

## Across China: VR helps Chinese shadow puppetry out of shadow

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### **Body**

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TIANJIN, Oct. 8 (Xinhua) -- When thinking about **shadow** puppetry, most Chinese people are reminded of their experience of watching **shadow** play in some temple fairs during big festivals when they were little. But now, one can enjoy a whole **shadow** show just by putting on a Virtual Reality (VR) headset.

This VR game is designed by China Institute of Art Science & Technology affiliated to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, aims to inject vigor to intangible cultural heritage, like **shadow** puppetry, through new technology.

"We've been looking for a connection between traditional art and modern technology," said the VR game designer Zhang Qing, associate professor with the institute.

"I hope that the people can appreciate the beauty of **shadow** puppetry and get to know more about this traditional art via the VR game," she said.

**Shadow** puppetry is a Chinese folk art known for its unique storytelling techniques via figures made from cowhide and an illuminated backdrop that creates the illusion of moving images, which can be dated back more than 2,000 years to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD).

However, as films and TV series gradually became major entertainment options since the late 1980s, **shadow** plays waned, with many performers shifting jobs.

In order to revive the ancient art via VR, Zhang, together with her team, has been to many **shadow** puppetry museums across the country and visited puppeteers at Houma city in north China's Shanxi Province where **Shadow** puppetry once flourished.

"The locals were celebrating a festival when we got there, performing **shadow** plays at a temple fair, so we took some video footage of it," Zhang said, adding that the footage has provided important materials for the development of their game.

"I only get to perform five or six times a year," a puppeteer Zhu Chao said that the art is far from its prime time.

Zhu hopes that the combination of **shadow** puppetry and new technology like VR can attract more young people and pass down this ancient performing art as it is gradually fading away.

"It's amazing," said Li Yingxin, an elderly experiencer of the game. "It's the first time to enjoy **shadow** play in this way, and it's a great idea to combine **shadow** play with VR."

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China will promote the integration of culture, tourism and modern technology, and develop immersive experiential culture and tourism consumption content based on new technologies like 5G, ultra-high definition, AR, VR and AI, according to a guideline issued by the General Office of the State Council in Aug. 23.

As the VR industry is heating up in China, the cutting-edge technology was recently adopted in many aspects in culture and tourism.

In Shanxi Province, visitors can have an immersive tour in virtual cave No. 18 of UNESCO heritage sites Yungang Grottoes with VR headsets.

In Shanghai, with a simple scan to the QR codes on the wall of the historical architecture, visitors can know culture and history behind old bricks with text, audio video and 360 VR Panoramas in the smartphone.

Another VR plus intangible cultural heritage project of Zhang has been put on the agenda.

"Peking Opera and Kunqu opera are next attempt. With a VR headset, people would feel like one of the performers on the stage in the virtual environment. It would be a brand-new approach to access traditional Chinese opera," Zhang said. Enditem

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