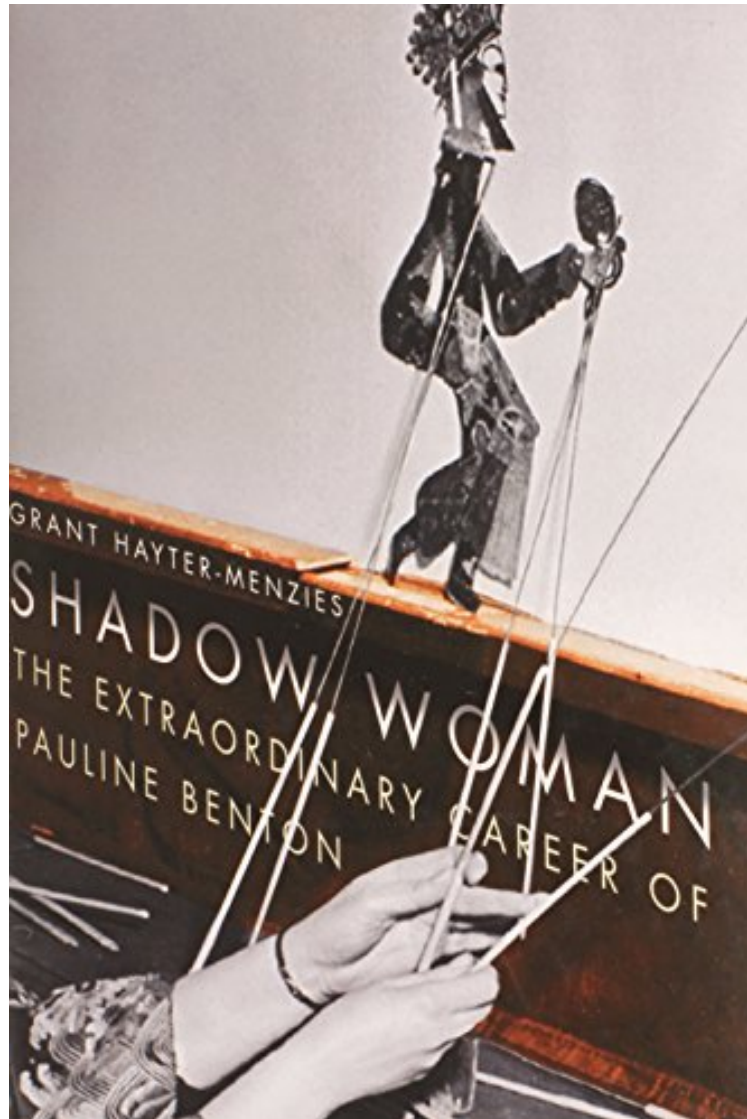


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## Shadow Woman: The Extraordinary Career of Pauline Benton

*Grant Hayter-Menzies*

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#2147348 in Books 2013-10-01 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.00 x .90 x 6.001, .0 #File Name: 0773542019232 pages | File size: 74.Mb

**Grant Hayter-Menzies : Shadow Woman: The Extraordinary Career of Pauline Benton** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shadow Woman: The Extraordinary Career of Pauline Benton:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Expected more material about puppets. By cy of theaI hoped for more information about puppets. I bought it for a puppeteer and he was satisfied with the story of Pauline Benton. I expected too much. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Shadow Woman tells of a Kansas woman saving a Chinese tradition By KelsieRBThe tired adage "out with the old and in with the new" rings especially true in the

world of arts, but what if the old refuses to go? Kansas-born Pauline Benton spent the majority of her life striving to rejuvenate the dying Chinese tradition of shadow puppetry, amidst the Chinese Cultural Revolution -- which had the ultimate goal of eradicating all relics of Chinese antiquity: old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas -- and the ever-increasing spread of modernity -- which demanded motion, lights and electricity. If you're not interested in or even aware of Chinese shadow puppetry, as I was not when I initially began this book, you may be interested to find out how a Kansas-transplant ended up in Beijing and, even more incredibly, how a young, Caucasian female in the early 20th century infiltrated this field which "was restricted to men and never open to foreigners," according to Prof. Juang Yuxiang (of Sichuan University) in the foreword. While Pauline Benton's career is impressive, during her lifetime, she was not especially famous or well-known beyond those closely related to her studies and performances. In fact, as Yuxiang said, by the 1960s, when Benton had all but retired from performing shadow puppet performances, "it is unlikely that a tourist walking into the Carmel Mineral Art Shop in ... Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, would have noticed anything special about the older lady who sat at the counter, an array of sparkling amethyst, calcite, quartz and fools' gold on shelves behind her," and he certainly wouldn't have suspected that this same stocky woman with windblown gray hair "had been heralded as the only woman shadow master in the word." Grant Hayter-Menzies' much-researched and beautifully crafted account of her life and life's work are further evidence of the respect she solicited from those professors, artists, craftsmen, and other colleagues truly passionate about reviving piyingxi tradition. As well as recounting the chronology of Benton's life, Hayter-Menzies picks up the story of Benton's puppets where she left them at her time of death; as if in homage to her lifetime goal of resurrecting shadow puppetry (if only in the Western hemisphere), Hayter-Menzies follows the journey of Benton's beloved collection from the hands of her friends and fellow storytellers, Pauline McGuire and Mercina Karam, to the burgeoning puppeteer "Jo" Franz, who was in charge of the preservation and restoration of the American Museum of Natural History's collection of shadow figures when Karam bequeathed Benton's collection to the museum. Surprised by the well-maintained condition of Benton's figures, Jo added them to her own theater company, the Gold Mountain Institute for Traditional Shadow Theatre ("just the sort of organization Pauline would have dreamed of," according to Hayter-Menzies), until her retirement in 1999, at which point Jo donated her collection as well as Benton's figures to Chinese Theatre Works, in Queens, NYC. Benton's influence doesn't end there, either. Many people who have viewed shadow puppets in collections like the Chinese Theatre Works have been inspired and sought careers, themselves, in the art of shadow theater, like Annie Katsura Rollins, who, in 2011 received a Fulbright Fellowship to spend a year in China researching the diminishing art, just like Benton did in the early 1900s. In addition to relating the life of Pauline Benton and the artists she inspired, Hayter-Menzies' book breaks down years of Chinese history and culture into meaningful periods in relation to Benton's career and the plight of shadow theater. He also includes dozens of pictures including Benton as a young girl, Benton working with various shadow theater troupes, and scenes from Benton's productions. Finally, he concludes the book with the five remaining episodes of "The White Snake," Benton's favorite play, translated into English by Benton, herself, which leaves the reader imagining just how Benton would have presented the White Snake (Pai Shih), her maiden, the Black Snake (Hsiao Ch'ing), and the dashing youth (Hsue Hsien). So, if you're an aficionado of shadow theater, an Asian history buff, or simply a Kansan (or a woman!) interested in the extraordinary life and success of a fellow Kansan (woman!) from the early 20th Century, I can confidently promise you'll find something to love about this book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A well-researched account

By Tom C I'm interested in the shadow theater, and this book provides information valuable to me about an American practitioner of the Chinese shadow theater who hoped to counteract its decline in China by bringing it to America. This book brings together the available information about her history, carefully distinguishing between established fact and what must remain well-grounded speculation.

Kansas-born Pauline Benton (1898-1974) was encouraged by her father, one of America's earliest feminist male educators, to reach for the stars. Instead, she reached for shadows. In 1920s Beijing, she discovered shadow theatre (piyingxi), a performance art where translucent painted puppets are manipulated by highly trained masters to cast coloured shadows against an illuminated screen. Finding that this thousand-year-old forerunner of motion pictures was declining in China, Benton believed she could save the tradition by taking it to America. Mastering the male-dominated art form in China, Benton enchanted audiences eager for the exotic in Depression-era America. Her touring company, Red Gate Shadow Theatre, was lauded by theatre and art critics and even performed at Franklin Roosevelt's White House. Grant Hayter-Menzies traces Benton's performance history and her efforts to preserve shadow theatre as a global cultural treasure by drawing on her unpublished writings, the recollections of her colleagues, the testimonies of shadow masters who survived China's Cultural Revolution, as well as young innovators who have carried on Benton's pioneering work.

"The story of this amazing woman an icon in the field of shadow theatre in the US, but about whom one knows so little would have gone into oblivion if it were not for this eloquent book. Of particular significance is the authors conclusion regarding the unexpected positive roles played by the Great Depression and WWII in the success of

Bentons career as a performer of Chinese Shadows." Fan Pan Li Chen, State University of New York at Albany