

### CHINESE SHADOW PLAYS VERY OLD

Forerunner of Talking Movie Is Ancient and Popular in That Country

A form of talking moving picture play originated in China more than a hundred years before the Christian era, and has continued in popularity right down to the present day of the modern cinema. This is the ancient Chinese shadow-play, which antedated the present talking pictures by having readers to produce voice effects. Collections of the figures used in the action of those early moving pictures, obtained by expeditions into China, form an interesting part of the exhibits illustrating various types of Oriental theatricals at Field Museum of Natural History. The museum has also examples of the screen and other equipment used for the projection of shadow-plays.

The history, and details of the production, of shadow-plays have been traced by Dr. Berthold Laufer, curator of anthropology at the museum, who is a noted scholar in Oriental subjects and who was leader of the museum's Chinese expeditions.

#### Popular Pastime

"The scenarios used in shadow-plays are derived from the literary drama of the legitimate stage, and they, with marionette shows, constitute the most popular theatrical pastimes of the Chinese," says Dr. Laufer. "The shadow plays are an early form of talking moving picture, with a reader reciting the words of the plot as the figures perform the action. Their appeal to popular taste lies in the fact that the words are recited in the living vernacular, while the repertoire of the legitimate stage of China adopts the literary language of the classics, which is intelligible to only a limited educated group.

"The acting figures in the shadow-plays are flat and ingeniously cut out of parchment, usually ox or sheep skin, evenly colored and varnished on

both sides. When held against the light they are transparent. A screen of white gauze lighted by means of oil lamps from behind, is stretched between two poles. The figures, held by wires stuck into bamboo or reed handles, are skillfully manipulated behind the screen, upon which their shadows are cast. Head, arms and legs are cut out separately and hinged to the body, so that great agility of motion is assured. The shadow-plays have an advantage over the Chinese legitimate stage in that the latter, much on the same level as the English stage in Shakespeare's time, is almost lacking in scenery, while in the picture plays the sea, clouds, rivers, gardens, mountains, palaces, temples, courts, boats, gods, demons and monsters are all represented.

#### Small Orchestra

"The performance is always accompanied by a small orchestra, while the various roles are recited by the operator seated behind the curtain. The plots are taken from Buddhist and Taoist lore or incidents in the history of China. The shadow plays excel in comic or satiric subjects; their wit is aimed at human weaknesses, official corruption, and social and political evils.

"The shadow-play was originally of a religious character, and gradually assumed the function of mere entertainment. It is, without doubt, indigenous to China, whence it spread to the Persians, Arabs, Turks and other peoples, finally reaching Europe. The first mention made of it is in historical annals relating to the year 121 B.C. The historian narrates an anecdote of Wulti, an emperor, who

lost one of his favorite wives and was obsessed by a great desire to see her again. A magician appeared at court who was able to throw her shadow on a transparent screen. The story is symbolic of the general idea underlying the early shadow performances—the shadow figures were regarded as souls of the departed, summoned back into the work by professional magicians."

### School Notes

#### Oak Terrace School Notes

The Makio Girl Reserves of the Oak Terrace school entertained their little sisters, the Makiolets as they call them, Friday evening after school. The Makiolets were initiated after the program planned for them by the Makios. After the initiation was over refreshments were served. About five-thirty the ring song was sung and the party separated.—Marie Russell.

#### Seventh and Eighth Grade Basketball

The seventh grade and the eighth grade held their third basketball game Wednesday, Jan. 22. Before this game the Makio Girl Reserves of the Oak Terrace school held a sandwich and candy sale. Out of the three games played the eighth grade won one and the seventh grade won two. The score was 11 to 13 in favor of the seventh grade. We are all waiting for the next game which might decide the winner.—Frieda Glass.

### Young Antioch Farmers War on Pests; Destroy Many; Figures Given

Antioch and surrounding farming community will be exactly \$12,800 richer in 1930 through the efforts of 38 members of the local chapter of the Illinois Association of Future Farmers of America who have just completed a six weeks' warfare on farm pests. The young men were divided into two groups and slayed the pests for points, the losing side to feed the winners in the near future.

In all, 3,462 sparrows were beheaded in organized night raids. Flashlights were used to blind the pests. They were then picked off their perch and heads brought to the Department of Vocational Agriculture at the local school where the chapter maintains headquarters. Three hundred seven mice, 138 rabbits, 93 rats, 8 woodchucks, 4 crows, and 2 hawks were also exterminated. Rabbits had done thousands of dollars worth of damage to fruit trees a year ago and it was decided to add them to the list. However, the rabbits were shot within the law, in season and daily bag limit.

Considering that a mouse does one dollar worth of damage per year; rat five dollars; sparrow three dollars; woodchuck \$25; hawk \$25; crow \$15; and rabbit \$10—the above totals the sum of \$12,800 which according to government statistics, is a fair estimate of the saving to farmers and others in the community.

Jasper McCormick and Norman Barthel divided the honor of bringing in the most points of the contest.

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