

Documentation Relating to the Origins of the Chinese Shadow-Puppet Theater

Both Chinese and non-Chinese sources frequently assert that Chinese shadow-puppet performance originated in the second century BC during the Western Han era.¹ Less frequently, the origin is placed in the eleventh century AD, in the time of the Northern Sung.² Some writers equivocate by claiming that the first use of a shadow-puppet performance, or the idea

THIS ARTICLE is dedicated to the memory of Professor Julian F. Pas, 1929–2000.

¹ For example, Berthold Laufer, *Oriental Theatricals* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology, 1923), p. 36; L. C. Arlington, *The Chinese Drama: From the Earliest Times until Today* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1930; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), p. 7; Sung Shi, "Shadow Puppets: Images behind a Screen," *Echo Magazine* 1.2 (Feb. 1971), pp. 14–15; Jacques Pimpaneau, "Chinese Puppets," *Echo Magazine* 6.4 (April 1976), p. 56, acknowledges this as a legend; Shen P'ing-shan 沈平山, "Chieh-teng ch'ü-ying: t'an liu-ch'uan min-chien te p'i-ying hsi" 借燈取影談流傳民間的皮影戲, *Hsiung-shih mei-shu* 雄獅美術 76 (June 1977), p. 59; Liu Jilin, *Chinese Shadow Puppet Plays* (Peking: Morning Glory Publishers, 1988), pp. 5–6 (my thanks to Dr. Chen Chao-jung for presenting me with a copy of this book) acknowledges the Western Han origin as a legend; Tung-ho 東河, "Wo-kuo min-chien hsi-ch'ü i-shu p'i-ying hsi" 我國民間戲曲藝術皮影戲, *Chin-jih ch'ing-chi* 今日經濟 280 (Dec. 1990), p. 69; I Chün-chieh 易俊傑, "Li-shih yu-chiu te Chung-kuo ying hsi" 歷史悠久的中國影戲, *Li-shih yüeh-k'an* 歷史月刊 102 (July 1996), p. 19; Kuo-li i-shu hsüeh-yüan ch'uan-t'ung i-shu yen-chiu chung-hsin 國立藝術學院傳統藝術研究中心, comp., *P'i-ying hsi, Chang Te-ch'eng i-shih chia-chuan chü-pen chi* 皮影戲張德成藝術家傳劇本集 (Taipei: Chiao-yü pu, 1996) vol. 1, pp. 21–22; Hua Tz'u-hsiang 華慈祥, "Ts'ai-chih pan-lan ch'i-fu pi-jang, Chung-kuo ying-hsi tsa-shuo" 彩紙斑斕祈福辟攘中國影戲雜說, *Li-shih wen-wu yüeh-k'an* 歷史文物月刊 9.5 (May 1999), p. 50; Zhang Yingjin, ed., *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922–1943* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1999), pp. 6–7, also includes a 1927 drawing of "Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty watching a shadowplay."

² E.g., Georg Jacob and Hans Jensen, *Das chinesische Schattentheater* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933), pp. 2–3; Sun K'ai-ti 孫楷第, *K'uei-lei hsi k'ao-yüan* 傀儡戲考原 (Shanghai: Shang tsa ch'u-pan-she, rev. edn. 1953), pp. 62–64; Chou I-pai 周貽白, *Chung-kuo hsi-chü shih* 中國戲劇史 (Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1953), vol. 1, p. 137; Denis Borda and Francis Boucrot, *Les théâtres d'ombres: Histoire et techniques* (Paris: L'Arche, 1956), p. 9, asserts that shadow theater "did not appear in the rest of Asia until the 13th and 14th centuries"; Kuan Chün-che 關俊哲, *Pei-ching p'i-ying hsi* 北京皮影戲 (Peking: Pei-ching ch'u-pan-she, 1959), pp. 2–3, also asserts (p. 4) that "during the Yüan conquests [13th–14th c.] shadow theater was transmitted [from China] to Africa and Europe"; Chou I-pai, "Chung-kuo hsi-chü yü k'uei-lei hsi ying hsi" 中國戲劇與傀儡戲影戲, in *Chung-kuo hsi-chü yü lun-chi* 中國戲曲論集 (Peking: Chung-kuo hsi-chü ch'u-pan-she, 1960), pp. 69–70; Sergei Obraztsov, *The Chinese Puppet Theater* (1957; English trans. J. T. MacDermott, London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 28; *Asian Puppets: Wall of the World* (Los Angeles: U.C.L.A. Museum of Cultural History, 1976), p. 101; William Dolby, *A History of Chinese Drama* (New York: Barnes &

of such use, occurred in the Western Han, and then developed into, or matured as, theater in the Northern Sung.³ In this article, I examine the relevant documents, and their derivatives, supporting these claims and show that the earliest mention of any kind of shadow-puppet performance or theater is in the eleventh century, and the claims for an earlier origin do not hold up to close scrutiny.

It is first necessary to specify the essential features of shadow-puppet performance.⁴ This is a type of theatrical in which the shadow or image of some kind of puppet, whether translucent or opaque, is produced on a translucent screen or curtain by back-lighting, and where the viewers observe the shadow or image from the opposite side of the screen or curtain. The crucial element is that the performer and observer are on opposite sides of a screen or curtain, and the shadows are observed through the screen. This must be distinguished from a performance in which the performer and observer are both on the same side of a wall or screen onto which a shadow or image is projected. It must also be distinguished from a recitation or lecture accompanied by pictures or drawings which are shown to the listeners in order to illustrate the content of the speech. This last type of performance does not necessarily make use of any kind of shadows.

Noble, 1976), p. 33, is doubtful of the claim of Western Han origin; K'o Hsiu-lien 柯秀蓮, "Tai-wan p'i-ying hsi te chi-i chi yüan-yüan" 臺灣皮影戲的技藝及淵源, *Chung-hua wen-hua fu-hsing yüeh-k'an* 中華文化復興月刊 10.1 (Jan. 1977), pp. 79, 81, recounts the Western Han story but states that it is unreliable; Jacques Pimpaneau, *Des poupées à l'ombre: Le théâtre d'ombres et de poupées en Chine* (Paris: Université Paris 7, Centre de Publications Asie Orientale, 1977), pp. 7, 14 (cf. his "Puppets" in n. 1, above); William Dolby, "The Origins of Chinese Puppetry," *BSOAS* 41.1 (1978), p. 112; Sven Broman, *Chinese Shadow Theatre*, Monograph Series 15 (Stockholm: Etnografiska Museet, 1981), p. 11; Ch'iu K'un-liang 邱坤良, "P'i-ying hsi te tsai-sheng yüan" 皮影戲的再生緣, *Tsung-ho yüeh-k'an* 宗合月刊 146 (Jan. 1981), p. 113; Lily Chang, "The Lost Roots of Chinese Shadow Theater: A Comparison With the Actors' Theater of China" (Ph.D. diss. U. California, Los Angeles, 1982), pp. 17, 19; Victor H. Mair, *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and Its Indian Genesis* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1988), p. 58; Chiang Yü-hsiang 江玉祥, *Chung-kuo ying-hsi* 中國影戲 (Ch'eng-tu: Ssu-ch'uan jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1992), pp. 1-2, 12-16, although he accepts the arguments of Sun K'ai-ti (*K'uei-lei*, pp. 62-63) that the origin of shadow theater was in the T'ang and Five Dynasties periods (see below).

³ E.g., Liu Mau-Tsai, "Puppenspiel und Schattentheater unter der Sung-Dynastie: Ihre Entstehung und ihre Formen," *OE* 14.2 (Dec. 1967), pp. 134-35 (my thanks to Eva Cohen for translating the relevant parts of this article), although he states that "The first reliable, unambiguous mention of a stage production of shadow theater is attested to only in the 11th century"; Chang Hsin-fang 張新芳, "Tan-t'an p'i-ying hsi yü k'ui-lei hsi" 談談皮影戲與傀儡戲, *Kuo-li li-shih po-wu-kuan kuan-k'an* 國立歷史博物館館刊 10 (1979), p. 11; Wang Chieh-mou 王杰謀, "Man-t'an wo-kuo te p'i-ying hsi" 漫談我國的皮影戲, *Ch'ang-liu* 暢流 62.6 (Nov. 1980), p. 35.

⁴ There are many names for the Chinese shadow puppet theater, such as: *ying hsi* 影戲, *ying-tzu hsi* 影子戲, *p'i-ying hsi* 皮影戲, *ying-teng hsi* 影燈戲, *teng-ying hsi* 燈影戲, *t'u-ying hsi* 土影戲, *chih-ying hsi* 紙影戲, *yang-p'i hsi* 羊皮戲, and so forth.

It is also necessary to point out, as does Kuan Chün-che 關俊哲 on the first page of the preface to his book on the Peking shadow theater, that the essential elements of shadow-puppet theater are very simple.⁵ That is, it requires only a small amount of apparatus, needs few performers, is easily transportable, and is easy to learn. Therefore this type of theatrical readily spreads to new places, either as a physical apparatus or as an idea. These aspects of shadow theater are important for evaluating the chronological distance between claims for the origin of the idea of shadow performance and the clear development of the idea into actual theatrical performance. Of course, high levels of skill in vocal delivery, manipulation of the puppets, and manufacturing the puppets and other apparatus are essential for virtuoso performance.

THE CLAIM FOR WESTERN HAN ORIGIN

The Shih-chi Account of Emperor Wu and His Concubine

All claims for a second century BC Chinese origin of shadow-puppet performance are ultimately based upon a very brief episode of 121 BC concerning emperor Wu of the Han dynasty as recounted in *Shih-chi* 史記 (completed ca. 90 BC). This account is found with nearly identical wording in two places in *Shih-chi*: "Annals of [Emperor] Hsiao-wu" ("Hsiao-wu pen-chi" 孝武本紀) and "Treatise on the Feng and Shan Sacrifices" ("Feng Shan shu" 封禪書).⁶

The next year (121 BC), Shao-weng, a man of Ch'i, by means of his [recitation for] methods (or formulas) for [communicating with] ghosts and deities, gained audience with His Highness. His Highness had a concubine Wang whom he favored, but the concubine had died. Shao-weng,

⁵ Kuan, *Pei-ching*, preface, p. 1.

⁶ Ssu-ma T'an 司馬談 (d. 110 BC) and Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷 (ca. 145-ca. 86 BC), *Shih-chi* 史記 (completed ca. 90 BC) (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1959) 12, p. 458 [6a], and 28, p. 1387 [4b], respectively. References to the dynastic histories cite the page numbers of the Pona edn. in brackets. Other page numbering alternatives in brackets, below, are used where an edition gives both styles.

To minimize unwarranted textual interpretations due to free translation, enthusiastic inference, or wishful thinking, I have intentionally translated the relevant sources in a very literal manner. With the exception of the first few lines, the text of *Shih-chi* 12 was either never completed or lost; the missing text was replaced with the text of ch. 28 by a later person. See Burton Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian of China* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1961) 1, p. 375, and 2, p. 41; Edouard Chavannes, trans., *Les Mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* (1895-1905; rpt. Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1967) 2, p. 511, and 3, p. 470; Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川龜太郎 (1865-1946), *Shiki kaichū kōshō* 史記會注考證 (1932-34; rpt. Taipei: Hung-shih ch'u-pan-she, 1983), 211.

by means of his methods (or formulas) [and techniques],⁷ presumably, at night caused the images (*mao* 貌) of the concubine as well as the Ghost of the Hearth to arrive (appear). The Son of Heaven, from inside his hanging curtain (*wei* 帷), gazing at a distance (*wang* 望) saw it.⁸ 其明年齊人少翁以鬼神方見上。上有所幸王夫人。夫人卒。少翁以方術⁹蓋夜致王夫人及竈鬼之貌云。天子自帷中望見焉。

This is the entire episode and there is nothing in it descriptive of the use of shadows. The word *mao* denotes only the image or appearance of something and can also denote an apparition created by supernatural means.¹⁰ In the Han period, *wei* denoted a kind of vertically hanging curtain, but not necessarily an enclosure.¹¹ *Wang* means "to look at [something] in the distance," a verb not especially appropriate for watching shadows on a screen.¹² The grammatical framing structure *kai... yün* 蓋...云 is commonly used to express a writer's skepticism about the enclosed statement, "presumably...[is so]."¹³

The content of the above passage from *Shih-chi* and the surrounding text in the latter part of *chüan* 28 arouse suspicions about the authenticity of this entire section of "Feng Shan shu." The text has little to do with the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, and seems to be mostly a slander on the emperor Wu. Although it is plausible that the gossip about this episode ascribed to 121 BC could have reached Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷, then approximately twenty-four years old, it would seem injudicious to have included this and other unflattering information in the historical record of the reigning mon-

⁷ Whether his methods (formulas) and techniques were magical, mechanical, chemical, or optical is not specified.

⁸ Cf. the translation in Chang, "Lost Roots," p. 17.

⁹ The Po-na edition at *ch.* 28, p. 25a, omits *shu* 術, while the Chung-hua edition at *ch.* 28, p. 1387, has *shu*. Both editions include the word in *ch.* 12. Otherwise the language of both editions in *ch.* 12 and 28 is identical. Takigawa (*Shiki*, p. 213) follows the Po-na edition.

¹⁰ Edward H. Schafer, *Consolidated Supplements to Mathews* (Berkeley: n.p., 1987), p. 33. Two-syllable bound binomes of the type called "adverbs of manner", e.g., *X-jan* (X-然), are usually defined in dictionaries by a phrase ending in ... 之貌.

¹¹ Hsü Shen 許慎 (30-124), *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu* 說文解字, completed ca. 100 (1963; rpt. Hong Kong: T'ai-p'ing shu-chü, 1966) 7B, p. 21b [p. 159]: 在旁曰帷 "located at the side we say *wei* (hanging curtain)"; in contrast to 帷在上曰幕 "when a *wei* is located above we say *mu* (valance)."

¹² *Wang* is the common verb for gazing at the moon, *wang yüeh* 望月.

¹³ As discussed by Lu Yao-tung 遼耀東, "Han Wu-ti feng shan yü Shih-chi Feng-shan shu" 漢武帝封禪與史記封禪書, in Kuo-li chung-hsing ta-hsüeh li-shih hsi 國立中央大學歷史系, ed., *Ti-san chieh shih-hsüeh-shih kuo-chi yen-t'ao-hui lun-wen chi* 第三屆史學史國際研討會論文集 (Taipei: Chung-ch'ing-feng ch'u-pan-she, 1991), pp. 284-86, who defines this framing structure as 疑之也.

arch. It is well known that Ssu-ma Ch'ien was harshly treated by the emperor, and it seems odd that he might paint such a negative picture and risk further punishment.¹⁴

Chiang Yü-hsiang 江玉祥 analyzes this incident, as recorded in *Shih-chi*, as well as some of the later variants (see below), and concludes that the image of concubine Wang (also to be known as Li) was produced by shadows, but the incident itself was not the antecedent to shadow theater.¹⁵

Subsequent Accounts of the Emperor Wu Incident

Before the eleventh century, all references to putative shadow performance are (to my knowledge) merely variants or elaborations of the emperor Wu episode. In what follows, the variant accounts are examined in chronological order.

The earliest is found in four surviving versions of a fragment from Huan T'an's 桓譚 (ca. 43 BC-28 AD) *Hsin-lun* 新論, completed in about 26 AD. The extant editions of *Hsin-lun* are reconstructions from fragments: one edition by Sun Feng-i 孫馮翼 in 1802 and the other by Yen K'o-chün 嚴可均 in 1815; there are some differences in their reconstructions.¹⁶ Three of the *Hsin-lun* versions (Pokora's numbers 150A-C) recount the incident. Writ-

¹⁴ Several scholars have questioned the authenticity of the "Feng-shan shu" sect. of *Shih-chi*: Chang Hsin-ch'eng 張心徵, *Wei-shu t'ung-k'ao* 偽書通考 (Shanghai: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1939), pp. 481-86, cites various scholars who argue that some sections of *Shih-chi*, including parts of the "Feng-shan shu," were missing by the first century AD and were added in by various people at that time. Ts'ui Shih 崔適 (1852-1924), *Shih-chi t'an-yuan* 史記探源 (1910; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1986), pp. 18, 102-3, regards all eight treatises in *Shih-chi* as spurious. Ch'iu Ch'ung-sun 丘瓊孫, *Li-tai yüeh-chih lü-chih chiao-shih* 歷代樂志律志校釋 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1964), pp. 7-8, favorably cites Ts'ui Shih and others. Liang Ch'i-ch'ao 梁啟超 and Ch'ü Ying-sheng 曲穎生 (quoted in Cheng Liang-shu 鄭良樹, *Hsü wei-shu t'ung-k'ao* 續偽書通考 [Taipei: Hsüeh-sheng shu-chü, 1984], pp. 1010-11 and 1021-1023, respectively) express suspicion about the authenticity of "Feng Shan shu" or parts thereof. Lu ("Han Wu-ti," p. 278, esp. n. 8) questions the reliability of "Feng Shan shu" and cites various scholars who regard it as a slander on emperor Wu. Watson (*Records* 2, p. 13) notes that the treatise "has traditionally been interpreted as a veiled attack by Ssu-ma Ch'ien upon Emperor Wu," but also seems to accept it as reliable (Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien: Grand Historian of China* [New York: Columbia U.P., 1958], pp. 115-16). B. J. Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), p. 89, notes that it ends "with a veiled attack on this emperor and his grandiose ideas. Doubts as to its genuineness have not been raised." Beck (n. 3) dismisses the work of Ch'iu Ch'ung-sun (*Yüeh-chih*) without discussion.

¹⁵ Chiang, *Ying-hsi*, pp. 9-12.

¹⁶ Huan T'an (ca. 43 BC-28 AD), *Huan-tzu Hsin-lun* 桓子新論, completed ca. 26 AD, ed. Sun Feng-i (fl. 1797-1802) (SPFY edn.), p. 13b, where he also quotes the variant versions. *Huan-tzu Hsin-lun*, ed. Yen K'o-chün (1762-1843) in *Ch'üan shang-ku san-tai Ch'in-Han San-kuo Liu-ch'ao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, sect. "Ch'üan Hou-Han wen" 全後漢文 (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1963) 15, p. 6a, seems to synthesize the "best" version and only cites the four sources for the variant versions but does not quote them.

ten more than one hundred years after the completion of *Shih-chi*, and beyond living memory of the event and the attendant gossip, the three relevant versions of this *Hsin-lun* fragment largely follow the *Shih-chi* account. However, versions no. 150A and no. 150C name the concubine as Li, but no. 150B and no. 150D name her Wang. Versions 150A-C all name the sorcerer Shao-chün,¹⁷ and use wording that indicates that some form of the fragment is the antecedent of the *Han-shu* 漢書 version. (Concubines Wang and Li are discussed below, under "The *Han-shu* version".) Although the three versions of the *Hsin-lun* fragment are not identical, their differences are mostly minor. The first version (150A) is preserved in the commentary of Li Shan 李善 (d. 689) on a poem by P'an Yüeh 潘岳 (*t. An-jen* 安仁, 247-300) in *Wen hsüan* 文選.¹⁸

Concubine Li, who was favored by emperor Wu of Han, died. A Gentleman of Methods, Li Shao-chün, said that he could cause her spirit (*shen* 神) to arrive (or appear). Thereupon at night he set up candles and spread out a tent (*wo* 幄), and had the emperor stay in another drapery (*chang* 帳). [The emperor] at a distance (*yao* 遙) saw an attractive girl similar to (*ssu* 似) the appearance (*chuang* 狀) of the concubine. 夜設燭張幄令帝居他帳. 遙見好女似夫人之狀. [The girl] returned to a drapery and sat down.¹⁹

The second version (150B) of the *Hsin-lun* fragment is preserved in *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* 北堂書鈔, compiled by Yü Shih-nan 虞世南 (558-638).²⁰ This is the earliest classified digest or "encyclopedia" 類書 that preserves a version of this event (see below for more on classified digests). However, the actual wording of the *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* version is quite similar to that of no. 150A and is thus very different from that given in Sun's reconstruction of *Hsin-lun*. Sun's version of no. 150B is:

Emperor Wu unceasingly pined for and thought of concubine Li. There was a Gentleman of Methods, Li Shao-weng of Ch'i, who said that he

¹⁷ Sun (*Huan-tzu Hsin-lun*, p. 19b) incorrectly transcribes the sorcerer's name in *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* as Shao-weng.

¹⁸ Hsiao T'ung 蕭統 (501-531), *Wen-hsüan*, commentary by Li Shan (d. 689) (Hong Kong: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1936) 23, p. 501. Timotheus Pokora, trans., *Hsin-lun (New Treatise) and Other Writings by Huan Tan (43 B.C.-28 A.D.)* Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies 20 (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1975), pp. 151-52; Timotheus Pokora, "Hsin-lun," Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), pp. 158-60. *Huan-tzu Hsin-lun*, p. 13b, which omits the final *yeh* 也.

¹⁹ Cf. Pokora's translation (*New Treatise*, p. 151, version #150A).

²⁰ Yü Shih-nan (558-638), comp., *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* (Taipei: Wen-hai ch'u-pan-she, 1962) 132, p. 5b [p. 218], *s.v.* *chang* 帳.

could cause the spirit (*shen*) of the concubine to arrive (appear). Thereupon at night he set up candles and lamps in a tent and hanging curtain (*wo wei* 幄帷), and had the emperor stay inside a separate drapery (*chang*). [The emperor] gazing at a distance (*yao wang* 遙望) saw the image (*mao*) of concubine Li. 夜設燭燈於幄帷令帝居別帳中. 遙望見李夫人之貌.²¹

In contrast, the actual *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* version of no. 150B is as follows. Note that the concubine's name is Wang, as in *Shih-chi*. The commentary on *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* by K'ung Kuang-t'ao 孔廣陶 (fl. 1888) notes that *Shih-chi*, *chüan* 12, writes the concubine's name as Wang, while the *Wen-hsüan* commentary and *Tai-p'ing yü-lan* 太平御覽 versions name her Li.

Concubine Wang, who was favored by emperor Wu, died, and the emperor sorely grieved over her. A Gentleman of Methods, Li Shao-chün, said that he could cause her spirit soul (*shen hun* 神魂) to arrive (appear). Thereupon at night he set up candles, spread out a tent (*wo*), and had the emperor stay inside another drapery (*chang*). [The emperor], gazing at a distance (*yao wang*) saw an attractive girl similar to (*ssu*) the concubine. 夜設燭張幄令帝居於它帳中. 遙望見好女似夫人.

The third version of the *Hsin-lun* fragment (150C) is preserved in *Tai-p'ing yü-lan*, compiled by Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) and others in 983.

Li Shao-chün established (or placed) the spirit shadow (*shen ying* 神影) of emperor Wu's concubine Li inside a drapery (*chang*) and had the emperor gaze at a distance (*wang*) and see it 置武帝李夫人神影於帳中令帝望見之.²²

None of the three versions of this fragment provides even a hint as to how the image was produced. The first two versions have no mention of shadows, but the third, preserved in a text completed in 983, uses the term *shen ying* in a context in which it can be interpreted as either a pair of nouns ("spirit and shadow") or as an adjective-noun construction ("spirit shadow"). The preferred interpretation is uncertain and the implication of the term is not clear. As we see below, the 983 AD record is the earliest use of *ying* ("shadow") in all the references to this event. It would be overreaching to create a shadow-performance out of this simple episode. A girl dressed in the favorite concubine's clothing, seen at a distance in the flickering

²¹ Cf. Pokora's translation of Sun's reconstruction (*New Treatise*, p. 151, #150B).

²² *Tai-p'ing yü-lan*, comp. Li Fang (925-996) et al. in 983 (1962; rpt. Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1968) 699, p. 3a (*s.v.* *chang* 帳) text uses *kuan* 觀 "to observe" rather than *wang* 望, as in Sun's reconstructed text. Cf. Pokora's translation (*New Treatise*, p. 152, #150C).

light of lamps and candles, filtered through the grief, wishful thinking, and anticipation (and gullibility) of the thirty-five-year-old emperor Wu, does not require the imaginary invention of a shadow performance. Therefore it is very likely that this use of *ying* implies a shadow projected onto the front of a screen or curtain, and not a shadow or image seen through a translucent screen.

The Han-shu account

The next account of this episode is found in the section "Accounts of External Kin" ("Wai-ch'i chuan" 外戚傳) of *Han-shu* 漢書, compiled by Pan Ku 班固 (32-92) and others mostly from 54 to 92, about 150 years after the completion of *Shih-chi*. *Han-shu* was the first successor to *Shih-chi* in what was to become a major historiographic genre known as Dynastic Histories, and its coverage was limited to the Western Han dynasty. Since it overlapped with the *Shih-chi* coverage of the early part of the Western Han, in principle we would expect to find these records largely the same, and although the *Han-shu* account of emperor Wu's incident is somewhat more elaborated, in most of their essential features the two versions are nearly the same:

His Highness unceasingly pined for and thought of concubine Li. A Gentleman of Methods, Shao-weng of Ch'i, said that he could cause her spirit (*shen*) to arrive (appear). Thereupon at night he set out lamps and candles, erected hanging curtains and drapery (*wei chang* 帷帳), arranged wine and meat [offerings], and then had His Highness stay in another drapery (*chang*). [His Highness], gazing out at a distance (*yao wang*), saw an attractive girl resembling (*ju* 如) the image (*mao*) of concubine Li. 夜張燈燭設帷帳陳酒肉而令上居他帳。遙望見好女如李夫人之貌。[The image] returned to a tent (*wo*) and sat, then paced about [again]. Furthermore [His Highness] was not able to go to look at [it].²³

Again, there is no mention of shadows, even though there are lamps and candles in unspecified locations. The most striking contrast with the *Shih-chi* account is in the name of the concubine. At one point *Han-shu* mentions two concubines, Wang of Chao and Li of Chung-shan, both of whom died young.²⁴ Elsewhere it describes the severe illness and death of concubine Li,²⁵ which is followed by the passage translated above. Even

²³ Pan Ku (32-92) et al., *Han-shu* (mostly written during 54-92) (Peking: Chung-hua, 1962) 97A, p. 3952 [15a]. Cf. the free translation of this passage in Burton Watson, trans., *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China: Selections from the History of the Former Han by Pan Ku* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1974), p. 249.

²⁴ *Han-shu* 97A, p. 3950 [13a].

²⁵ *Han-shu* 97A, pp. 3951-52 [14a-15a].

though the composition of *Han-shu* took place well beyond any living memory of the event, and therefore had to depend upon either transmitted documents or attenuated gossip, it is surprising that the name of the supposedly favorite concubine is not consistent with that found in *Shih-chi*. The name change may be due to the influence of the account written in *Hsin-lun*.

A second version of the emperor Wu incident is found in *Han-shu*, "Treatise on the Suburban Sacrifices, part 1" ("Chiao-ssu chih, shang" 郊祀志上):²⁶

The next year a man of Ch'i, Shao-weng, by means of his [reputation for] methods (formulas) gained audience with His Highness. His Highness had a concubine Li whom he favored, but the concubine died. Shao-weng, by means of his methods (formulas) presumably (*kai...yün*) at night caused the images (*mao*) of the concubine as well as the Ghost of the Hearth to arrive (appear). The Son of Heaven, from inside his hanging curtain (*wei*), gazing at a distance (*wang*) saw it. 蓋夜致夫人及竈鬼之貌云。天子自帷中望見焉。

This is clearly abbreviated from the *Shih-chi* version and adds nothing to help explicate the account.

The Lun-heng account

A somewhat different version of the incident is from a source contemporary with *Han-shu* - Wang Ch'ung's 王充 (27-91) *Lun-heng* 論衡, written from about 55 to about 91 AD.

Emperor Wu favored concubine Wang. When concubine Wang died [emperor Wu] pined to see her form (*hsing*) 思見其形. A Gentleman of the Way, by means of his methods (formulas) and techniques, made the concubine's form. When the form was completed [it] went in and out of the palace gate. 作夫人形。形成出入宮門. Emperor Wu was astonished, stood up and greeted it. Suddenly he could not see it again. Presumably (*kai*) this was not something real of the natural [world]. It was an artifice [made by] a Gentleman of Methods' clever deception. Thus after one look it seemed to suddenly dissolve, disperse, vanish, and was gone.²⁷

Wang Ch'ung's skepticism in *Lun-heng* is well-known, so it is not surprising that he labels this as a deception. But there is no description as to how the deception was performed: neither curtains, nor lamps and can-

²⁶ *Han-shu* 25A, p. 1219 [20b].

²⁷ Wang Ch'ung (27-91), *Lun-heng*, written during ca. 55 - ca. 91 (SPY edn.) 18, pp. 3b-4a. Cf. the translation of Alfred Forke, *Lun Heng: Philosophical Essays of Wang Ch'ung* (1907-11; rpt. New York: Paragon, 1962) 1, p. 97.

dles, nor shadows. In contrast to the contemporary *Han-shu* account, *Lun-heng* uses the *Shih-chi* name for the concubine, Wang.

The Han-wu ku-shih account

Han-wu ku-shih 漢武故事 also recounts a version. Although traditionally attributed to Pan Ku, it is actually a composition by an unknown author probably in the third century.²⁸

At this time [emperor Wu's] concubine Li, whom he favored, had died. His Highness pined and grieved for her very much. Shao-weng said that he could cause her spirit (*shen*) to arrive (appear). Thereupon at night he spread out drapery (*chang*) and bright candles, arranged wine and food [offerings], and had His Highness stay inside another drapery. [His Highness] from a distance saw (*yao chien*) concubine Li 夜張帳明燭陳酒食令上居他帳中，遙見李夫人，but he was not able to go look at [her].²⁹

This seems to be an abridged version of the *Han-shu* account, although there is no mention of any kind of image (form), nor of shadows.

The Sou-shen chi account

The version in *Sou-shen chi* 搜神記, compiled by the minor historian Kan Pao 干寶 (ca. 285–ca. 360) sometime between 335 and 349,³⁰ seems to be an elaboration of the *Han-shu* account:

Emperor Wu of Han at this time favored concubine Li. After the concubine died, the emperor unceasingly pined and thought about [her]. A Gentleman of Methods, Li Shao-weng of Ch'i, said that he could cause her spirit (*shen*) to arrive (appear). Thereupon at night after having spread out hanging curtains and drapery (*wei chang*), and bright lamps and candles, he had the emperor stay in another drapery and gaze out at a distance (*yao wang*) at her. [The emperor] saw a beautiful girl staying inside the drapery who resembled (*ju*) the appearance (*chuang*) of concubine Li. 夜施帷帳明燈燭而令帝居他帳，遙望之。見美女居帳中如李夫人之狀。 [The appearance] returned to a tent (*wo*) and sat, then paced [about]. Furthermore [the Emperor] was not able to go look at [her].³¹

²⁸ Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 48–49; Chang, *Wei-shu*, pp. 547–48; Huang Yün-mei 黃雲眉, *Ku-chin wei-shu k'ao pu-cheng* 古今偽書考補証 (1932; Chi-nan: Ch'i-Lu shu-she, 1980), pp. 95–97.

²⁹ *Han-wu ku-shih*, falsely attributed to Pan Ku, but of a later date, in Wang Wen-ju 王文濡, comp., *Shuo-k'ü* 說庫 (1915; rpt. Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1963), p. 2a.

³⁰ Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 55–62, discuss the problems of dating the received versions of the *Sou-shen chi* text.

³¹ Kan Pao (ca. 285–ca. 360), *Hsin-chiao Sou-shen chi* 新校搜神記, compiled during 335–

This largely resembles the *Han-shu* account. Again, there is no indication of the means by which the image was produced, nor is there any mention of shadows.³²

The long version in Shih-i chi

Another collection of “strange tales” that records the emperor Wu anecdote is *Shih-i chi* 拾遺記, compiled by Wang Chia 王嘉 (d. ca. 386).³³ This version is much longer and more elaborated in comparison with all other versions of the episode. Although it provides an explanation for the creation of the image, there is still no mention of shadows.

Formerly the emperor deeply favored concubine Li. After she died, [the emperor] thought about and dreamed of her, and sometimes [expressed his] wish to see the concubine. The emperor appeared so haggard from grief that his consorts were all worried. He issued an edict for Li Shao-chün [to come] to converse with him. [The emperor] said, “We pine for concubine Li. Is there a way to reach her?”

Shao-chün said, “[Your Highness] may see her from a distance, but you may not share the same curtain or tent (*wei wo*) with her 可遙見不可同於帷幄. Submerged in the dark sea there is a marvelous stone. Its color is blue and it is light as a feather or plume. When it is excessively cold, the stone is warm, but when the heat is excessive then the stone is cold. When one carves it into a human image, it divinely awakens and is no different than a real human. If you cause this stone image to be brought here then [Your Highness's] concubine will arrive (appear) 使此石像往則夫人至矣! This stone person will be able to transmit and translate human words and speech. There will be a voice but there will be no breath.

349, ed. Hu Huai-ch'ên 胡懷琛 (b. 1886) (1931; rpt. 1957; rpt. Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1959) 2, p. 15. Cf. the free translation in Kenneth DeWoskin and J. I. Crump, Jr., trans., *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1995), p. 24.

³² Ch'ên Yüan-lung 陳元龍 (1652–1736), comp., *Ko-chih ching-yüan* 格致鏡原 (Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1971) 60, p. 11a [p. 2705], a collection of material on the origins of customs and objects, cites a modified *Sou-shen chi* version of this event under its category *ying-hsi* 影戲 “shadow theater,” and prefaces the account with: “From ancient times it has been handed down that the origin of shadow theater came from emperor Wu of Han...” 故老相承言影戲之原出於漢武帝。However, the actual source of this seems to be the unattributed entry under the *ying-hsi* category in *Pai-shih hui-pien* 裨史彙編 55, p. 11a [p. 865], compiled by Wang Ch'i 王圻 (fl. 1565–1614) (Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1969), which, in turn, is an almost verbatim copy of the entry in *Shih-wu chi-yüan* 事物紀原 9, p. 352 (see below).

³³ Wang Chia (d. ca. 386), *Shih-i chi* 5, pp. 4a–5a [p. 1585]; text reconstructed from fragments by Hsiao Ch'i 蕭綺 (fl. ca. 530), in Ch'eng Jung 程榮 (fl. 1592), comp., *Han Wei ts'ung-shu* 漢魏叢書 (Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1966). For the date of Wang Chia see Michael C. Rogers, *The Chronicle of Fu Chien* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 287, n. 749.

Thus you will be cognizant of the difference between deities [and humans].”

The emperor said, “Can this stone image be obtained?”

Shao-chün said, “For that I request a high-masted ship and the gigantic strength of a thousand men who can sail upon the sea and climb trees. Cause them all to be illuminated in the techniques of The Way and provision them with a drug that prevents death. Then when they go upon the dark sea, after a period of ten years they will return. Of the men who previously went, some will have ascended to the clouds never to return home, some will leave their [human] form and feign death. Only four or five men will be able to come back. When you obtain this stone then command the workmen to carve and make the form of the concubine in accordance with an earlier drawing of her. When the carving is completed place it inside a light gauze valance (*mu*) just like when she was alive” 依先圖刻作夫人形。刻成置於輕紗幬裡宛若生時。

The emperor was greatly elated and asked Shao-chün, “May I go near [the image]?”

Shao-chün said, “This may be compared with you suddenly having a dream [about her] at midnight, then when it becomes light can you go near to observe [her]? This stone is poisonous and it is proper to be at a distance while gazing at it, but one cannot come close to [it]. Do not make light of something venerated for a myriad ages and be misled that this is [just] a fiendish thing.”

The emperor thereupon followed his admonishment on seeing the concubine. When [the audience] was finished, Shao-chün was thereupon deputed [to go on this mission]. In the spring, this stone human [image] was made and [The emperor] regularly revered it. [The emperor] no longer pined for and dreamed [of the concubine]. Thereupon he had constructed a Dais of Numinous Dreams and every year in due season sacrificed to it.

The Classified Digests

Finally we examine “quotations” in classified digests – compilations of supposedly verbatim literary references in a large variety of topics. As shown here, the compilers of classified digests took liberties with their quotations. If the anecdote about emperor Wu of Han was regarded as the first record of shadow performance, we might expect to find relevant hints, or even overt statements, in the quotations. Even better would be to find a category in a classified digest devoted to the topic of shadow performance,

but no such category is found before the eleventh century.

Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao

The first classified digest to recount the emperor Wu incident was *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao*, which records the fragment (150B) from *Hsin-lun* under the topic “*chang* 帳” (drapery); this was discussed above.

I-wen lei-chü

The next classified digest to preserve an account was *I-wen lei-chü* 藝文類聚, compiled by Ou-yang Hsün 歐陽詢 (557–641) and others. In it, the quotation is attributed to *Han-shu* and subsumed under the topic “*teng* 燈” (“lamps”); however the quotation is slightly altered and abridged:

Emperor Wu unceasingly pined for and thought of concubine Li. A Gentleman of Methods, Shao-weng of Ch'i, said that he could cause her spirit (*shen*) to arrive (appear). Thereupon at night having set up lamps and candles, hanging curtains and a tent (*wei*), he had the emperor stay in another drapery (*chang*). [The emperor], gazing out at a distance (*yao wang*), saw an attractive girl resembling (*ju*) the image (*mao*) of concubine Li 夜設燈燭帷幄而令帝居他帳，遙望見好女如李夫人之貌，but he was not able to go to look at [it].³⁴

Ch'u-hsüeh chi

The next classified digest to recount the anecdote was *Ch'u-hsüeh chi* 初學記, compiled by Hsü Chien 徐堅 (659–729) and others. *Ch'u-hsüeh chi* cites it in two places from two different sources. The first from *Shih-i-chi*, and the second from *Han-wu ku-shih*, both in altered and abridged forms. First the *Shih-i-chi* version:

After emperor Wu of Han's concubine Li died, [the emperor] constantly pined for and dreamed [about her]. He commanded workmen to make concubine Li's form (*hsing*). Sometimes he placed [the form] inside a light gauze valance (*mu*) just like when she was alive. 作李夫人形。或置於輕紗幕裡婉(=宛)若生時。The emperor was greatly exhilarated.³⁵

Second, from *Han-wu ku-shih*:

Concubine Li, whom His Highness favored, died. His Highness pined and grieved for her very much. Shao-weng of Ch'i said that he could cause her spirit (*shen*) to arrive (appear). Thereupon at night he set out

³⁴ Ou-yang Hsün (557–641) et al., *I-wen lei-chü* (Peking: Chung-hua, 1965) 80, p. 1368.

³⁵ Hsü Chien 徐堅 (659–729) et al., *Ch'u-hsüeh chi* 初學記 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1962) 25, p. 598, s.v. *wei mu* 帷幕 “hanging curtains and valances.”

bright candles. His Highness stayed inside another drapery (*chang*) and gazing out at a distance (*yao wang*) saw concubine Li 夜張明燭, 上居他帳中, 遙望見李夫人, but he was not able to go look at [her].³⁶

I find no reference to the emperor Wu anecdote in the classified digest *Pai-shih liu-t'ieh shih-lei chi* 白氏六帖事類集, compiled by Pai Chü-i 白居易 (772–846), nor in its later augmented version *Pai K'ung liu-t'ieh* 白孔六帖, with supplementary material by K'ung Ch'uan 孔傳 (fl. 1150). However, the former has, for the first time (to my knowledge), a category labeled “*t'sa hsi* 雜戲,” but the entries and sources all seem to be about theatricals comprised only of music and dance.³⁷ The material added to this category in the augmented version also has nothing relating to shadow performance.³⁸ However, there is a remarkable entry regarding a sensational illusionist from India (T'ien-chu 天竺) who cuts off his hands and feet, and slashes his intestines and stomach, and whom emperor Kao-tsung 高宗 (r. 650–683) of the T'ang dynasty forbade entry into China.³⁹ Although the text ambiguously cites only a “Treatise on Music” (“Yüeh chih” 樂志) as its source, this incident is recorded in the “Treatise on Rites and Music” (“Li yüeh chih” 禮樂志) in *Hsin Tang-shu* 新唐書, with a parallel record in the “Treatise on Sounds and Music” (“Yin-yüeh chih” 音樂志) in *Chiu Tang-shu* 舊唐書.⁴⁰ Even though this does not relate to shadow performance, it does affirm the commerce in theatrical entertainments between India and China in the seventh century (apparently via the Central Asian trade routes). The *Chiu Tang-shu* entry also claims that the body-slashing illusion had already come to China from India in the reign of emperor An 安帝 (r. 106–125) of the Eastern Han dynasty.

T'ai-p'ing yü-lan

Finally, the incident about emperor Wu is recounted in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* quoting a *Hsin-lun* fragment (150C) (see above), where for the first time the word *ying* 影 “shadow” is included. But, as pointed out above, the most

straightforward interpretation of this usage is a shadow projected onto a screen or curtain, not an image viewed through a translucent screen. Even the *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* category “shadows (*ying*)” has nothing about shadow performance.⁴¹

The specific meanings of *wei* 帷, *chang* 帳, *wo* 幄, and *mu* 幕 require detailed research, but it is clear that they are all terms for various kinds of curtains or canopies, apparently enclosures in which one sits. Even though in later ages some of these terms may denote hangings made of specific types of translucent textiles, we cannot assume the same characteristics apply to the textiles used in Han times. The *ch'ing sha mu* 輕紗幕 in *Shih-i chi* is some kind of transparent gauze curtain through which an object on the opposite side can be seen. But none of these can be assumed to be translucent screens (curtains) on which are viewed shadows projected from the opposite side.

Some of those who have written on shadow theater claim or imply the use of shadow performance by Buddhist preachers as part of their teaching and evangelical activities, particularly in popular sermons called *su-chiang* 俗講.⁴² For example, although Liu Mau-Tsai had earlier made clear that the real beginning of shadow theater is found in a text of the eleventh century (see below),⁴³ he also asserts that “in the seventh century, Buddhist monks used shadow figurines during their folksy sermons... if I understand the text correctly.”⁴⁴ His understanding is based upon the explanation by Sun K'ai-ti 孫楷第 of an obscure phrase (*li-p'u* 立鋪) in the Tun-huang manuscript of “Wang Chao-chün pien-wen” 王昭君變文.⁴⁵ Sun argues that the phrase refers to an image or drawing (painting), and concludes that “If my argument proves to be accurate” this is the actual origin of the shadow theater, but this “is not genuine shadow theater 非真正影戲也.” The equivocations by Sun and Liu are justifiable because careful scrutiny of the Tun-huang fragment shows that there is nothing in the verse or prose context of

⁴¹ *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi* 太平廣記, completed by Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) et al. in 978 (Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1968) 388, pp. 7b–8b [1924]; 228 [pp. 492–94] contains anecdotes about various types of entertainments, but no mention of shadow theater.

⁴² Sun, *K'uei-lei*, pp. 62–63; Liu, “Puppenspiel,” p. 134; Chang, “Tan-t'an,” p. 11; Chang, “Lost Roots,” pp. 17–19; Colin Mackerras, *Chinese Drama: A Historical Survey* (Peking: New World Press, 1990), p. 20; Hua, “Ts'ai-chih,” p. 50.

⁴³ Liu, “Puppenspiel,” p. 62.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁵ Sun, *K'uei-lei*, pp. 62–63, and Sun K'ai-ti, “Chin-shih hsi-ch'ü te ch'ang-yen hsing-shih ch'u-tzu k'uei-lei hsi ying hsi k'ao” 近世戲曲的唱演形式出自傀儡戲影戲考, in *idem, Ts'ang-chou chi* 滄州集 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1965), vol. 1, pp. 260–62. The *pien-wen* is in Wang Chung-min 王重民 et al., comp., *Tun-huang pien-wen chi* 敦煌變文集 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1957), p. 100.

³⁶ Hsü, *Ch'u-hsüeh chi* 25, p. 617, s.v. *chu* 燭 “candles.”

³⁷ Pai Chü-i (772–846), *Pai-shih liu-t'ieh shih-lei chi* (Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1969) 18, pp. 92b–93a [pp. 732–733]. Cf. William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1986), p. 774, s.v. “Tsa-chü” 雜劇.

³⁸ Pai Chü-i, with supplementary material by K'ung Ch'uan 孔傳 (fl. 1150), *Pai K'ung liu-t'ieh* 白孔六帖 (Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1969) 61, pp. 16b–20a [pp. 894–96].

³⁹ Pai and K'ung, *Pai K'ung* 61, p. 19a [p. 896].

⁴⁰ *Hsin Tang-shu* (completed in 1060) (Peking: Chung-hua, 1975) 22, p. 479 [4b–5a]. *Chiu Tang-shu* (completed in 943) (Peking: Chung-hua, 1975) 29, p. 1073 [8b]. My thanks to Luo Shaodan for helping me search for these citations.

the term under discussion that even hints at the use of shadow performance. It is most likely that the illustrations in *su-chiang* sermons were drawings or paintings similar to those described by Victor Mair.⁴⁶

In contrast, Chou I-pai 周貽白 contends that Sun K'ai-ti's explanation of the term in the *p'ien-wen* is not correct, and, arguing for a very different interpretation, says that it refers neither to pictures nor to shadows. He concludes that shadow theater began during the Northern Sung period.⁴⁷ He also asserts that it developed in China without any foreign influence.⁴⁸

Chiang Yü-hsiang asserts that conditions for the development of shadow theater were at their peak during the eighth and ninth centuries and, following the argument of Sun K'ai-ti, this form of theatrical originated during the T'ang period. Chiang further claims that shadow performances were used only by Taoists and Buddhists, consequently this "folk shadow-theater" did not come to the notice of the literate classes.⁴⁹ To support this claim, Chiang presents circumstantial evidence from various T'ang literary sources that he interprets on the basis of his assumption that sorcerers and Taoists employed shadows to produce their illusions. From this he infers that there were shadow plays during the T'ang period, but also acknowledges that there is no substantial evidence to support his assertions. Then, on this basis, he states that shadow theater developed in China without any foreign influence.⁵⁰ It is also relevant to note that the earliest actual references to shadow theater in China state that the stories performed were about events of the Three Kingdoms period (220-285), rather than about topics relating to Buddhism (see below).

Taking a different perspective, Ch'i Ju-shan 齊如山 argues that early forms of the shadow theater must have developed in north China during the T'ang because of its extensive later development in Shensi 陝西 province and the many references to it in Sung-era texts. He also accepts the emperor Wu of Han anecdote as indicative of the ultimate origin of shadow theater.⁵¹

The main difficulty with all of these claims about pre-Sung shadow performance is that they are based upon various types of conjecture and

inference without any substantive textual or material evidence. It appears as if most of these writers, after rejecting the substance of a purported second century BC origin, are still searching for some route to prove the domestic origin of Chinese shadow theater. But whether or not there were pre-eleventh-century shadow performances cannot be determined from these arguments. Although a cut-out from a drawing on paper can be the predecessor to a painted flat paper or leather figure, and thus the potential antecedent for shadow performance,⁵² it is the observation of the back-lit images through a translucent screen that turns a "picture performance" into shadow theater.

The textual variations and literary development of the emperor Wu episode, especially the overly imaginative twentieth-century versions, may be of interest as research topics in themselves, but such discussion goes beyond the scope of this essay.

Summary of the Pre-eleventh-century Sources

The chronological sequence of all pre-eleventh century records of the emperor Wu anecdote can be summarized as follows:

SOURCE	DATE OF COMPOSITION (COMPILATION)
<i>Shih-chi</i>	ca. 90 BC
<i>Hsin-lun</i>	26
<i>Han-shu</i>	54-92
<i>Lun-heng</i>	55-ca. 91
<i>Han-wu ku-shih</i>	3d century (?)
<i>Sou-shen chi</i>	335-349
<i>Shih-i chi</i>	ca. 386
<i>Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao</i>	ca. 630
<i>I-wen lei-chü</i>	ca. 640
<i>Wen-hsüan</i> (commentary)	ca. 680
<i>Ch'u-hsüeh chi</i>	ca. 720
<i>T'ai-p'ing yü-lan</i>	983

Within the more than one thousand years spanned by these twelve sources, there was ample opportunity for an imaginative writer or editor to make the slight alterations in wording that would at least be suggestive of shadow performance, but there is not even a trace of such wording. Even the use of the word *ying* "shadow" in the *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* account does not

⁴⁶ Mair, *Painting*, Pimpaneau, *Poupées*, p. 14, rejects the arguments of Sun K'ai-ti and Ch'i Ju-shan (see below for the latter).

⁴⁷ Chou, "Ying-hsi," pp. 70-73.

⁴⁸ Chou, *Hsi-chü shih*, vol. 1, pp. 137-38.

⁴⁹ Chiang, "Ying-hsi," pp. 12-16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-20, 24.

⁵¹ Ch'i Ju-shan, "T'an p'i-jen ying hsi" 談皮人影戲, in *Ch'i Ju-shan sui-pi* 齊如山隨筆 (Taipei: Chung-yang wen-wu kung-ying-she, 1953), pp. 26, 30 (rpt. in *Ch'i Ju-shan ch'üan-chi* 齊如山全集 [Taipei: Ch'i Ju-shan hsien-sheng i-chu pien-yin wei-yüan-hui, 1964], vol. 7). See also Chang, "Lost Roots," p. 19, and Pimpaneau, *Poupées*, p. 14.

⁵² Sun, *K'uei-lei*, p. 63; Mair, *Painting*, p. 83.

suggest shadows or images seen through a screen. Considering the large number of collections of "strange tales" (*chih-kuai* 志怪) produced during this period,⁵³ as well as the consciously fictional tales (*ch'uan-ch'i* 傳奇) that began to appear in the eighth century, one would expect some mention of shadow-puppet performance, if such a type of entertainment did exist within the culture. Since there are references to *k'uei-lei* 傀儡, marionette (string-puppet) theater, in various pre-seventh-century texts,⁵⁴ shadow performance should also have attracted some attention. My search has not been limited to the episode of emperor Wu of Han, but has included examining a very large number of pre-Sung texts, including the classified digests, for any evidence pertaining to shadow performance. So far, I have found nothing. Despite the risk in drawing inferences from silence, in this case the absence of shadow-puppet performance before the eleventh century looms too large to be disregarded.

THE FIRST RECORDS OF SHADOW-PUPPET THEATER

The first unambiguous reference to shadow-performance (theater) is in *Shih-wu chi-yüan* 事物紀原, compiled in the period roughly from 1078 to 1085 by Kao Ch'eng 高承 (fl. end of the eleventh century).⁵⁵ This large collection of explanations about the origins of material objects, terms, and activities cites the sources for some of its entries but not for others. The sole entry to explain the origin of "ying-hsi" 影戲 gives the emperor Wu anecdote without citation. The language of the main part of the account is quite different from that of the *Shih-chi* version, but has similarities to both the *Han-wu ku-shih* and *Sou-shen chi* versions. Following the anecdote, the *Shih-wu chi-yüan* entry asserts the origin of shadow-puppet theater and, what is more important, attests to the performance of this type of theatrical during the reign of emperor Jen 仁宗 (r. 1023-1063) of the Northern Sung dynasty. The entire entry reads:

⁵³ Campany, *Strange Writing*.

⁵⁴ As recorded in Li Ch'üan 厲荃 (fl. 1726), comp., *Shih-wu i-ming lu* 事物異名錄 (pref. 1726; Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1969) 26, pp. 7a-b [1063-64]; and Sun, *K'uei-lei*. These references to marionette theater contradict Liu's ("Puppenspiel," p. 135) assertion that the pre-11th-c. silence on shadow puppet performance "is most likely attributable to the negative attitude the educated world had vis-a-vis public entertainment."

⁵⁵ *Shih-wu chi-yüan* 事物紀原, attrib. Kao Ch'eng (fl. 1085) (TSCC edn.) 9, p. 352. This text is also found under the title *Shih-wu chi-yüan chi-lei* 集類, attrib. Kao Ch'eng (Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1969) 9, p. 26b [658]. Cf. translations in Dolby, "Chinese Puppetry," p. 112; Chang, "Lost Roots," pp. 17, 20.

From ancient times it has been handed down that the origin of the shadow theater started with the demise of concubine Li of emperor Wu of Han. A man of Ch'i, Shao-weng, said that he could cause her soul (*hun* 魂) to arrive (appear). His Highness unceasingly thought about the concubine. Thereupon he deputed [Shao-weng] to cause her to arrive (appear). Shao-weng at night made a square hanging curtain (*wei*) and set out lamps and candles. The emperor sat in another drapery (*chang*). From inside the hanging curtain he gazed out (*wang*) to see it. It seemed to be (*fang-fu*) the image of the concubine. 夜為方帷張燈燭。帝坐他帳。自帷中望見之。彷彿夫人像也。 Presumably [the emperor] was not able to go look at it. Starting from this [event] there was shadow theater (*ying-hsi* 影戲) in the world. But through the ages [mention of shadow theater] is never seen [in the written record]. In the time of emperor Jen of the Sung dynasty, among the people in the market places there were those who could talk about the events of the Three Kingdoms 三國 period (220-285). Some selected stories, embellished them with additional words, and made shadow people (*ying-jen* 影人). [These] were the first images made of the three-sided wars among [the kingdoms] of Wei, Wu, and Shu.

Citing only the authority of "ancient times," *Shih-wu chi-yüan* relates a version of the emperor Wu episode without any language about shadows, and then leaps to the conclusion that: "Starting from this [event] there was shadow theater in the world." However, this assertion is undermined by the next statement that "through the ages [mention of shadow theater] is never seen [in the written record]" until "the time of emperor Jen of the Sung dynasty." As demonstrated above, this assertion about the origin of shadow theater is baseless. There is indeed not even a hint of this type of theatrical before the eleventh century.⁵⁶ Since explaining origins is the objective of the *Shih-wu chi-yüan*, Kao Ch'eng had a strong incentive for forcing an interpretation to explain the beginning of an apparently popular theatrical form that he both labels with a name and attests as to its having been performed in the market places (presumably in Pien-liang 汴梁, modern K'ai-feng 開封, the capital of the Northern Sung). Finally there is a clear reference to shadow-puppet theater.

However, there are problems about the authenticity of the majority of entries in *Shih-wu chi-yüan*. The *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu* and other bibliographic critics acknowledge that a portion of its entries are by Kao Ch'eng, but also show that a very large number of entries were added later by other

⁵⁶ See also K'o, "T'ai-wan," p. 81.

writers. The distinction between the original entries and the later ones cannot be determined. *Shih-wu chi-yüan* is also criticized for inaccurate information about origins in some of its entries.⁵⁷ Without a way to distinguish between the original and later entries, we cannot be certain about the authenticity of this testimony to shadow theater, and therefore must attach a question mark to this reference.

The enigmatic collection of anecdotes titled *T'an-sou* 談藪 is sometimes cited as a source for an early reference to shadow theater. This title is also cited under various entries in *Tai-p'ing yü-lan* (completed in 983) and *Tai-p'ing kuang-chi* 太平廣記 (completed in 978), where it is attributed to a person of Sui-dynasty (581-617) times.⁵⁸ Other sources attribute it to a person who lived during the period 1078-1085, in the Northern Sung.⁵⁹ But, as *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu* and other critics point out, the extant *T'an-sou* contains many anecdotes about events of the Southern Sung from the Ch'ing-yüan 慶元 through the Ching-ting 景定 reign eras (1194-1264) – more than one hundred years later.⁶⁰ The extant editions of *T'an-sou*, which were assembled from surviving fragments, lack any mention of shadow performance.⁶¹ Presumably this title was applied to at least two books, the existing entries of which have been conflated into a single text.

Liu Mau-Tsai claims that *T'an-sou's* reference to shadow theater is found on page 1088 of *Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng* 古今圖書集成 (apparently the 1934 facsimile edition), but no mention of *T'an-sou* or of shadows is on that page.⁶² However, page 8420 contains a reference to a category called “ying-

hsi 影戲,” occurring in a work titled *Shih-wu yüan-shih* 事物原始 (sic); the latter in turn cites *T'an-sou* for a version of the emperor Wu anecdote.⁶³ This version is merely a paraphrase of the entry in *Shih-wu chi-yüan*, and contains the statement that: “Starting from this, later generations had shadow theater. But after [emperor] Wu of Han, [it] was not heard of [until] the time of emperor Jen of Sung...” 由是後世有影戲。然漢武以下無聞。宋仁宗時。I cannot find a text titled *Shih-wu yüan-shih* in any bibliographies, although it is also cited in *Shih-wu i-ming lu* 事物異名錄 (preface dated 1726).⁶⁴ My best guess is that it is an error for *Shih-wu chi-yüan*.

Another problematic text cited for an early reference to shadow theater is *Hsü ming-tao tsa-chih* 續明道雜誌, attributed to Chang Lei 張耒 (1054-1114).⁶⁵ This text and its main section, *Ming-tao tsa-chih*, can be found in several editions, all with attribution to Chang Lei, but none of the editions is earlier than the beginning of the Ming period, that is, the end of the fourteenth century. In addition, none of the critical or historical bibliographies lists either title, and none of the discussions about Chang Lei and his writings mentions either of these titles among his works.⁶⁶ It is therefore necessary to be skeptical about the authenticity of this text. The relevant part of the entry reads:⁶⁷

In the capital precincts there was a boy from a rich family. He was orphaned at a young age and had sole control of the [family] fortune. Since

⁵⁷ Chi Yün 紀昀 (1724-1805) et al., *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu [t'i-yao]* 四庫全書總目[提要], completed 1782 (1930; rpt. Taipei: I-wen yin-shu-kuan, 1957; hereafter, *SKCSTM*) 135, pp. 23b-24b [2652]; Chang, *Wei-shu*, p. 851; Hu Yü-chin 胡玉鑄 (1859-1940), *Ssu-k'u t'i-yao pu-cheng* 四庫提要補正 (Taipei: Chung-kuo tz'u-tien kuan, 1967), p. 265 [1057-59]; Etienne Balazs and Yves Hervouet, eds., *A Sung Bibliography* (Hong Kong: Chinese U.P., 1978), p. 322; Chao Kuo-chang 趙國璋 and Pan Shu-kuang 潘樹廣, comps., *Wen-hsien-hsüeh tz'u-tien* 文獻學辭典 (Nan-ch'ang: Chiang-hsi chiao-yü ch'u-pan-she, 1991), p. 502.

⁵⁸ *Index to Tai P'ing Yü Lan*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series 23, pp. 204, 236; *Tai-p'ing yü-lan*, “yin-shu mu” 引書目, p. 11b; *Index to Tai P'ing Kuang Chi*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series 15, pp. 28-29.

⁵⁹ Balazs and Hervouet, *Bibliography*, p. 191; Shang-hai t'u-shu-kuan 上海圖書館, comp., *Chung-kuo ts'ung-shu tsung-lu* 中國叢書綜錄 (Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1959-1962), vol. 2, p. 1063.

⁶⁰ *SKCSTM* 143, pp. 8b-9a [2812-13]; Chang, *Wei-shu*, p. 897; Hu, *Pu-cheng*, p. 285; Yü Chia-hsi 余嘉錫, *Ssu-k'u t'i-yao pien-cheng* 四庫提要辨證 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1980) 19, pp. 1166-68.

⁶¹ *T'an-sou* 談藪, compiler unknown, in *Pai-pu ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng* 百部叢書集成 (Taipei: I-wen yin-shu-kuan, n.d.; rpt. in *TSCC Hsin-pien* 新編 [Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng ch'u-pan kung-sso, 1985]).

⁶² Liu, “Puppenspiel,” p. 135, n. 40.

⁶³ Ch'en Meng-lei 陳夢雷 (1651-1741) et al., *Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng* 古今圖書集成, completed in 1725 (Taipei: Ting-wen shu-chü, 1977; facsimile rpt. of 1934 edn.), sect. “I-shu tien 藝術典,” vol. 4805, p. 8420 [ch. 805, p. 37b].

⁶⁴ E.g., *Shih-wu i-ming lu* 19, p. 5a (vol. 1, p. 815), and 26, p. 10a (2, p. 1069). Note that this text is contemporary with *Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng*, completed in 1725.

⁶⁵ Sun, *K'uei-lei*, pp. 64-65; Kuan, *Pei-ching*, p. 3; Meng Yüan lao 孟元老, *Tung-ching meng-hua lu chu* 東京夢華錄注, annot. Teng Chih-ch'eng 鄧之誠 (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1963), p. 147; K'o, “T'ai-wan,” p. 81; Dolby, “Chinese Puppetry,” p. 112; Ch'iu, “Tsai-sheng,” p. 113; Chang, “Lost Roots,” p. 19; Chiang, *Ying-hsi*, pp. 25-26; I, “Li-shih,” p. 20. Sun, Kuan, Dolby, Chang, and Chiang incorrectly cite the main part of this book, viz. *Ming-tao tsa-chih* 明道雜誌.

⁶⁶ *Chung-kuo ts'ung-shu tsung-lu*, vol. 2, p. 1057; Yüan Hsing-p'ei 袁行霽 and Hou Chung-i 侯忠義, comps., *Chung-kuo wen-yen hsiao-shuo shu-mu* 中國文言小說書目 (Peking: Pei-ching ta-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1981), p. 144; *SKCSTM* 17, pp. 1a-b [371], and 154, pp. 19a-20a [3065]; *Hsü t'ung-chih* 續通志, compiled ca. 1767 (Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1959) 562, pp. 6449-50; *Combined Indices to Twenty Historical Bibliographies*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series 10, vol. 4, p. 121; *Sung-shih* 宋史, completed 1345 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1977) 444, pp. 13113-15 [5a-6a]; Herbert Franke, ed., *Sung Biographies* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976), pp. 20-23; Balazs and Hervouet, *Bibliography*, pp. 404-5; Nienhauser, *Companion*, p. 233.

⁶⁷ *Hsü ming-tao tsa-chih*, attrib. Chang Lei (1054-1114), in Ts'ao Jung 曹溶 (1613-1685), comp., *Hsüeh-hai lei-pien* 學海類編 (Taipei: Wen-yüan shu-chü, 1964), p. 4b [3395]. Cf. the translation in Chang, “Lost Roots,” pp. 19-20.

a group of ne'er-do-wells recklessly led him around everywhere, this boy especially liked to watch performances of shadow theater (*ying-hsi*). Every time the performance reached the beheading of a certain Kuan (i.e., Kuan Yü 關羽), [the boy] shed tears for him and he would enjoin the performer to postpone it...

There is also an authentic and reliable source for a record of the performance of shadow theater. Meng Yüan-lao's 孟元老 (fl. 1110-1160) *Tung-ching meng-hua lu* 東京夢華錄 (preface dated 1148) describes everyday life from 1105 to 1125 in Pien-liang, the Northern Sung capital.⁶⁸ The relevant entry unambiguously attests to the presence and popularity of shadow-puppet theater at that time:

Since the Ch'ung-[ning] 崇寧 (1102-1106) and [Ta]-kuan 大觀 (1107-1110) reign periods, among the entertainers and artisans of the pleasure-quarter of the capital, there have been... (the text gives seven names) shadow-theater [performers].⁶⁹

The next reference to shadow theater appears after the capture of Pien-liang in 1126 by the non-Han peoples who established the Chin 金 dynasty, when the court, elite classes, and others fled south to continue the Sung dynasty from the new capital at Lin-an 臨安 (modern Hang-chou 杭州). *Tu-ch'eng chi-sheng* 都城紀勝 was written in 1235 by Nai-te weng 耐得翁, the pseudonym of an otherwise unknown person. The book is apparently authentic, although the bibliographic critics debate the identity of the author, some claiming his surname was Chao 趙.⁷⁰ This record attests to the presence of shadow theater early in the thirteenth century, apparently carried to the south by the refugees from Pien-liang and other places under the Northern Sung dynasty. The entry, under the category "artisans of the pleasure quarter," reads:⁷¹

⁶⁸ Balazs and Hervouet, *Bibliography*, pp. 150-52; Nienhauser, *Companion*, pp. 832-34; Chao and P'an, *Wen-hsien-hsüeh*, p. 240.

⁶⁹ Meng Yüan-lao (fl. 1110-1160), *Tung-ching meng-hua lu*, preface dated January, 1148, in Chang Hai-p'eng 張海鵬 (1755-1816), comp., *Hsüeh-chin t'ao-yüan* 學津討原 (Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng ch'u-pan kung-ssu, 1980) 5, pp. 2a-b [293]. Cf. the translations in Dolby, "Chinese Puppetry," p. 113; Chang, "Lost Roots," p. 21.

⁷⁰ Nai-te weng 耐得翁 (pseud.), *Tu-ch'eng chi-sheng* 都城紀勝, completed 1235, in Ting Ping 丁丙 (1832-1899), comp., *Wu-lin chang-ku ts'ung-pien* 武林掌故叢編 (Taipei: T'ai-lien kuo-feng ch'u-pan-she, 1967), the full text covers pp. 48-59 of vol. 1. *SKCSIM* 70, pp. 38b-39b [1478-79]; Yü, *Pien-cheng* 8, pp. 450-51; Balazs and Hervouet, *Bibliography*, pp. 153-54; Nienhauser, *Companion*, p. 833.

⁷¹ Nai-te, *Tu-ch'eng chi-sheng*, p. 11b [1, p. 56]. Cf. the translations in Idema and West, *Chinese Theater*, p. 80; Chang, "Lost Roots," p. 22.

Shadow theater: In the case of shadow theater (*ying-hsi*), the people of the capital precincts previously used plain paper which they carved and perforated [for puppets]. Later they used skin (that is, leather) adorned in multi-color to make them. Their stories are essentially the same as those who tell historical tales. For the most part true and false are placed side by side. For the just and loyal they carve [the puppets] with a proper appearance. For the depraved and evil they give them an ugly appearance. Presumably this is also to convey [judgments of] praise and blame in the visual [aspects of the] theater to the common people of the market place.

This source is the first to mention the material for constructing the shadow puppets. In the early stage, paper, an inexpensive but easily carved and also easily damaged material, was used. Later, leather was used, which is expensive, but is stronger and more durable than paper, and (when pared thin and oiled) is also more translucent. This merely suggests the humble social beginnings of shadow theater in China, and has no relevance to its origins, foreign or domestic. The introduction of leather puppets also did not eliminate paper puppets, since the latter have continued in use right up to the present time.⁷²

In the following generation, the presence of shadow theater in Lin-an is further recorded in another description of everyday life in the Southern Sung capital from 1241 to 1274 or later. *Meng Liang lu* 夢梁錄 was written about 1304 by the otherwise unknown Wu Tzu-mu 吳自牧. Under the category "artisans of the hundred [varieties of] theater" is a description that clearly draws upon the language of the shadow-puppet entry in *Tu-ch'eng chi-sheng* and gives additional detail.⁷³

Even more are those who can perform shadow theater. Originally in the Pien capital, at first they used plain paper which they carved and perforated [for puppets]. After this people cleverly and artistically used sheep (goat) skin to carve into [puppet] forms, then adorned and decorated them in multi-color. These [puppets] were not subject to harm or damage. In the city of Hang there are such people as Chia Ssu-lang 賈四郎, Wang Sheng 王昇, and Wang Jun-ch'ing 王閏卿 who are talented in arranging the cloth [curtain] and setting out the story without any flaws. Their sto-

⁷² Chiang, *Ying-hsi*, pp. 29-30.

⁷³ Wu Tzu-mu 吳自牧 (ca. 1304), *Meng Liang lu* 夢梁錄, in Ting, *Wu-lin chang-ku ts'ung-pien*, ch. 20, p. 12a [4277]. *SKCSIM* 70, pp. 39b-40b [1479]; Balazs and Hervouet, *Bibliography*, pp. 154-55; Nienhauser, *Companion*, p. 833; Chao and P'an, *Wen-hsien-hsüeh*, pp. 748-49. For the date of *Meng Liang lu*, see Idema and West, *Chinese Theater*, pp. 13-14. Cf. the translations in Dolby, "Chinese Puppetry," p. 113; Idema and West, *Chinese Theater*, p. 80.

ries are essentially the same as those who tell historical tales. For the most part true and false are placed side by side. For the just and loyal they carve [the puppets] with a proper appearance. For the depraved and evil they incise [the puppets] with an ugly shape. Supposedly this is also to convey [judgments of] praise and blame towards in the puppets' [appearance].

A generation after this, Chou Mi 周密 (1232-1308?) also described everyday life in Lin-an. His *Wu-lin chiu-shih* 武林舊事, written between 1280 and 1290, contains a section on popular entertainments, which, under the entry for shadow theater (*ying-hsi*), lists the names of twenty-four performers.⁷⁴

It is abundantly clear that shadow-puppet theater is not mentioned in Chinese sources until the eleventh century, at the earliest. It was evidently a popular entertainment in both the Northern and Southern Sung capital cities, and very likely elsewhere. Since there is no authentic information as to the time or place of the origin of shadow performance in China, it is possible that the idea, or some artifact, of this type of theatrical entered Chinese territory from foreign lands, either via the northwestern overland trade routes with Central Asia and India, or via the southeastern or southern sea routes with Java, Southeast Asia, and India.⁷⁵

EARLY SHADOW-PUPPET PERFORMANCE OUTSIDE CHINESE TERRITORY

A few scholars have suggested a non-Chinese origin for shadow theater – India – from whence it may have been carried to China via the overland Central Asian trade routes, the so-called Silk Road.⁷⁶ After commenting on the transmission of marionette theater to China, Hsü Ti-shan

⁷⁴ Chou Mi (1232-1308?), *Wu-lin chiu-shih*, written during 1280-1290, in Ting, *Wu-lin chang-ku ts'ung-pien* 6, p. 18b [375]; Yü, *Pien-cheng* 8, pp. 451-54; Balazs and Hervouet, *Bibliography*, pp. 155-56; Nienhauser, *Companion*, pp. 325-26; Chao and Pan, *Wen-hsien-hsüeh*, p. 494.

⁷⁵ Liu ("Puppenspiel", p. 134) asserts the independent invention of shadow theater in China and rejects the possibility of external influence. Chang, "Lost Roots," p. 20, says "Chinese shadow theater may not have been imported from India."

⁷⁶ Pimpaneau, *Poupées*, p. 14; Juan Ch'ang-jui 阮昌銳, "Ma-lai te p'i-ying hsi" 馬來的皮影戲, *I-shu chia* 藝術家 63 (Aug. 1980), p. 180; Broman, *Shadow*, p. 11; Kuo-li i-shu hsüeh-yüan, *P'i-ying hsi*, p. 21; Mackerras (*Drama*, p. 20) refers, without a source citation, to the work of Hsü Ti-shan 許地山 as having established similarities between Chinese and Sanskrit drama. He seems to be referring to a letter to the editor in which Hsü ("Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh so-shou te Yin-tu I-lan wen-hsüeh ti ying-hsiang" 中國文學所受的印度伊蘭文學底影響, *Hsiao-shuo yüeh-pao* 小說月報 16.7 [July 1923], p. 10) mentions an article in preparation

許地山 also remarks on the early existence of shadow theater in India.⁷⁷ He then suggests that the great flourishing of this type of theatrical during the Southern Sung may have been due to the influence of shadow theater from India, transmitted via the southern sea routes.⁷⁸ This mode of transmission was certainly feasible since sea commerce between China and Java, Southeast Asia, and India was already well developed before Sung times.⁷⁹

The shadow theaters of Java and India are well known, however the dates of the earliest references to this type of theatrical and its antecedents are shrouded in the uncertainty of the dating of sources as well as the interpretations of the apparently relevant text passages.⁸⁰

Scholars of Indian shadow theater often interpret certain passages in the epic *Mahābhārata* and other early texts as referring to shadow theater, but the dating of the numerous layers within these texts and the interpretations of the relevant passages are debatable.⁸¹

For the early existence of shadow theater in Java, the authority of Petrus Zoetmulder is usually cited to support arguments for references to shadow performance in the *Arjunawiwāha*, written between 1028 and 1035, or in a twelfth-century Javanese epic poem.⁸² But Zoetmulder points out that there is uncertainty about the integrity of the text of the *Arjunawiwāha*.⁸³

on "The literary influence of Indian and Iranian literature on the literary style of Sung and Yuan fiction and theater," but I cannot find an article by Hsü with this title – the closest is Hsü, "Fan chü t'i-h chi ch'i tsai Han chü shang ti tien-tien ti-ti" 梵劇體例及其在漢劇上底點點滴滴, Cheng Chen-to 鄭振鐸, ed., *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh yen-chiu* 中國文學研究 (Hong Kong: Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh yen-chiu-she, 1963), pp. 375-410.

⁷⁷ Hsü, "Fan chü," pp. 388-89.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁷⁹ Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of Tang Exotics* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1963); Kenneth R. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1985).

⁸⁰ Since I cannot read the languages of Java and India, I am entirely dependent upon secondary sources.

⁸¹ Ananda Coomaraswamy, "Notes on Indian Dramatic Technique," *The Mask: A Quarterly Journal of the Art of the Theatre* 6 (1913-1914), pp. 110-11, seems to be citing a reference to marionettes rather than shadow puppets; A. B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama* (London: Oxford U.P., 1924), pp. 269-70, is doubtful of all pre-15th c. claims; J. J. Ras, "The Historical Development of the Javanese Shadow Theatre," *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* 10 (1976), pp. 53-56, seems to be arguing for the existence of shadow theater in south India before the tenth century and (transmitted from India) in Java in the tenth century; Stuart Blackburn, *Inside the Drama-House: Rāma Stories and Shadow Puppets in South India* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1996), pp. 1-2, 35.

⁸² Ward Keeler, *Javanese Shadow Puppets* (Singapore: Oxford U.P., 1992), p. 4; Laurie J. Sears, "Rethinking Indian Influence in Javanese Shadow Theater Traditions," *Comparative Drama* 28.1 (Spring 1994), pp. 94, 109; Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales* (Durham: Duke U.P., 1996), p. 5 and n.11. See also Laufer, *Oriental*, p. 53.

⁸³ P. J. Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan: A Survey of Old Javanese Literature* (The Hague: Martinus

In spite of the problems associated with these early texts, there seems to be general agreement that the shadow theater originated in India and was transmitted to Java. From Java, it also spread to Bali, the Malay Peninsula, Siam, and Cambodia.⁸⁴ But whether or not it was also carried to southern or southeastern China is still uncertain. However, the timing and circumstances of the earliest mention of shadow theater in northern China suggests that the possibility of influence from India via the Central Asia trade routes can not be easily dismissed.

CONCLUSION

It has been demonstrated that the earliest reference to shadow performance in China is from an eleventh-century text describing everyday life in the Northern Sung capital city. Two Sung sources clearly state that, aside from the putative Han-period antecedent, shadow performance was not heard of in China until the eleventh century. Since exotic entertainments from India were already known by the seventh century, if not earlier, it is possible that shadow theater was introduced to China from India via the overland Central Asian trade routes. But there is no direct evidence with which to test this hypothesis.

By the mid-twelfth century, shadow theater was already a very popular entertainment in the Southern Sung capital. Whether the Southern Sung shadow theater was solely based upon antecedents from the north, or was enriched by influences from the shadow theaters of Java and Southeast Asia entering China via the southern sea routes cannot be determined.

What is certain is that all claims for the origin of shadow performance or its antecedent in the episode of emperor Wu of the Han dynasty do not hold up to close scrutiny.

Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 65, 208-10, 243-44.

⁸⁴ Rene Nicolas, "Le theatre d'ombres au Siam," *Journal of the Siam Society* 21.1 (1927), p. 39; D. K. B. Bridhyakorn, *The Nang*, 3d edn. (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1962), pp. 4-5; James R. Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1967), p. 65; Jonathan R. Goldbergelle, "The Performance Poetics of Tolubommalata: A South Indian Shadow Puppet Tradition," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1984); Leon Rubin, "South-East Asian Theatres," John Russell Brown, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1995), p. 488.