

Exploring New Avenues for Traditional Culture Development Under Modern Media Communication: A Case Study of Hua County Shadow Puppetry (Postprint)

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Date: 2025-07-09T15:34:20+00:00

Abstract

[Objective] To investigate the influence of modern media dissemination on the development of traditional culture and to promote its development and innovation.

[Methods] Employing the interactive fusion of web dramas and shadow puppetry to enable people from different regions to understand shadow puppetry; utilizing shadow puppetry to create virtual IP image anchors, thereby “activating” applications through modern technology to form new modes of dissemination.

[Results] The integrated application of traditional culture and modern media enables traditional culture to adapt to modern technological dissemination methods. Through this combination, not only can technology be endowed with cultural depth, but traditional culture can also be perpetuated, thereby enhancing national cultural confidence.

[Conclusion] As a treasure of the motherland, traditional culture should be continuously developed with a long and enduring legacy. In the context of deepening global economic integration, transcending temporal boundaries and actively promoting the prosperity of the traditional cultural industry holds multiple and profound significance for China’s socialist modernization process. In the process of development and inheritance, through integrated research on modern media, sustainable development strategies should be constructed and national cultural confidence established. By integrating existing media, traditional culture can conform to the times, respond to the times, and progress and develop together with the times, enabling more people to understand the unique charm of Huaxian shadow puppetry, and encouraging more people to be willing to understand traditional culture and exert their due value in their respective fields.

Full Text

Preamble

New Pathways for Traditional Culture Development Under Modern Media Influence: A Case Study of Hua County Shadow Puppetry

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Abstract

[Purpose] This study explores the impact of modern media communication on traditional culture development to promote the preservation and innovation of traditional cultural forms. **[Method]** The research employs two primary approaches: first, the interactive integration of web dramas and shadow puppetry to broaden audience awareness across regions; second, the creation of virtual IP anchor figures using shadow puppetry to “activate” traditional art through modern technology, thereby forming novel communication methods. **[Results]** The fusion of traditional culture and modern media not only endows technology with cultural depth but also ensures the perpetual transmission of traditional culture, thereby strengthening national cultural confidence. **[Conclusion]** As a national treasure, traditional culture should achieve continuous and enduring development. In an era of deepening global economic integration, transcending temporal boundaries to actively promote the prosperity of traditional cultural industries holds multiple and far-reaching significance for China’s socialist modernization. Through integrated research on modern media, we can construct sustainable development strategies, establish national cultural confidence, merge existing media platforms, and enable traditional culture to adapt to, respond to, and progress alongside the times, allowing more people to appreciate the unique charm of Hua County shadow puppetry and inspiring broader engagement with traditional cultural heritage across diverse fields.

Keywords: modern media communication; traditional culture; new development pathways; Hua County shadow puppetry

Classification Code: G244

Document Code: A

Article ID: 1671-0134(2025)05-77-05

DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2025.05.016

Citation Format: Zhai Yifan, Wu Tie. New Pathways for Traditional Culture Development Under Modern Media Influence: A Case Study of Hua County Shadow Puppetry [J]. China Media Technology, 2025, 32(5): 77-81.

Hua County, located in the eastern Guandong Plain, derives its name from Mount Hua. With a long history as one of the primary birthplaces of Chinese civilization in the Yellow River basin, Hua County enjoys exceptional geographical conditions and profound cultural accumulation. Its rich folk handicrafts

provide a solid foundation for the birth, development, and inheritance of Hua County shadow puppetry. A nation's development relies on cultural support, while modern media communication serves as a crucial means to promote traditional culture preservation and development. As a nation's spiritual bloodline, traditional culture has become a hot topic of contemporary concern, prompting comprehensive exploration.

In modern society, traditional culture faces numerous challenges, particularly regarding how to expand its influence using modern media communication methods. Hua County shadow puppetry, a treasure of Chinese traditional culture, confronts such challenges. By examining modern media's impact on traditional culture development, this paper seeks new pathways for Hua County shadow puppetry, hoping to lead innovative development for other traditional cultural forms.

1.1 Historical Background of Hua County Shadow Puppetry

Shadow puppetry, also known as “shadow play” or “lantern shadow play,” is an art form that uses silhouettes made from animal hide or cardboard to perform stories. Artists manipulate these figures behind a screen while narrating tales in local dialects, accompanied by percussion and string instruments, creating a rich folk atmosphere. The art form enjoys widespread popularity, with regional variations emerging based on different vocal styles. The origins of shadow puppetry are not singular but “multi-sourced,” with theories including the “Shaanxi origin,” “Luanzhou shadow play,” and “Henan center” hypotheses. According to *Chinese Shadow Play*, the art originated in Shaanxi and spread along the Yellow River basin. Research indicates that all Chinese opera forms can trace their roots to Shaanxi's Qinqiang opera, which itself is closely related to shadow puppetry, with Hua County as its birthplace. Renowned for its long history, exquisite craftsmanship, mature artistic expression, perfect art form, and canonical status, Hua County shadow puppetry is acclaimed as the “Father of Chinese Opera” and “Father of World Shadow Puppetry.”

1.2 Current Status of Hua County Shadow Puppetry

With the diversification of modern entertainment and technological development, Hua County shadow puppetry's audience base and social influence have gradually declined. Younger generations show diminishing interest in traditional arts, and a shortage of inheritors has created a survival crisis, leading to its inclusion in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage lists. While most viewers appreciate shadow puppetry only superficially, practitioners persistently employ various methods for dissemination. Modern media continuously evolves, broadening transmission channels for inheritors who leverage the internet to promote traditional culture's charm, spirit, and national confidence. As early as 1994, inheritor Pan Jingle was invited by director Zhang Yimou to participate in the film *To Live*, where his exquisite craftsmanship dazzled audiences and popularized Hua County shadow puppetry. Additionally, shadow puppetry

has participated in numerous international cultural festivals and folk art exhibitions. Today, it continues to evolve by integrating with modern elements, appearing on Xi'an subway cards, ethnic-themed clothing, and animations that create refreshing experiences. In 2011, shadow puppetry was integrated into *Kung Fu Panda 2*, which opened with Hua County shadow puppetry elements, demonstrating successful fusion between animation and traditional art. Numerous such integration cases now exist, all aiming to utilize media for preserving Hua County shadow puppetry.

Despite ongoing preservation efforts, the prospects remain challenging. With society's rapid development, basic media transmission alone cannot keep pace with the times. We must embrace current trends, absorb essence while discarding dregs, and appropriately modify traditional craftsmanship using technology. Manual production is labor-intensive and time-consuming, but digital technology can generate shadow puppetry through computer production, preserving and disseminating the art form while revitalizing it.

2. New Development Pathways for Hua County Shadow Puppetry Under Modern Media Influence

2.1 Current State of Modern Media Technology

Modern media technology evolves rapidly, fundamentally reshaping information communication patterns. Cutting-edge technologies including 5G, artificial intelligence, big data, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) drive industry progress. 5G networks, with high speed, low latency, and broad connectivity, significantly enhance data transmission, enabling smooth dissemination of high-definition video and live streaming while providing solid support for real-time media applications. Artificial intelligence permeates content creation, distribution, and user interaction—intelligent writing tools rapidly generate news 稿件, improving production efficiency, while AI-based recommendation systems precisely analyze user browsing history and preferences to enable personalized content delivery, substantially enhancing user engagement. Big data helps media institutions deeply mine value from massive datasets, providing robust foundations for content planning and operational decisions by revealing audience needs and market trends. VR and AR technologies create immersive, interactive media experiences, transforming originally flat, singular information presentation into three-dimensional, vivid formats applied in film, gaming, and news reporting, making users feel personally present.

2.2 Interactive Integration of Web Dramas and Shadow Puppetry

Interactive integration represents an emerging interdisciplinary approach that facilitates effective communication between multiple entities while enhancing interactivity. Modern media's fusion with traditional art forms opens new development pathways, granting traditional arts renewed vitality and broader audiences. By leveraging internet and new media platforms, Hua County shadow

puppetry can transcend geographical limitations, allowing global audiences to appreciate this unique art form online. This significantly enhances its visibility and influence, particularly among younger viewers, thereby expanding its practitioner base.

Analyzing current social trends, web dramas enjoy considerable popularity. Originating in Britain, radio dramas similarly employ human performers to narrate stories, sharing fundamental characteristics with shadow puppetry and greatly promoting its development. This format offers audiences fresh perspectives, encouraging them to appreciate this artistic masterpiece with openness. In the modern media environment, the integration of web dramas and shadow puppetry provides a completely new artistic viewpoint. This cross-boundary combination not only showcases traditional art's charm but also enriches web dramas with deeper cultural connotations.

First, this fusion represents innovative inheritance of traditional art. As an ancient Chinese folk art with a long history and unique appeal, integrating shadow puppetry elements into web dramas enables younger audiences to understand and appreciate this tradition, achieving modern transmission and preservation. Second, this integration creates unique visual and artistic effects. Combining shadow puppetry's paper-cut art and lighting effects with modern web drama filming techniques produces novel visual experiences that refresh audiences. Meanwhile, shadow puppetry's symbolism and allegory add depth and dimension to web drama plots and character development. Third, this interactive integration enhances China's cultural soft power. In an era of increasing global cultural exchange, combining traditional art with modern media showcases Chinese culture's unique charm, elevates national cultural image, and strengthens international competitiveness. Finally, this fusion provides new directions for web drama development. In a competitive market, incorporating traditional art elements like shadow puppetry helps web dramas stand out and attract audiences. This cross-boundary collaboration also broadens creators' perspectives, enabling them to explore more creative themes and expressive techniques.

Overall, while traditional culture's audience base remains relatively limited and geographically dispersed, it demonstrates certain stability. As media communication boundaries blur, this approach successfully gathers scattered traditional culture enthusiasts in cyberspace, forming a unique "circle culture." This innovative transmission method not only creatively promotes traditional culture but also achieves its inheritance. Under this model, such communities develop demand for traditional culture, which in turn drives creators toward second and third rounds of web drama production, forming a virtuous cycle between creators and disseminators.

3.2 Negative Impacts

Technology is a double-edged sword. While new media brings unprecedented opportunities for outstanding traditional culture dissemination, it also presents

unprecedented challenges. Although combining traditional culture with modern media can promote new forms, this requires corresponding results to materialize. If successful, Hua County shadow puppetry and other intangible cultural heritage can utilize relevant theories for preservation and promotion.

Over time, while intangible cultural heritage may gain visibility, traditional culture risks being misguided by current development trends. When advertisers proliferate and stories lacking cultural depth become commonplace, such transmission methods fail to genuinely reflect shadow puppetry's connotations, reducing it to an economic accessory and causing its artistic value to be overlooked. Moreover, excessive commercialization may lead to complete loss of shadow puppetry's original ecological culture.

Second, modern media communication has altered lifestyles and aesthetic concepts. With internet and smartphone 普及, information access has become more convenient, gradually diminishing attention spans and patience for traditional art forms. Compared to shadow puppetry, which requires careful appreciation, modern audiences may prefer brief, stimulating entertainment experiences. Although web dramas are shorter, prolonged lack of innovation can cause visual fatigue, creating difficulties for shadow puppetry's inheritance and development.

In summary, modern media's negative impacts on Hua County shadow puppetry primarily manifest as aesthetic fatigue, lifestyle changes, and commercialization tendencies. Addressing these challenges requires continuous innovation and breakthrough—preserving and promoting traditional art while adapting to modern society, allowing this ancient folk art to radiate new vitality in the new era.

4. Countermeasures and Recommendations

Based on the above analysis, to better promote Hua County shadow puppetry's development under modern media and enhance its innovative capacity, we must integrate resources and explore symbiosis between source and target cultures. This allows traditional folk arts like Hua County shadow puppetry to find their place in new environments. For instance, French puppetry, Egypt's Aragoz puppet show, and China's Hua County shadow puppetry all employ human-manipulated puppet performance. However, French puppetry innovates in staging, lighting, and music, creating fantastical atmospheres that make traditional puppetry more appealing to modern audiences. Egypt's Aragoz puppet show, while maintaining consistent puppet forms, emphasizes live interaction—a storyteller serves as a bridge between puppets and audience, carrying an instrument to enliven the atmosphere. Audiences become immersed, and victory in performances may be determined by applause and whistling volume. China's shadow puppetry, with its simple stage, single table and screen, ancient tunes, and obscure dialects, possesses unique flavor but lacks audience appeal. This demonstrates that folk arts seeking global standing and continuous inheritance must adopt forms that audiences accept while continuously innovating content.

Beyond enhancing internal capabilities, cross-cultural communication should align with the times. We must uphold cultural subjectivity, establish ethical guidelines for traditional culture's digital transmission, improve technical ethics and regulatory systems, and utilize modern elements to showcase classical charm. With diverse transmission channels, many folk inheritors now employ live streaming for broad dissemination, using performances to generate traffic and expand visibility, thereby attracting art enthusiasts. Therefore, China's traditional cultural industries must fully utilize new media technology and strengthen integration to successfully navigate this challenging transformation period.

Traditional culture, as a national treasure, has a long history. In today's deepening global economic integration, actively promoting traditional cultural industry prosperity holds multiple and profound significance for China's socialist modernization. While modern media technology brings "circle-breaking" opportunities for traditional culture development, we must guard against technological supremacy that dissolves cultural subjectivity. Future efforts should follow the principle of "technology as tool, culture as soul," preserving cultural roots during innovative expression and continuing spiritual cores during industrial development. This will ultimately achieve a paradigm shift for traditional culture from "static preservation" to "dynamic growth," allowing it to radiate new vitality in the digital civilization era.

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(Editor: Li Yansong)

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