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## The Slideshow as a “Rusty Movie” – A Unique Mass Media

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### Abstract

Among the visual wonders of early modern China, there are not only the figures of films, but also the slides. This thing not only appeared before films, but also assumed irreplaceable cultural functions in the decades after the founding of the People's Republic of China. This paper traces the etymology of the word “shadow play”, explores the projection history of slides and movies, analyzes the process of slides from auxiliary films to independent formation, and as a phenomenon-level media of the times, it plays an important role in the promoting process of changes the mode of mass communication

**Keywords:** Shadow play; film projection; slide development; mass communication

### The Introduction

In the 1950s and 1960s, in the vast towns of China, especially in rural areas, a form of propaganda and entertainment called the "Rusty Movie" was extremely active. It's the slideshow. The use of slides has been very extensive today. It plays an important role in the fields of electrification education, advertising display, business exhibitions, etc. However, its position in history has not received the attention it deserves. In fact, the beginning of the slide can be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, and has a symbiotic relationship with the film.

#### "Shadow play" - movies or slides?

In the newspapers and journals of the late Qing Dynasty, vocabulary such as "shadow light" and "shadow play" can be seen. In combination with the contents of the narrative, many of them describe the viewing experience about "slideshow". In the "Movies to Shanghai textual research", Huang Dequan gave a detailed proof of the materials of various parties, and it was verified that the "Western Shadow Play" performed by Shanghai Xuyuan Yicun Village on August 11, 1896 was a slideshow. In fact, as early as the birth of the film in 1895, there was a “shadowing” event in China, which was a slideshow. In 1875, Shanghai's “Shun Pao” had been reported: “An American businessman have

now borrowed the Dachun Road Fuchun Tea Garden to perform foreign wonderful movies on February 16th, performing national scenery and snow scenes, volcanoes ,king the birds and so on, the fire was led by electric, so it was extraordinarily bright and different [1]”. In the same year, the British missionary Dean wrote a professional article on the slide projector, and published it continuously in the 9th-12th issue of "Chinese and western news records", which describes "slide film" can be painted, "the film photographed is especially exquisite"[2]. It can be seen that the technology of the slides has been relatively mature, and widely named by people as the "shadow play", but in 1875 the film hasn't been born yet.

In another article that recorded the slides, the word "Western Drama" was used: "I watched the western shadow plays at my friends' for a few days. It was quite pleasing. They used the projective lights to align the light, and the glass pieces with the tricks were facing the lights to get the images." [3] By reading this text, we can find that the "projective lights" recorded reflect the light source, so that the person on the glass pieces appears on the white wall, which is exactly the form of the slide show. But the "western shadow plays" he wrote was clearly not the film or drama that people understand today, but the slideshow. Therefore, what people generally regard as "cinema" today

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does not necessarily refer to films, but to slideshows.

The sensation that the slides ignited at the end of the 19th century was no less than the impact of the film's debut. On November 21, 1885, foreign Chinese Yan Yongjing screened the "World Collection" slides at the Shanghai Gezhi Academy and explained it himself, even if the fare is up to 5 horns, but the lobby of the Gezhi Academy is "very crowded the latecomers are regretful for not being able to stand" [4] within 4 days of the screening, this incident was reported as a hot news at the time. In 1897, the viewer finally recorded the two visual experiences of slides and movies in the article, and called them "Toyo Shadows" and "Electric Light Shadows". Because the slides are consistent with the principles of film projection, so they share the same system at birth. "Some early film projectors used the light source of the slide projector as the light source, and some of the projector manufacturers responded to the competition in the movie. The slide projectors they produced provided special accessories to enable them to screen movies and become a slide/movie dual-use machine [5]. This passage reveals the twin relationship between the two devices mechanically, so it's not difficult to understand why the two have been confused for a long time.

The slides that presented the fantastic visual effects were active on the curtain for a long time, until the film cultivated the new consumption interest of the citizens, which caused the impact to the slideshow. "Not long after the event film arrived, Chinese talents felt that the slideshows had no fun. The heat of the slides has moved to the film. "In recent years, the career of movie theaters has been developed day by day. There are at least four or five times as many people who welcome movies as there used to be [6]" Although the slideshow were coldly treated in the entertainment market, it have always played an indispensable role as an important tool in electrification education. Because the slides are simple and easy to operate, and the production cost is very low compared to the movie, so that during the Seventeen Years after the founding of the People's Republic of China, this kind of screening activity has been greatly promoted, and has been the cultural center and screening team's specialty for a long time. The slideshow teams have traveled through large and small villages and towns, bringing cultural information and entertainment experiences to local residents. They are as popular as movies, and the earthy people gave the slideshow a kind name--the rusty movie.

### **From Auxiliary to Independent - The Spread And Development of Slideshow in the Early Days of the People's Republic Of China**

### **Media Close to the Audience - The Popularity**

The slide show is often interspersed before or during the film showing to serve as an explanation or adjustment. With the increasing radiation effect of the slide propaganda, it can even replace the film in the mind of the grassroots. In 1955, a slide show station was established in Feixi county, Anhui province. "Every time before or during the screening, broadcasting and bamboo-allegro performances were intercut to carry out political propaganda. In particular, the good people and good deeds in local areas will be made into slideshows in time, and the masses will feel friendly and encouraged [7]"

In addition, the slides also enrich the means of film publicity, early film screening "often mixed with slides, kaleidoscope and other kinds of visual entertainment, they are usually used as a preheated film opening or interlude performance [8]" This practice extended after the founding of new China. Liaoyuan city, Jilin province, used single-lens slide projector to publicize "Audience Notice" and "Movie Preview". "The Shanghai municipal company also uniformly produced video tapes and slides for pre-screening promotion"[9], and achieved good effect. Actually, the average cultural level was relatively low in the 1950s, therefore it was very common for the masses to regard slideshows as movies-"Rusty movie", "Little film" and "Peepshow" were all the names of the slideshows. The close relationship between the slide and the film in the projection principle contributes to the common cognition of the audience. In addition to the movie-like experience brought by visual experience, its popular science function and entertainment effect are the key factors for the slide to gain popularity. The slide publicity has become "more than just an addition to the projection, it's becoming an independent text beyond the projection itself, exerting great social effect"[10].

### **Cater to the Context of the Audiences - Education Through Recreation**

Initially, the slide show was a simple and feasible means of political propaganda, which was widely used as a medium for various policies and campaigns. One of Shanghai's main propaganda tools in the 1950s was the slideshow. In June 1951, the Shanghai Huangpu district organized teams use slide propaganda to suppress counter-revolutionary movement, "Demingli, Deqingli, Depeili, Dechangli, Weiwenfang, such the five lanes, jointly held a slide show film (punishing the counter-revolutionary regulations, etc.) and cooperated with the waist drum team to promote day and night [11]".

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As the influence of slideshows has gradually expanded, slideshows have become a cultural knowledge classroom that is popular among the people. At the beginning of the founding of New China, the level of cultural knowledge of the grassroots people was very backward. Even when watching a movie that focuses on the transmission of lines and voices, there are still many audiences who can't understand the content of the story or even distinguish between the two sides. The theme of the slideshow fits the reality of life and can be manipulated at will to meet the acceptance of the workers and peasants. It suits the audience of workers and peasants more quickly and significantly than books, plays and exhibitions. Both urban residents and isolated villages can get a considerable degree of cultural education from the screen of the slides.

The adaptability and high acceptance of the audience to the slide education is also derived from the cultural strategy in which the text content is deeply rooted in the folk. Cultural departments everywhere often use slides to promote current events and good deeds, and these deeds are based on the deeds of the people. In order to continuously supply the update of the program, most of the slides need to be produced by themselves. The team members often use the spare time to collect the materials, and then draw new films. Farmers and workers were very envious when they see an acquaintance "on the slide". The heroic deeds of ordinary people greatly encourage the workers and peasants' production emotions, and thus cultivate favourable socialist values.

### Localized Transformation - Folk Entertainment

The reason why the slides are so popular and won great praise is directly related to the "down-to-earth" content of the films, as well as the rich and interesting projection forms. The slideshow workers usually take multiple roles, both as projectionists, as commentators and promoters. In order to cooperate with the movement against "the three evils and the five evils" at the early liberation period, the staff of the cultural center of Zhangdian, Shandong Province made some slides for screening. "To boost publicity, they have used the 25-watt amplifier to broadcast commentary, sometimes written and performed rap-style art shows." [12] Besides, the staff also changed the commentary into Allegro and Shandong Liu-chin which greatly increased the fun and acceptance of the slide show.

In the film work summary of Chongqing Jiangjin county in 1960, there were also various forms of folk art - "Flower drum, allegro, rhymes, poetry, ditty, headlights, storytelling, etc [13]" Moreover, there have been many references in the literature to use the "car lights, lanterns,

lotus play, allegro, storytelling, Sichuan Qingyin and other folk arts form to enrich the live performance [14]".

These original initiatives by the slide practitioners have greatly improved the difficulties encountered in film screenings. Because there're many farmers cannot read subtitles or understand mandarin; Some people, even those who are literate often fail to watch the plot; Even the projectionists sometimes have misunderstandings. Furthermore, the narrative techniques such as the flashback narrative in the film also exceed the thinking paradigm of the workers and peasants, which is difficult for many people to understand. In the middle and late period of The Seventeen Years (1949-1966), the slideshow have been widely supported by the people of the towns, villages and mountains. The slideshow gained a status of "mass response" among the worker-peasants class, and they have become an independent cultural and entertainment project, also formed a magical craze across the country.

### Conclusion

The mass communication is a social information system that conveys information and reminds the external environment of change as a basic function, which has an important impact on human behavior and social politics. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the slideshow, a mass media with the characteristics of the Chinese era, has exerted an extremely extensive influence on the Chinese grassroots society where the basic background is rural. The kinship between the slides and the film has laid the trajectory of the two. Because of its simple and convenient characteristics, this kind of entertainment activities has been highly praised and developed in the early years of material hardship. So that it has become an indispensable propaganda, which is called "short weapon" for local cultural departments during that period of time. Not only due to the promotion of the projection team staff to develop new technologies by themselves, but also the cultural needs of the worker-peasant class. All over the country have developed this new type of local entertainment projects, cultivating it into the ideal form of the audience itself. Today, the construction of socialist culture is also going on with great vigor and vitality, the practice of slideshow still provides us with the key to the creation of prosperous culture.

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