his consort, Lady Li, called *Shaoweng* exquisitely crafted Li's silhouette



*witch craft* is shadow puppet and which had its early beginnings



# Punch in China (Baldheaded Guo)



Baldheaded Guo lived in 6th century

a famous comedy actor was imitated  
by the puppeteers after he died



*the first Mr. Punch in the world*

# Sui and Tang Dynasty(AD 618–907)

Many new puppet styles



## Shadow

It still served for a religious purpose such as in Buddhist and Taoist preaching



Afterward, **shadow puppet** was used to perform some folk and history tales to attract audiences in temples.

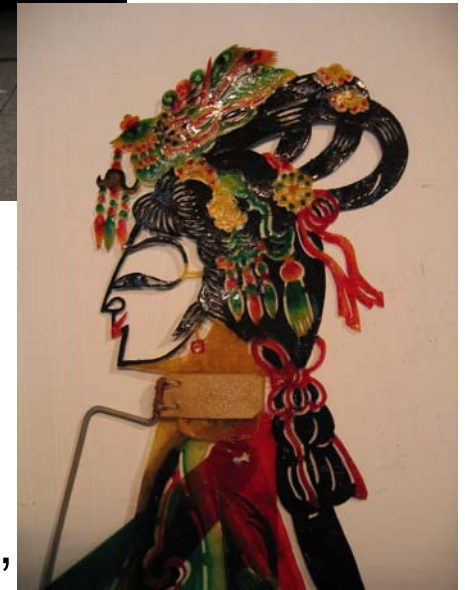




The well-developed handcraft industry and economical prosperity in the **North Song Dynasty** (AD 960-1127) provided a solid basis for the development of the performing arts in China.



the art of **puppet and shadow** developed into a mature and flourishing industry.



many popular styles such as water puppet, organ puppet, gunpowder puppet, string puppet and shadow.



“Opera puppet” and “Opera shadow” were enjoying high reputation in Northern Song (AD 1127-1279), when Northern Song Emperors relocated their capital to Jinling (Nanjing) from Kaifeng.

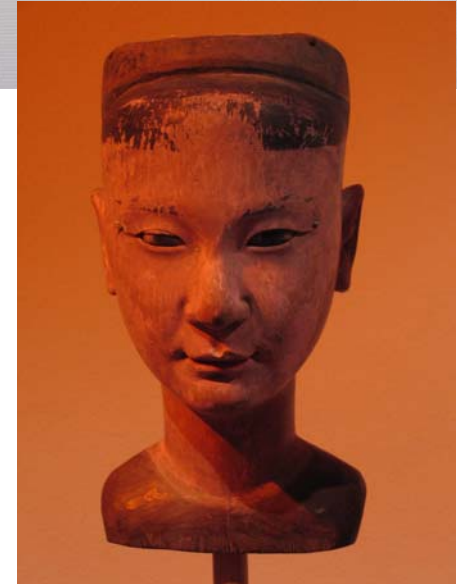




The soldiers of the **Yuan Dynasty** (AD 1271-1368), who were very fond of the puppet art form and especially the shadow which helped spread, wherever they were stationed, this spectacular form of art entertainment all over China.

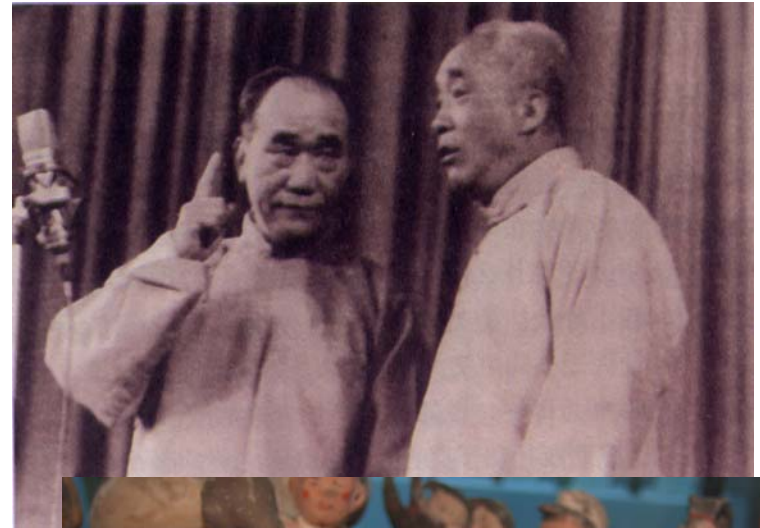


moved to Beijing in the **Ming Dynasty** (AD 1368-1644) and the **Qing Dynasty** (AD 1644-1911)





# Chinese theatre originated from five different ancient traditions





# Mask Dance, or Nuo opera



Singing, dancing and opera performing with mask



# Variety show (hundred entertainment)





# Puppetry

wedding



funeral



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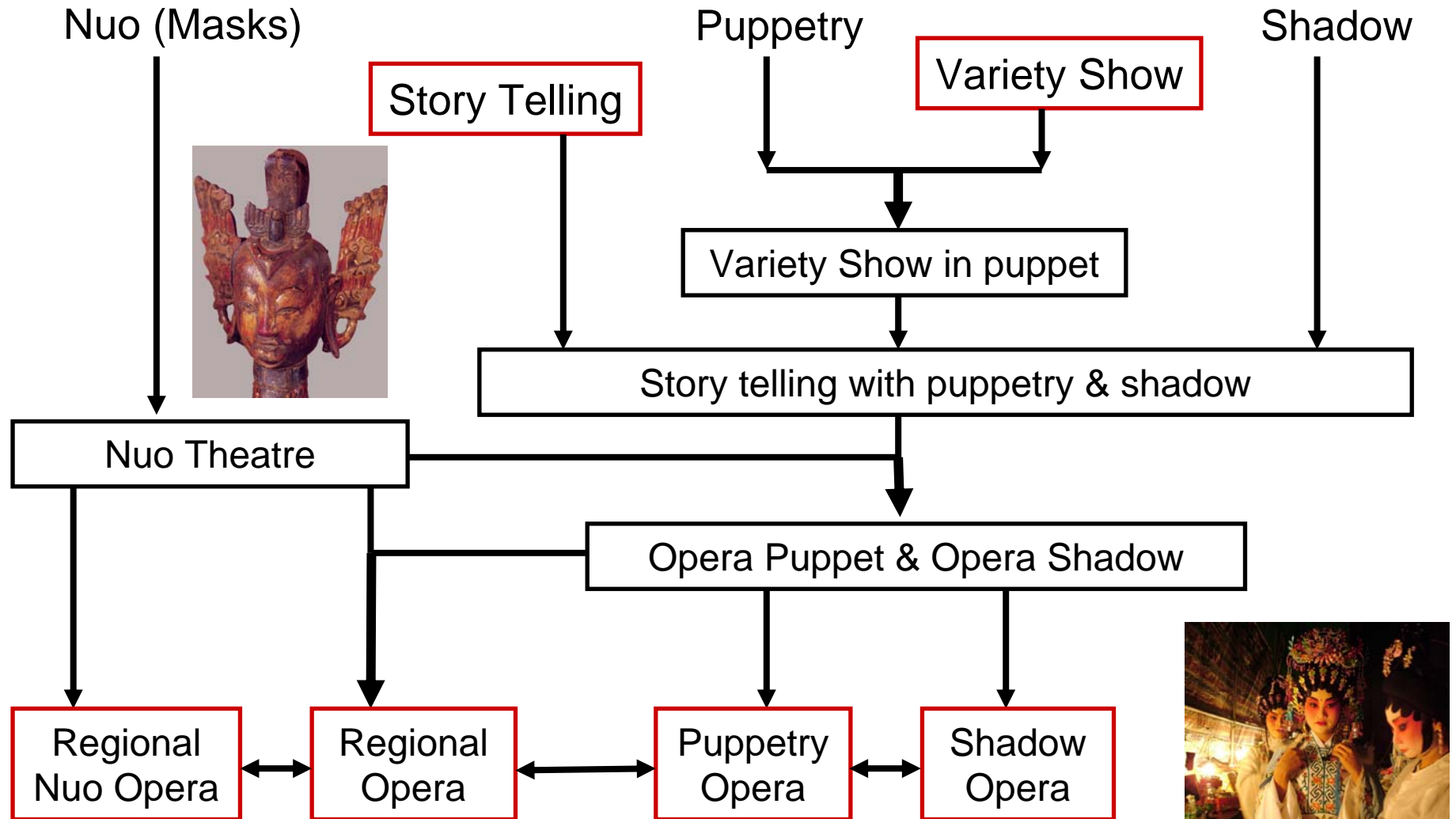
# Shadow witch



# Story-telling Performance recounting and singing



# The Development of Chinese Theatre





# The Birth of Modern Chinese Puppet and Shadow Puppetry

After the Russian puppetry master Sergei Obrastzov's visit to China and the cultural exchanges occurred in puppet and shadow puppet field which then took place in the 1950s, new puppet troupes were integrating modern theatre specialists, such as playwrights and directors with traditional artists sprang up in China.



# Elaborated New Traditional Opera

“New Traditional” opera of puppet and shadow were created, combining traditional local style with modern style which catered for the modern audiences quite well.

“Hibiscus Fairy” by the  
Guangdong Puppet Troupe



“Monkey King” by China Puppet Troupe in Beijing





## Extracts of Plays

Another influential play of this period was initiated by Mr. Yang Sheng and Mr. Chen Nan Tian from Zhangzhou, Fujian, in which the extracts of plays (or zhezixi) was later modified and upgraded from a traditional glove puppet performance to an independent form.



# Chinese-Featured Fairy Tale Drama

A new form of fairy tale drama was also created in the post 1950s period by the Hunan Puppet and Shadow Art Troupe under the leadership of Mr. Tianhan.





# Children's Play With Both Man and Puppet

A further development in puppetry came after the opening up and reforms in China in the 1980s, in which puppetry was influenced by Japanese Mask Fairy Tale Drama and the big cartoon puppet with mask.



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# Modernized Puppet

The latest developments in puppetry of course is, with moving with the times, that of harnessing the use of technology like ultra-light to the traditional puppet art form, and performances





# Social problem

Leaving of old puppet and shadow artists vs.  
Shortage of young puppeteers

Fast changing environment as well as the preference of audiences vs.  
Slow pace in adaption of government policy

Puppet theatres mainly based in village vs.  
Resources centralized in big cities



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# Problem among the artists

No advancement in traditional arts vs.  
No application of modern arts

Lack of research in puppet and shadows vs.  
Fall behind in puppet and shadows education

One-way International exchange vs.  
Lack of regional communications



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# New Hope

Educational bodies start to realize the educational function of puppets

Government pay attention to Intangible Heritage

China's participation in International organizations

Metropolises are interested in organizing international puppet festivals

2012 Unima Congress will take place in Chengdu, China



Puppetry in China has been a golden vein, like the dragon



It is the Culture  
and Heritage not  
just China but  
also the World



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The End