

The Shadow Plays of Kelantan, Malaysia and Daoqing, Huan County of China: A Comparative Study of Social Functions

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Abstract

Kelantan shadow puppetry and Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry are typical representatives of folk art in Malaysia and China and are integral parts of the complex whole of human culture. From an anthropological perspective, they exhibit many similarities. Throughout their long development histories, shadow puppetry has been assigned extensive roles within society and culture, with ritual, entertainment, and education being the most prominent social functions. This study employs historical and anthropological theories and methods to conduct a cross-regional and cross-cultural comparison of the subjects, analyzing their relationships between phenomenon and essence, culture and religion, society and history. Through objective narration and subjective interpretation, it aims to elucidate the essence of this socio-cultural activity. The results of this research will promote further cultural recognition and understanding between the two regions and ethnic groups, bring more attention and deserved respect to the great shadow puppetry artists, and inspire the younger generation to recognize and take an interest in traditional culture.

Keywords: Wayang Kulit Kelantan, Huan County Daoqing Shadow Play, Social Functions

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Wayang Kulit Kelantan, Malaysia dan Daoqing, Daerah Huan, China: Satu Kajian Perbandingan Fungsi Sosial

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Abstrak

Wayang kulit Kelantan dan wayang kulit Huan County Daoqing merupakan wakil tipikal seni rakyat di Malaysia dan China, serta bahagian penting dalam keseluruhan kompleks budaya manusia. Dari perspektif antropologi, kedua-duanya menunjukkan banyak persamaan. Sepanjang sejarah perkembangan mereka yang panjang, wayang kulit telah memainkan pelbagai peranan dalam masyarakat dan budaya, dengan ritual, hiburan, dan pendidikan sebagai fungsi sosial yang paling ketara. Kajian ini menggunakan teori dan kaedah sejarah serta antropologi untuk melakukan perbandingan rentas wilayah dan rentas budaya terhadap subjek-subjek tersebut, menganalisis hubungan antara fenomena dan intipati, budaya dan agama, serta masyarakat dan sejarah. Melalui naratif objektif dan tafsiran subjektif, ia bertujuan untuk menjelaskan hakikat aktiviti sosio-budaya ini. Hasil kajian ini akan mempromosikan pengiktirafan dan pemahaman budaya yang lebih mendalam antara kedua-dua wilayah dan kelompok etnik, membawa lebih perhatian dan penghormatan yang sewajarnya kepada seniman wayang kulit yang hebat, serta memberi inspirasi kepada generasi muda untuk mengenali dan meminati budaya tradisional.

Kata kunci: Fungsi Sen Wayang Kulit Kelantan, Wayang Kulit Daoqing Daerah Huan

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1.0 Introduction

Shadow puppetry, as an ancient folk art, has spread to over 20 countries and regions, accumulating a wealth of philosophy, wisdom, and beliefs throughout its long history. It serves as a vessel of social information, reflecting the historical and cultural developments of different societies. This study focuses on two distinct yet comparable traditions: Kelantan shadow puppetry (Wayang Kulit Kelantan) in Malaysia and Huan county Daoqing shadow puppetry in China. Kelantan shadow puppetry, also known as Siamese shadow puppetry (Wayang Kulit Siam), is the most well-preserved, technically advanced, and culturally representative form of Malaysian shadow theater. Meanwhile, Huan county Daoqing shadow puppetry, representing the western school of Chinese shadow puppetry, is a model of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage protection, featuring a complete performance system, musical accompaniment, and artistic craftsmanship.

This study employs a comparative approach, combining ethnographic fieldwork, historical analysis, and performance studies to examine the two traditions. Primary sources include interviews with puppeteers, recordings of performances, and archival research, while secondary sources draw from academic literature on ritual, folklore, and cultural preservation. By analyzing their musical forms, narrative content, and performance contexts, this research highlights both their unique cultural expressions and underlying commonalities.

Kelantan and Huan county Daoqing shadow puppetry are selected for comparison due to their shared historical longevity and fundamental cultural essence. Despite regional differences—Kelantan's tradition being influenced by Thai-Malay syncretism and Huan county's rooted in Daoist folk culture—both have endured as living traditions, adapting to social changes while preserving core ritual and artistic functions. Their comparison reveals how shadow puppetry serves as a medium for cultural transmission, moral education, and communal identity across diverse societies.

As a form of cultural expression, shadow puppetry bridges the past and present, preserving history while enriching spiritual life. Both Kelantan and Huan county traditions emerge from daily life, serving as entertainment, ritual practice, and moral instruction. Through structured performances—whether in worship ceremonies or communal gatherings—they convey values of sincerity, kindness, and beauty, guiding respect for nature, social ethics, and cultural norms. At a micro level, their distinct musical styles, narratives, and performance techniques reflect their unique socio-historical contexts. Yet at a macro level, both traditions fulfill fundamental human needs—biological, social, and spiritual—demonstrating how folk art evolves within shared frameworks of belief, morality, and custom.

2.0 Ritual function

Victor Turner (1967, p.19) once pointed out that "ritual" is formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers." Ye Changhai (1999, p.135) asserts that "the inherent ritualistic nature of theater has always been its most important characteristic." Looking at shadow puppetry around the world, it invariably carries elements of religious ritualistic performances. In places such as Jawa and Pulau Bali in Indonesia, Nakhon in Thailand, Kerala in India, Cairo in Egypt, Athens in Greece,



and Bursa in Turkey, shadow puppet performances are almost indispensable in religious ceremonies such as deity worship, priesthood rites, purification, baptism, exorcism, and healing. In Kelantan, Malaysia, and Huan County, China, shadow puppet performances are often used to symbolize ritualistic activities. Ghulam Sarwar Yousof (2004, p. 12) pointed out that "the ancient myths and legends of the Malay Peninsula trace the origins of traditional theater directly to gods, spirits, and other unseen beings. This imbues traditional theater forms with an aura of mysticism and makes theater a spiritual art." Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry is based on Chinese folk beliefs, combining Daoqing and shadow puppetry. Daoqing is a form of storytelling and singing used in imperial courts to praise deities and in Taoist temples to explain doctrines and promote religious ideas. It entered the folk culture and merged with shadow puppetry to become a composite art form that performs both religious and secular stories. Given the religious and cultural influences on Kelantan shadow puppetry and Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry, it is not surprising that they not only provide entertainment but also serve a variety of ritual purposes.

2.1 The ritual function of Kelantan shadow play

Shadow puppet performances are often used to symbolize ritualistic activities, and Kelantan shadow puppetry is a fitting example with its many ceremonial elements. In 2023, during field research in Kelantan, researchers learned from Tok Dalang Pak Cu's narration that a complete wayang kulit performance includes stage preparation, the opening ceremony (upacara buka panggong), musical interludes, Dalang Muda (the young puppeteer), the main performance, and the closing ceremony (upacara tutup panggong). The opening and closing ceremonies are considered mandatory and must be completed during each performance. On May 28, 2023, Tok Dalang Pak Cu fully demonstrated all segments of the opening and closing ceremonies during a performance in Kelantan. During the opening ceremony, the Dalang recites specific prayers to invoke blessings and gain the necessary spiritual power, showing respect to gods and spirits. Prepared offerings such as yellow rice, cakes, water, betel nuts, and coins are presented to the deities to gain their favor and prevent evil spirits, ensuring the safety of performers, staff, and the audience. Musical instruments are sanctified with the smoke of herbs, enabling them to produce the most beautiful sounds. Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof (2004, p. 123) noted that the carefully prepared mantera and offerings, including food, not only ensure the safety of performers and the audience but also aim to re-establish the ancient bonds between humans and supernatural forces, reaffirmed through the giving and receiving of food. In the closing ceremony, the character Wak Long sings the song "Ngantar Balai," marking the end of the performance. The Dalang holds a handful of yellow rice and recites a mantra, unique to each Dalang based on the knowledge passed down from their teachers. The mantra's purpose is to thank the invisible beings and ensure the well-being of the performers and audience, preventing any misfortune or unforeseen events. After reciting the mantra, the Dalang scatters the yellow rice in different directions on the stage, over the instruments and puppets, and on himself.

In traditional Malay theater, ceremonies have been integral, with rituals likely serving as the primary function of Kelantanese drama in the past (Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, 1992). Kelantan shadow puppetry is frequently utilized in a ritual known as "berjamu," which celebrates the opening of a new performance space, the fulfillment of a vow, homage to a teacher, or reverence for the "angin"(wind). Paying homage to a teacher constitutes a graduation ceremony for a new Dalang, where "collective trance phenomena are not uncommon during



these ritual performances, with the active participation of a large audience turning the performance into a spectacle, each affected individual actively engaging in the ritual, attempting to alleviate their own anxieties" (Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, 2004, p. 168). The flattery of "angin"(wind) here is not literal but refers to gods, spirits, or other unseen beings within the context of traditional theater. In other meanings, it also represents attraction or obsession. If someone decides to become a Dalang due to a strong passion for wayang kulit, it is believed that they possess angin wayang kulit, which needs to be guided through "berjamu."

The stance of modern religious authorities—particularly Islamic authorities—toward these traditional ritual practices is complex and divergent. On one hand, some orthodox Islamic scholars view traditional performances like shadow puppetry as potentially containing elements incompatible with Islamic doctrine, thus adopting a cautious or oppositional stance. As the Malaysian state with the strongest Islamic ethos, Kelantan's religious council (Majlis Agama Islam) has repeatedly issued religious edicts (fatwa) calling for the purification of traditional cultural elements deemed to violate the principle of Tawhid (monotheism). On the other hand, reformist scholars advocate a cultural harmonization approach, arguing that shadow puppetry, as cultural heritage, can retain its ritual functions through Islamization. This includes restricting performance themes to Islamic prophetic narratives or moral parables, eliminating deity worship and exorcism rituals, and replacing traditional incantations with Arabic prayers. This pragmatic attitude gained traction post-2010, with some religious figures emphasizing traditional arts as a medium for disseminating Islamic values. Notably, lay practitioners often demonstrate flexibility—many regard shadow puppetry rituals as cultural traditions rather than religious acts. This perceptual gap allows such practices to endure among the populace. Regulatory enforcement also varies regionally, urban areas strictly adhere to religious rulings, while remote villages preserve more traditional ritual elements. This tension continues to shape the distinctive trajectory of Kelantan shadow puppetry's contemporary evolution.

2.2 The ritual function of Huan County Daoqing shadow play

In Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry, provincial inheritor Jing Dengqiⁱ informs us that currently, puppetry performances primarily occur during temple fairs, focusing mainly on deity dramas, while other types of performances have become rare. In China, temple fairs are sacred spaces distinct from everyday life, where people can experience freedom and spiritual joy in this mystical environment. Puppetry performances at temple fairs serve as a means of communication between humans and spirits, gradually forming fixed patterns that become specific social-historical structures, carrying memories of human activities and behaviors (Yang Jing, 2014). Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry incorporates many performance styles and themes related to religious rituals, particularly in its narratives about divine stories. Based on Chinese folk beliefs rooted in polytheism, the repertoire of Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry features a diverse array of divine characters. For instance, works like "Fengshen Yanyi" (Investiture of the Gods) blend historical and mythological figures, encompassing humans, deities, and various spirits in a blend of reality and fantasy that is both fantastical and mysterious. Other examples include "A formation composed of a large number of immortals," "Array of Immortal Executions," and "Splitting the Mountain to Save Mother," all belonging to this genre.

In certain ritual activities, performing "ritual dramas" specifically tailored for these occasions



represents another manifestation of the ceremonial function of Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry. Organizing temple fairs is a traditional folk custom in China, where a significant component involves gathering near temples to conduct rites of worship. The theatrical performances during these rites are crucial components known as ritual dramas. In Huan County, Gansu Province, during the initiation of temple fairs, shadow puppetry troupes often perform "divine dramas." On the first evening, they might stage "Heaven Officer Blessing," while on the second evening, performances could include "Liu Hai Playing with Golden Toad" or "The Three Gods of Fu, Lu, and Shou." Through these rituals, people communicate with and worship spirits, seeking blessings, warding off disasters, and expressing gratitude and praise to the spirits for ensuring peace and well-being through the performances of shadow puppetry.

In fact, the ritualistic performances of shadow puppetry are prevalent in everyday life as well. For instance, when someone is afflicted with a prolonged illness or faces misfortunes and setbacks, they may seek help from spirits to ward off evil and cure ailments. They make vows to the spirits that if they recover and everything goes smoothly, they will invite a shadow puppet troupe to perform a "gratitude drama" or "vow fulfillment drama" (known as "huan yuan xi" in Chinese) to thank the spirits. Similarly, when children frequently fall ill without effective medical treatment, it may be perceived as being troubled by malevolent spirits. In such cases, parents may seek protection from spirits in temples and invite a shadow puppet troupe to perform a "clearance drama" (known as "guo guan xi" in Chinese) to expel the evil spirits. These performances serve to communicate with spirits and seek supernatural aid to improve people's lives, whether through healing from illnesses, overcoming obstacles, or protecting children from harm.

In Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry, ceremonial activities are conducted at the beginning, during, and end of performances to ensure smooth proceedings. Specifically, these include "opening," "inviting the gods," and "closing." During the "opening" ceremony, the puppet of the Black Tiger Spirit Officer is placed on the screen (Liangzi), and an altar is set up at the performance venue with incense, candles, and food offerings. The candles are lit, and Qiantai (The term "Qiantai" refers specifically to the Tok Dalang, the principal puppeteer in traditional Malay shadow theatre.) prays to the gods while burning printed talismans. The religious function of the "opening" ceremony is highly apparent, akin to Taoist rituals performed by priests for exorcism and demon-suppression, showing little difference (Li Yuezhong, 2010). The "invocation of gods" involves Qiantai burning incense and paper money to communicate with the spirits and invite them to witness the performance. At the conclusion, the "deification" ceremony is performed to appease the spirits and request blessings. Performances held on special occasions such as births, weddings, funerals, traditional festivals, and birthdays also serve distinct ritual purposes. These ceremonies underscore the significant ritualistic role of Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry, serving to connect with spiritual entities, seek their assistance, and express reverence during various important life events and celebrations.

3.0 Entertainment Function

Since its inception, shadow puppetry has appealed to people across various social strata, including ruling elites, the educated, and the general populace, regardless of age or gender. This art form brings joy to people's lives through its exaggerated character portrayals, skilled



performance techniques, and rich, captivating narratives encompassing religious stories, historical events, folk tales, and current affairs. The vivid and diverse plots and content of shadow puppetry not only stir the emotions of the audience but also leave room for imagination, providing a delightful experience for both mind and body. Through rich cultural symbols and meanings, shadow puppetry offers aesthetic enjoyment and entertainment on a spiritual level. It serves as a medium that engages audiences emotionally and intellectually, creating a profound impact that transcends mere amusement.

3.1 The entertainment function of Kelantan shadow play

The general perception of Wayang Kulit is often viewed as "just a rural entertainment form in Kelantan" (Juliana Forbes, 2010, p. 165). According to Patricia Matusky (1997), "In Kedah and Kelantan states, shadow puppetry remains the most widely performed and popular entertainment form in both towns and villages" (p. 6). Currently, the Kelantan government has implemented laws requiring registration of Wayang Kulit performances with local cultural management departments. This regulatory measure signifies a clear intention to shift the focus of these performances from their ceremonial aspects towards pure entertainment. Che Ann points out that Wayang Kulit was once a primary medium through which people could temporarily escape from daily life and find spiritual satisfaction. In the past, performances were held annually from February to September or October, on any evening except the Thursday before the Muslim Sabbath. Particularly after the rice harvest season, Wayang Kulit would be presented to the community as a perfect symbol of celebrating their hard work or as a means to relieve fatigue. Wayang Kulit performances cater to the aesthetic needs of people across different age groups. The youngest audience members may be captivated by its mesmerizing visual effects, teenagers may enjoy action-packed or romantic scenes, and more mature viewers may appreciate the philosophical content as well as the shared cultural identity transmitted to other members of the community.

In the puppetry of shadow plays, elements of entertainment are evident in the puppet designs. Compared to the puppets used in Huan County Daoqing shadow plays, those in Kelantan shadow plays are somewhat rougher, with less finely detailed internal carving and somewhat crude designs. However, this roughness creates an undeniable vitality that is closely linked to the rhythm of village life. In fact, this less serious and more dynamic form allows it to lively respond to the expectations of the audience (Juliana Forbes, 2010). Che Ann believes that traditional Kelantan shadow puppetry includes five comedic characters: Pak Dogol, Wak Long, Wak Yoh, Samad, and Said. These characters are introduced specifically to bring joy to the audience. The localized version of the "Ramayana" serves as the primary source for Kelantan shadow puppetry, but in many cases, new branches of stories have developed beyond the epic's main plotlines. The new forms of Wayang Kulit avoid Hindu or Indian elements and do not attempt to introduce Islamic teachings. Therefore, most of the newly created stories predominantly feature comedic plots, emphasizing entertainment.

In the performance of shadow puppetry, the Dalang serves as the source of entertainment. Dalangs exhibit significant diversity and flexibility in selecting texts, often influenced by the organizers' requirements. Che Ann remarks "The issues in the story are based on the theme given by the organizers. Besides addressing current issues, sometimes advertisements for product promotions are added, or comedy elements are inserted. It means we dalangs often employ light-hearted tones and satire to maintain audience engagement." Many Dalangs



maintain an open attitude towards storytelling and performing techniques, delighting in the presence of their audience. They know how to captivate the audience and strive to ensure their satisfaction. When organizing Wayang performances for entertainment purposes, they incorporate more comedic segments into the program and enhance entertainment value through exaggerated performances and atmospheric renderings.

3.2 The entertainment function of Huan County Daoqing shadow play

Chinese shadow puppetry, like other folk arts, has evolved in response to the needs and customs of people's lives. Its diverse forms of expression, mysterious performance effects, and easily comprehensible content have been warmly embraced and firmly entrenched in the realm of folk entertainment. Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry was introduced as a form of entertainment from the Guanzhong region of Shaanxi, China. Its founder, Jie Changchun, encountered shadow puppetry during his wanderings due to his impoverished background. Later, he formed a troupe and gained the admiration of a prince in Ningxia for his splendid performances, becoming the royal court's dedicated performer for over a decade (Huan County Daoqing Shadow Puppetry Compilation Committee, 2006), (Sun Jianjun, 2003), (Wu Yimin, 1997). In the past, in economically underdeveloped rural areas, the most significant form of entertainment available to people was folk drama, which served as their primary means of self-amusement (Wei Liqun, 2007). In the Huan County region of Gansu Province, where the population is scattered and transportation is very limited, a shadow puppet troupe consisting of five or six people would travel with a wooden box carried by a mule. This box contained puppets and props. They would make their way to a warm cave dwelling in a village to perform for dozens of spectators. This was the true scenario of shadow puppetry performances in Huan County, Gansu, which persisted for several hundred years. Even today, from the 10th month of the lunar calendar to the 3rd month of the following year, communities can still hear the bustling sounds of shadow puppet performances.

The entertainment function of the Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry can be seen through the characterization of its puppets. In this tradition, puppets are categorized into roles known as Sheng (male), Dan (female), Jing (painted face male), and Chou (clown). The "Chou" roles are primarily used to portray comedic stories and plotlines. The puppetry style of the Chou characters often involves various facial expressions sculpted with exaggerated features, comical expressions, and sometimes crooked mouths and eyes. Their appearance is characterized by vivid colors and a deliberately grotesque appearance. The movements of the Chou characters during performances are agile and diverse, with flashy gestures, frivolous walks, intense actions, and sometimes even displaying frenzied states. This stark contrast with serious and sacred characters enhances the overall theatrical effect. During performances, Qiantai (the puppeteer) also accompanies the clown performances with humorous off-screen voices, further enhancing the comedic effect. The entertainment value of Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry is also reflected in a series of specific stories within its repertoire. These plays are designed specifically for entertainment, featuring themes drawn from local customs and reflecting everyday life. The plots are simple yet witty, with strong satire and profound underlying meanings. Examples include "Wang Qi is henpecked," "Bald man wets the bed," "Second sister is dreaming," and "LiuSan cooks." These plays exemplify the lively and humorous nature of Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry performances.

In Huan County, there are over a hundred temples where shadow puppetry performances are



held during temple fairs. The stages coexist with the temples, and the dramas dance alongside the rituals for the deities. "Entertaining the gods" and "entertaining the people" are integral parts of the local spiritual and cultural life. (Yang Jing, 2014). To allow the deities in the temples to directly view the performance, the stage is constructed directly opposite the temple. A large open space is left between the temple and the stage for worship activities and other rituals. Some temples are situated on hilltops where there is no suitable area around for setting up the stage; in such cases, the stage is built at the foot of the mountain but still facing the temple directly. This setup creates a scenario where both humans and deities can observe the shadow puppetry in the same time and space during the "divine drama" performances. Although "divine drama" performances are solemn and sacred ceremonies, their essence lies in people expressing reverence and worship towards the deities. This brings joy to the deities and in turn, they bestow blessings upon the worshippers, fulfilling their spiritual needs. Shadow puppetry thus possesses both a metaphysical seriousness and an entertainment aspect, reconciling these two seemingly opposing yet interconnected facets in "entertaining the gods" and "entertaining the people". This dual satisfaction of divine and human needs is the ultimate goal of shadow puppetry performances. "We do not know of any entertainment besides theater that has the power to create such huge social waves." (Chen Baocheng, 1995, p. 8-9).

4.0 Educational function

Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof (2004, p. 101) points out, "Like drama, shadow puppetry around the world serves primarily to provide entertainment and education." "Education is the natural, sequential, and harmonious development of all human knowledge, abilities, and talents." (Hu Dehai, 2013). "Education is life, education is growth, education is the tool for the continuation of social life, it is the continual reorganization or reconstruction of experience." (John Dewey, 1937). As long as it involves the dissemination and learning of human civilization achievements, including various knowledge, skills, and experiences of social life, and can promote individual socialization and social personalization in social practice activities, it belongs to the category of education. Shadow puppetry plays a positive role in inspiring people's ideals, pursuits, and hopes. It has a profound accumulation of humanities, history, aesthetics, and social information, subtly guiding and restraining human behavior. Some of its themes, philosophical concepts, and worldview contain rich connotations accumulated from historical development, traditionally regarded as an essence of education, transmitting values, historical events, moral lessons, and aesthetic standards to people.

4.1 The educational function of Wayang Kulit Kelantan

In regards to the educational function of Kelantanese shadow puppetry, the academic community has largely maintained silence. There exists a contradiction between the monotheistic beliefs of Islam and the polytheistic beliefs of Hinduism, Buddhism, and animism traditionally associated with Wayang kulit, the shadow puppetry. Kelantan state has also banned performances of shadow puppetry in the past. Whether this prohibition is directly related to the academic silence on the educational function of shadow puppetry remains unclear. We only find vague references among individual scholars regarding the function of shadow puppetry. For example, Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof (2004) points out that shadow puppetry worldwide primarily serves entertainment and education purposes, particularly in Indonesia, where it has become a medium for education, as well as political or social



propaganda. Similarly, Juliana Forbes (2010) highlights that Southeast Asian shadow puppetry stands out in the world's theatrical traditions, providing entertainment, spiritual solace, and cultural education as a holistic theatrical form. Neither scholar explicitly mentions Malaysia in their discussions. A very small number of Tok Dalang have made brief comments on the educational function of Kelantanese shadow puppetry. Pak Daim believes that every character, music, and dialogue in shadow puppetry is organized and holds significant educational value. Che Ann, in addition to incorporating comedic elements into his performances, also brings stories with educational significance.

In fact, the rich and profound educational significance inherent in the stories of Kelantanese shadow puppetry is objectively present. Patricia Matusky (1997, p.1) points out, "The root story is a Malay oral version of the Ramayana epic, with other major sources being traditional Malay folk tales, as well as stories from local events and current affairs." The Ramayana, one of the two great ancient Indian epics, is widely circulated throughout Southeast Asia, deeply ingrained in people's lives, and promotes the cultivation of literary literacy. The Malay oral version of the Ramayana incorporates Malay elements, and in the introduction of clown characters, the well-known Pak Dogol serves as an outstanding advisor and guide towards the right path, consistently advising Sri Rama to uphold the rule of law. The epic story and character behaviors in the Ramayana portray profound moral significance and ethical values. For instance, Sri Rama and his followers are depicted as embodying universal human values such as responsibility, compassion, fairness, and opposition to injustice. Tok Dalang Pak Daim points out that at the end of the story, goodness and wisdom prevail, virtues and beliefs prevail, subtly influencing the audience's values and behavioral norms. The stories of Kelantanese shadow puppetry also often reflect local social realities and diverse aspects of life. They touch upon issues such as environmental protection, health, livelihoods, and even politics, which are current social hot topics. Through these narratives, the puppetry portrays societal phenomena and relationships, prompting the audience to reflect and discuss. It conveys knowledge, information, and values to the audience, helping them better understand society and life. In this way, Kelantanese shadow puppetry serves an educational, inspiring, and cautionary role.

4.2 The educational function of Huan County Daoqing shadow play

Barbara E. Ward (1985) argues that drama serves as a carrier of Chinese cultural values and is also a successful educator. The ancient Chinese philosopher and educator Confucius, in his work "Classic of Filial Piety: Broad Principles", expounded that "there is nothing better than music for influencing the transformation of societal customs and systems" (Confucius, 1996, p.62). In China, drama serves as a living textbook in popular culture, and shadow puppetry is a traditional theatrical form found throughout the country. Its performance style and content consistently embody religious themes, secular entertainment, and adherence to shared philosophies. The values it represents closely align with socially endorsed orthodox beliefs. Historically, shadow puppetry in the Huan County region has carried various cultural and social activities such as entertainment, religious ceremonies, social gatherings, and customs, providing profound cultural indoctrination and societal influence. Currently, there are still 23 shadow puppetry troupes active in Huan County. During the Chinese Lunar New Year period, organized cultural activities including shadow puppetry performances are held in villages, temples, family clans, and even by some governmental bodies. People from all walks of life, whether illiterate or educated, including cultural elites such as scholars, masters, and doctoral students from around the world, actively participate. Each participant gains valuable cultural



insights they deem most valuable from these events.

The repertoire serves as the primary vehicle for the educational function of Daoqing shadow puppetry in Huan County. The Editorial Committee of Huan County Daoqing Shadow Puppetry (2006, p.29) states, "The content of the repertoire consistently integrates a sense of moral education, with karma as the main theme, and even utilizes divine intervention to achieve the wish of punishing evil and promoting good." Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry boasts many outstanding traditional plays. According to a 2004 survey by the Huan County government, there are currently 180 scripts available for performances. These plays encompass mythology, history, politics, current events, and anecdotes, closely reflecting people's lives and serving their spiritual expectations and pursuits. They guide and educate people in religious beliefs, moral ethics, fostering friendly interactions among individuals, and promoting harmonious coexistence within society. Here is a typical example to help us draw a clearer conclusion: "Liu Quan Offers Melons" is a classic traditional play of Daoqing shadow puppetry in Huan County. This play includes two themes: mythological stories and historical stories, intertwined with the tales of "Liu Quan Offers Melons" and "Luo Tong's Northern Expedition." A famous segment from the play, "Tour of Hell", is widely known among the populace. "Tour of Hell" depicts the process of Emperor Taizong of Tang Dynasty, Li Shimin, dying and resurrecting, during which he sees that individuals who commit numerous wrongdoings during their lifetime will be placed into different hells and punished accordingly after death. For example, those who sow discord or slander others are cast into the Hell of Tongue Removal and undergo punishment by having their tongues pulled out. Those who blaspheme against gods are cast into the Hell of Knife Mountains and endure punishment by crawling over knife mountains. Those who engage in prostitution, deceive women and children, or bully the weak are cast into the Hell of Boiling Oil and endure punishment by being fried in oil. Those who disrespect the elderly or are unfilial to parents are cast into the Hell of Blood Pond and endure punishment by being submerged in blood. Those who engage in bribery, theft, or robbery are cast into the Hell of Volcanoes and endure punishment by burning. Those who waste food or oppress the people are cast into the Hell of Grinding Stones and ground into minced meat. "Tour of Hell" serves as a warning against negative social behaviors, emphasizing a strong sense of retribution. It guides people to do good and pursue goodness in life, advocating for filial piety, respect for elders, kindness to children, dedication to duties, honesty, integrity, kindness towards others, diligence, frugality, and thrift. The play conveys the principle that "if a person lives a dishonest and unkind life, they will be punished in hell after death" (Huang Hu, 2013, p. 50-59).

Characters portrayed in Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry are consistently intertwined with social realities and historical facts. Emperors, generals, heroes, supernatural beings, and people from all walks of life can become protagonists in these stories. Through shadow puppetry, these characters are vividly brought to life in a historical narrative style, embodying and transmitting core values of Chinese traditional culture such as benevolence, righteousness, loyalty, and honesty within the plot and performances. Audiences, while watching these performances, can experience not only the ethical teachings and elite literature advocated by the upper strata of society but also accurately and clearly perceive the essence of folk culture. Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry originates from the grassroots, drawing from daily life and returning to it, making it readily resonate with and garner empathy from the general populace. Consequently, it naturally becomes a carrier and executor of folk education and cultural dissemination. In accordance with Pan Guangdan (1991, p.10), "The general



populace's historical knowledge and the ethnic consciousness upheld by this knowledge primarily derive from storytellers, drummers, and itinerant theatrical troupes, with theatrical troupes making a particularly significant contribution, as narrating a story is fundamentally better told than read, and better acted out than told."

5.0 Conclusion

Shadow puppetry is referred to as the living fossil of human civilization. It internalizes human cognition, perspectives on the world, and the process of exploration into its musical styles, puppet designs, performance forms, and content. Through centuries of historical development, it has transcended imagined differences in religion, aesthetics, society, and biology, becoming a symbol capable of conveying direct meaning. It reflects emotions and significance, as well as cultural behaviors, structures, and values (Merriam, 1964). In the process of inheritance and development, both Kelantanese and Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry are interlinked with the beliefs, morals, laws, and customs of their respective regions throughout various periods. They adhere to fundamental philosophical foundations and established performance patterns, serving humanity and fulfilling people's daily needs. Despite their distinct cultural backgrounds, they exhibit similar social functions when addressing the practical demands of people's lives. Kelantanese and Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry, as integral parts of societal behavior, remain culturally significant in their respective regions. Future studies may explore how modern technology can help revitalize shadow puppetry for younger audiences.

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