

A Case Study on the Operation and Management Model of Fuliancheng Troupe

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Abstract

In the process of Chinese-style modernization, the importance of cultural industry has become increasingly prominent. As an important carrier of China's excellent traditional culture, the inheritance and development of traditional opera are of far-reaching significance to promoting cultural prosperity. This study takes the modern Peking Opera class model "Fuliancheng troupe" as a case study to discuss the inheritance and innovation of the operation and management mode of traditional opera institutions. This study uses a single case study, and through interviews, research and literature analysis, it reveals its "class and community integration" structure that integrates master-apprentice etiquette and modern charter, the market-oriented operation mode of "teaching and performance integration", and the scientific training system of "sitting in the course, taking the class, and leaving the course". The study finds that Fuliancheng troupe has realized the unity of artistic inheritance and adaptation to the times through institutional integration, market balance and talent training innovation. Its experience shows that contemporary opera institutions need to promote the democratization of governance, diversification of funds and the application of digital technology while adhering to the art ontology in order to achieve sustainable development.

Keywords

Fuliancheng troupe, operation and management mode, opera art institution, Opera inheritance

1. Introduction

In recent years, our country has successively issued policy documents such as the "Special Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2019-2025)", "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage", and the "14th Five-Year Plan" for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This policy context provides a dual proposition for the sustainable development of "traditional drama": it is necessary to pay attention to the ontological inheritance and living continuation of skills, and to complete innovative transformation by optimizing the operation and management mechanism.

At present, the opera market is showing a trend of inheritance and innovation. The inheritance system with national troupes as the core ensures the artistic level of Peking Opera, Kunqu Opera and other major dramas, and maintains the influence of traditional culture through the "Famous Opera" project and the integration project of culture and tourism. However, structural contradictions are becoming increasingly prominent: the training of colleges and universities is seriously out of touch with the needs of academies, and martial arts actors are not connected; The market is overly dependent on financial support, and it is difficult for local dramas to survive. Although intangible cultural heritage inheritors have preserved traditional skills, problems such as rigid creative mechanism and superficial digitalization have led to the continuous marginalization of opera in the contemporary cultural consumer market, and the key to solving the dilemma lies in systematic innovation in the operation and management

model of opera art institutions from three aspects: content production, talent training, and business model.

2. Literature review

2.1. Opera troupe training school

The traditional Chinese opera school is the core organizational form for the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese opera art, and its concept and connotation have been continuously enriched with the evolution of history. Academic research on it mainly focuses on dimensions such as educational mode, organizational nature, and social function.

The term "Ke Ban" originally referred to institutions that trained opera performers in ancient times. Its core lies in cultivating professional artists through rigorous apprenticeships and stage practice. Zhang Shengyun (2017) found that the teaching of Chinese opera skills can be traced back to the "Jiaofang" serving the court in the Tang Dynasty. In the Ming Dynasty, Ke Ban that recruited impoverished children for systematic training emerged, and it developed extensively with the rise of local operas in the Qing Dynasty.[1] Lv Zhenzhen (2019) further revealed the composite attributes of Ke Ban as an economic organization. She clearly stated that Ke Ban is not only a vocational education institution, but also a folk handicraft organization with the nature of commodity economy. [2]This marks the expansion of understanding of Ke Ban from a simple educational entity to a special economic and cultural complex.

From a modern academic perspective, the educational philosophy and organizational model of traditional opera schools have been systematically summarized. Their comparison and integration with opera schools have also enriched their conceptual connotations. Zhao Jingbo (2010) pointed out that the coexistence of new-style opera schools and traditional opera schools in the early 20th century marked the pioneering of modern opera education, and looking back at the traditions of traditional opera schools can help us learn from the past and gain new insights. [3]Chu Zhuyan (2024) emphasized that we should "learn from the spirit of traditional opera schools rather than copying Western models" from the rise and fall of traditional opera schools, in order to scientifically construct a modern opera education system.[4]

In summary, the academic definition of "traditional opera school" mainly encompasses two dimensions: firstly, it represents a professional opera talent cultivation and economic organization in Chinese history, centered around the apprenticeship system and integrating skill impartation with commercial performances; secondly, the educational philosophy, organizational model, and practical spirit it embodies are regarded as significant historical resources and cultural heritage for constructing a contemporary Chinese opera education system and achieving creative transformation and innovative development.

2.2. Fuliancheng troupe

As a quintessential example of modern Peking Opera training schools, the Fuliancheng troupe (formerly known as the "Xiliancheng troupe") has undergone a transformation in its management model research, shifting from a focus on static characteristics to a dynamic analysis of economic logic and modernity evolution, revealing its governance essence as a complex cultural production organization.

In its early days, its management model was rooted in the organizational structure of traditional opera troupes. Lv Zhenzhen (2019) believes that the early management of Fuliancheng troupe formed a "troupes-and-societies integration" framework, where the troupe leader was responsible for investment, operation, and art management, while apprentices exchanged their labor for skill training.[5]

With the expansion of the professional troupe and the changes in the social environment during the Republic of China period, the management model of the Fuliancheng Troupe gradually became institutionalized and standardized. Zhou Liuyi (2023) pointed out that over more than four decades, the Fuliancheng Troupe has formed a mature management system, encompassing a phased planning of "enrollment—performance troupe formation—graduation", teacher recruitment, graded assessments, and a stable process for producing and performing plays, which constitutes the institutionalized core of its educational practice.[6]

By the 1930s and 1940s, facing competition from emerging opera schools and the impact of social modernization trends, the management model of the Fuliancheng troupe began to actively adapt to modernization. Jiang Siyi (2019) believes that the Fuliancheng troupe did not adhere to tradition, but actively responded to the times by introducing systematic arrangements in teaching, integrating modern concepts into teacher-student relationships, and actively adapting to the urban performance market and media environment in terms of operations, demonstrating self-innovation towards modern education. [7]Qi Yue's (2018) analysis of historical materials from the "Ta Kung Pao" also indirectly confirms that its talent cultivation and management effectiveness have gained widespread social attention and recognition through mass media, reflecting its management model's adaptation and interaction with the external environment.[8]

Throughout its development, the management model of Fulianshe has evolved with distinct characteristics of gradualness, integration, and practicality. It is neither a simple adherence to tradition nor a wholesale adoption of modern models. Instead, it creatively combines the ethical cohesion of traditional apprenticeships and the production discipline of handicraft workshops with the institutionalization and market adaptability of modern organizations, all while adhering to the core principles of inheriting traditional opera art.

3. Research Design

3.1. Method selection

This study adopts a single-case study design under the qualitative research paradigm to focus on exploring the management model of Fuliancheng troupe. The author enhances the validity and reliability of research findings through the mutual complementarity and cross-validation of multiple data sources and multidimensional research perspectives. Specifically, this study employs three research methods: semi-structured interviews, field research, and literature review.

3.1.1. Semi-structured interview method

The application of semi-structured interview method enables the research to delve into the core level of organizational memory - the deep cognitive structure and experience accumulation that constitute the enduring operational logic of an institution. Through in-depth interviews with the inheritors of Fuliancheng troupe, Jinsen Ye and Ping Sun, not only can unpublished internal archival materials be obtained, but more importantly, the cognitive perspective of those who have experienced its management model can be captured. This method not only retains the theoretical framework of the author, but also leaves sufficient room for the interviewees to express their experiential narratives, thus forming a dynamic balance between the preset structure and emerging themes. The inheritors have dual identities as managers and art practitioners. Their narratives reveal the operational mode of the school while also showcasing the actual operational logic under informal constraints, providing a three-dimensional understanding of the management model of Fuliancheng troupe.

3.1.2. Field research method

The relevance of the literature research method is reflected in its ability to systematically sort out the historical context and contemporary interpretation of the management and operation model of the Fuliancheng troupe. Through the examination and verification of verifiable historical materials such as "The Thirty-Year History of Fuliancheng", the organizational structure of "the integration of troupe and class" and the economic model of "supporting the troupe with performances" in the operation of the class can be restored. In addition, the original data such as student registration rosters and performance schedules recorded therein provide empirical evidence for analyzing its talent team construction and market operation mechanism. In terms of academic literature, the CNKI database system can be used to sort out and reveal the theoretical blind spots in existing research on the Fuliancheng troupe in academia. The integration of news media, authoritative opera official accounts, and other materials reflects the social acceptance and dissemination effect of the management and operation model. The cross-validation of these three types of materials not only avoids the one-sidedness of single historical materials but also forms a research loop from historical facts to contemporary values, presenting the dual aspects of Fuliancheng troupe as a cultural institution and a market entity at the discourse level.

3.2. Case Selection

This study follows the principle of typicality in case studies (Robert K. Yin, 2017), and selects "Fuliancheng troupe" as the case study object based on its typical characteristics and research value in the history of Peking Opera. The specific reasons can be summarized into the following three points.

Firstly, from the perspective of the uniqueness of organizational form, the Fuliancheng troupe holds paradigmatic significance in the history of opera development. This institution not only fully retains the teaching essence of "oral and mental instruction" and the apprenticeship mechanism of traditional opera schools, but also initially possesses the organizational characteristics of modern art institutions, forming a unique transitional educational model. Compared to the academic training path of the opera school system (such as the China Academy of Traditional Opera) and the familial inheritance approach of the family troupe model (such as the Mei Lanfang Troupe), the Fuliancheng troupe pioneers a third path of "supporting classes with classes and educating people through opera", providing a typical sample for studying the modernization transformation of opera.

Secondly, from the perspective of the necessity of academic research, there is a significant structural imbalance in the current research on Peking Opera. The academic community has achieved fruitful research results on the ontology of Peking Opera art, but systematic research on non-artistic elements such as organizational management and market operation of Peking Opera art institutions is still blank. The Fuliancheng troupe has fully preserved first-hand materials such as operational archives and teaching records, coupled with its clear lineage of inheritance (having trained more than 700 Peking Opera actors) and rich oral historical materials (with interviews of existing inheritors reaching 200 hours), forming a triple evidence chain of "documents-physical objects-living forms", which provides a rare academic condition for this study.

Thirdly, in terms of the profound historical impact, Fuliancheng Opera School stands as the most representative academy in the history of Peking Opera. Its educational practice spanning over four decades not only nurtured masters who established their own schools, such as Ma Lianliang, Tan Fuying, and Qiu Shengrong, but also attracted renowned artists like Mei Lanfang and Zhou Xinfang to learn and perform here in their early years. This "cradle of masters" nurturing mechanism, coupled with its pivotal role in the formation of Peking Opera schools,

makes it the best entry point for studying the inheritance and development of Peking Opera art institutions.

In summary, Fuliancheng troupe possesses uniqueness in terms of its historical status and typicality in aspects such as business model, talent cultivation, and archival resources. Therefore, it is chosen as the research object for the management model of traditional opera institutions.

As a typical representative of modern Chinese opera art institutions, Fuliancheng troupe's development trajectory deeply reflects the successful experience and structural dilemmas of traditional opera schools in operation and management. This report, from the perspective of art management, will summarize its successful elements by analyzing its organizational structure, repertoire operation, talent cultivation, teaching management, and other core dimensions. At the same time, it will explore the internal causes and limitations of the troupe's decline in the context of key historical events and social changes.

4. Case Analysis

As a typical representative of modern Chinese opera art institutions, Fuliancheng Opera Troupe's development trajectory profoundly reflects the successful experience and structural dilemmas of traditional opera schools in operation and management. This report, from the perspective of art management, will summarize its successful elements by analyzing its organizational structure, repertoire operation, talent cultivation, teaching management, and other core dimensions. At the same time, it will explore the internal causes and limitations of the era leading to the decline of the troupe, in conjunction with key historical events and the background of social changes.

4.1. Analysis of success factors

4.1.1. Institutionalize organizational management

In terms of organizational structure, the troupe inherited the solid framework of ancient opera troupes, incorporating informal governance mechanisms such as the apprenticeship system and marital relationships into written regulations, thereby maintaining core human resources and completing an important transition from traditional etiquette and customary order to quasi-institutionalized management. This transformation process reflects the adaptive changes of traditional opera art institutions under the impact of modernity. It not only retains the core of skill inheritance in opera art, which is passed down orally and taught by heart, but also significantly improves organizational operational efficiency through clear division of responsibilities and standardized process design. This management model, which combines traditional continuity and modern adaptability, is an important institutional guarantee for its sustained operation in the field of modern opera.

4.1.2. Marketization of operational mechanism

In terms of repertoire operation, Fuliancheng Opera Troupe adopts a "teaching and performing integrated" educational model, the core of which lies in achieving a dynamic balance between artistic inheritance and market demand. The formation of this model stems from a profound understanding of the limitations of traditional classroom teaching—pure closed-door training is difficult to cultivate performing talents that meet market demands. To this end, the troupe closely integrates the systematic inheritance of over 600 operas with commercial performance practices, enabling students to gain ample stage experience during their training period. This practical paradigm of "educating through opera" has dual advantages: on the one hand, it ensures the complete inheritance of traditional operas and maintains the purity of art; on the other hand, it adjusts teaching content in a timely manner through market feedback, synchronizing talent cultivation with industry development.

4.1.3. Scientific talent cultivation

In terms of talent cultivation, the company has established a three-tier progressive training system of "apprenticeship - performance troupe - graduation". The personalized teaching mode of "teaching students according to their aptitude" integrates the essence of traditional opera teaching, where "art follows the performer", with a systematic phased training program, forming a unique talent cultivation path. This training system maintains the value of traditional art while also possessing modern characteristics of market competitiveness. It has not only cultivated a large number of skilled performing talents but also established a virtuous interaction mechanism between repertoire renewal and market acceptance through continuous stage practice.

4.1.4. Systematize the framework of professional courses

In the 1930s, facing the dual pressures of social change and market transformation, the Fuliancheng Troupe embarked on a profound self-innovation. In 1931, the troupe took the lead in breaking the long-standing tradition of valuing technical skills over cultural knowledge in traditional training classes. While maintaining the inheritance of skills, it systematically introduced cultural courses and pioneered new teaching methods such as "expert lectures". This change was not only a conscious response to new cultural trends but also an active adaptation to changes in audience aesthetic tastes. In specific practice, the troupe absorbed the educational experience of emerging opera schools at that time and comprehensively improved the cultural literacy of actors by organizing them to carry out special research and study. This measure not only cultivated a new generation of actors with both skills and knowledge but also promoted a paradigm shift in the opera industry from experiential inheritance to systematic training. The core value of systematically improving the old-style training framework lies in achieving the unity of artistic inheritance ontology and adaptability to the times.

4.2. Structural dilemma analysis

4.2.1. Traditionality of governance structure

Although Fuliancheng troupe has established written regulations in terms of organizational management, it has not completely broken through the management conventions of feudal opera troupes. Its patriarchal centralized system maintains teaching order through high-frequency corporal punishment, and this personal dependency severely restricts the development of artistic creativity. The underlying contradiction lies in the fundamental conflict between the hierarchical system inherited within the troupe and the creative freedom required for modern art production. The subjectivity and artistic personality of actors are difficult to fully respect and develop within the strict disciplinary system. Although this governance model ensures the efficiency of skill inheritance in the short term, it sacrifices the endogenous motivation for artistic innovation.

4.2.2. Monotony of funding sources

The survival and development of the Fuliansheng Opera Troupe are entirely dependent on the prosperity of the performance market. In a relatively stable social environment, this mechanism of relying on performance income to maintain teaching expenses can still maintain the basic operation of the professional troupe. However, with the outbreak of war and the sharp contraction of the performance market, the troupe immediately fell into an existential crisis. This highly market-driven funding operation model has fundamental structural flaws - a lack of risk management and a diversified financial security system.

In summary, the success of the management model of Fuliancheng Opera Troupe lies in adhering to the core tradition of opera inheritance and enhancing market adaptability through partial improvements; while its predicament stems from its failure to thoroughly break through

the management constraints of old-style opera troupes and its lack of forward-looking adjustments on key issues.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Case discovery

Research has found that the management model of Fuliancheng troupe epitomizes the adaptive transformations and inherent contradictions of traditional Chinese opera art institutions during the modern social transformation period. Its rise and fall reveal a fundamental proposition: for traditional art institutions to achieve sustainable development, they must complete modern transformation while adhering to the essence of art. The limitations of its partial improvements indicate that merely maintaining the orthodoxy of skill inheritance is insufficient to meet the challenges of the times. Deep-seated changes must be achieved through governance structure innovation and financial ecosystem reconstruction.

5.2. Future development direction and expected outcomes

5.2.1. Fuliancheng troupe

In terms of governance structure innovation, Fulianshe needs to break through the historical limitations of the traditional patriarchal centralized system. By establishing a modern management structure with clear responsibilities and democratic decision-making, it can fundamentally eliminate the constraints of personal dependency on artistic innovation. This will foster an open and inclusive creative environment, fully stimulate the actors' subjectivity and artistic personality, thereby enhancing the ability to innovate in repertoire and promoting the paradigm shift of traditional Chinese opera art from "experience inheritance" to "innovative development".

In terms of the reconstruction of the funding ecosystem, given the structural flaw of Fulianshe's sole reliance on performance income, it is necessary to integrate diverse funding sources such as government cultural funding, commercial operations, and social donations to establish a risk-diversified funding guarantee mechanism. This will enhance the institution's resilience to risks, ensure continuous operation amid market fluctuations or external shocks, and provide a stable resource support system for artistic creation and talent cultivation.

To upgrade talent cultivation, it is necessary to introduce modern educational assessment tools and establish a scientific and standardized evaluation mechanism for talent cultivation effectiveness, while retaining traditional advantages such as "oral teaching and heart-to-heart instruction" and "integration of teaching and performance". This will enhance the efficiency and quality of talent cultivation, effectively address the industry pain point of the current mismatch between academy training and troupe needs, and form a supply system that meets the talent demands of the contemporary opera market.

Digital technology empowers the dimension, leveraging digital techniques such as VR and IP development to drive the digital transformation of classic repertoires. This innovation in the dissemination of traditional opera and content creation models transcends the physical limitations of traditional stages, attracting younger audiences and enhancing the influence of opera art in the contemporary cultural consumption market. It achieves modern dissemination and creative transformation of traditional art.

5.2.2. Other traditional opera art institutions

In the future, traditional Chinese opera art institutions should dialectically absorb the historical experience of the management model of the Fuliansheng troupe and construct a more modern development model. Adjustments and optimizations can be made in the following aspects: establish a scientific and democratic management system to balance the dialectical relationship between inheritance and innovation; improve the talent cultivation mechanism by introducing

a modern training and evaluation system while retaining the traditional methods of "oral transmission and heart-to-heart teaching" and "integration of teaching and performance"; start from multiple aspects such as government cultural funding, commercial operation, and social support to build a diversified financial security system; utilize digital technology to promote the modern transformation of traditional art, expanding the dissemination dimensions of traditional Chinese opera through means such as VR-ifying classic repertoires and IP development.

The fundamental purpose of the aforementioned management measures is to establish a flexible operational mechanism that adapts to market changes. While maintaining the essence of art, we actively explore innovative development paths such as performance ecosystem innovation and cross-sector integration, providing new possibilities for the sustainable development of traditional cultural industries and achieving an organic unity of artistic value and social benefits.

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