

Artistic Management Modes in the Folk Entertainment Industry of the Song Dynasty: A Case Study of Goulan and Washe

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The Song Dynasty is a golden period for the development of art in Chinese history, with the flourishing of folk art industry. Goulan and Washe, as representatives of the development of folk art, have a wide influence and high research value. The analysis of the development and operation model of Goulan and Washe in the Song Dynasty from the perspective of art management, the clarification of the aspects related to art management involved in the development of Goulan and Washe industry, and the comprehensive summarization of these aspects in contrast to ancient and modern times, shed light on the development of art management in the Song Dynasty and in the Chinese history as well.

Keywords: art management, Goulan, Washe, development model

The Song Dynasty, as the peak period of traditional commodity economy development, broke the separation of the main streets and alleys in the previous dynasties, and a new pattern of the integration of main streets and markets was thus formed. The formation of the new pattern was no longer restricted to various aspects of the traditional period, but in turn promoted the prosperity of trade and economic development in the main streets and markets. The prosperity of the commodity economy also provided a material basis for the development of entertainment and the citizens' economy. With the continuous development of the commodity economy, the cultural and entertainment activities among citizens also correspondingly had commercial characteristics. The large entertainment venue that integrates performing arts and markets for year-round entertainment for citizens—the Washe (瓦舍) with a Goulan (勾欄) as its center—was created to adapt to this situation (Wu, 2001).

During the Northern Song Dynasty, the vaudeville houses, known as “Washe,” emerged in Bianjing before becoming prevalent nationwide and even influencing the Yuan Dynasty as large entertainment venues for the public to enjoy. The original meaning of “Goulan” is a fence or railing, but due to the commercial nature of the performances held in the vaudeville houses, the area where the performers showcased

their talents was enclosed by railings, thus Goulan referred to the performance area within the vaudeville house. Before the formation of Goulan, the terrace was the performance space for the artists. After the Washe became popular in the Northern Song Dynasty, the performance space was replaced by Goulan, but the terrace did not disappear; instead, it was absorbed and integrated into the stage for performances within the Goulan. In essence, the layout of the vaudeville houses can be generally summarized as Washe-Goulan-terrace.

The Washe was a product of the development of the commodity economy, just like the new pattern combining residential areas and markets, which in turn boosted the economy of the Northern Song Dynasty. The flourishing economy improved the living standards of the people and the cultural and entertainment consumption needs of the common people, transforming the previous upper-class entertainment pastimes into popular entertainment for the masses (Li, 2007). As a large amusement park with distinct characteristics of the two Song dynasties (the Northern Song Dynasty and the Southern Song Dynasty), Washe provided a fixed performance venue for various artists in urban and rural areas, breaking the previous separation between official and folk performances. This allowed for the exchange and integration of various performance forms, freeing artists from official restrictions and allowing them to fully display their talents. While performances may have previously been for the satisfaction of the upper class, within Goulan and Washe, performances became the means for artists to make a living, catering to

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different audience tastes and cultural needs, leading to the continuous improvement of performance standards and the professionalization of performance troupes as well as the widespread commercial competition. To meet the demands of commercial competition and continuously improve their performance standards, performance troupes were compelled to innovate, leading to the improvement of script quality and the collaboration between performance artists and literary societies. Simultaneously, to satisfy the diverse cultural tastes of the audience, a variety of performances, storytelling techniques, and unprecedented prosperity in narration skills emerged, all of which constituted a colorful entertainment panorama for the citizens of the Song Dynasty.

The Development Patterns of Washe

The culture of Washe in the Song Dynasty epitomized a fusion of commercial, entertaining, and competitive cultures, establishing itself as a large-scale comprehensive entertainment venue.

Commercial Culture

In the external management of Washe, court-appointed officials or musicians were delegated to manage it. According to the section "Various Departments," Volume One of *The Eastern Capital: A Dream of Splendor*, there were mainly the offerings treasury, miscellaneous items treasury, and miscellaneous procurement office, responsible for managing all the goods in the market needed by the palace officials, and supplying them on time. The market superintendent would oversee the trade goods and Washe should also be managed by these institutions (Wu, 2001). Additionally, since the courtyard was managed by the authorities, when different acting troupes rented the courtyard, they had to pay a unified rent to the government, but the exact amount is unknown. In terms of internal management, similar to modern theaters, entry into the courtyard to watch performances required payment from the audience, with different performances having different prices. Besides the entrance fee, another common form of payment was for the actors to ask for tips from the audience before or during the performance. Additionally, the gatekeepers at the entrance of the courtyard not only collected fees from the audience but also served as advertisers.

Commercial competition during the Song Dynasty was fully manifested in the courtyard. In the Song Dynasty,

the two acting troupes in Washe competing against each other's performances were called "Duipeng" (對棚). In order to compete for the audience, the acting troupes needed to improve their performance level and quality. As mentioned earlier, commercial competition drove the professionalization of acting troupes.

"Zhaozi" (招子), similar to today's posters, was used for advertising. Hanging Zhaozi at the door of the courtyard before the performance was also an effective and common way of competition between the acting troupes. Zhaozi served as an explanation and introduction, and when multiple courtyards simultaneously held performances, the audience would choose different courtyards based on their preferences, and Zhaozi played a significant role. Zhaozi would also indicate whether the program was new and the repertoire of today's performance for the audience to select.

Another equally important method of attracting audiences was the decoration of the courtyard. Here, decoration referred to arranging the stage and installing the paraphernalia at the door of the courtyard, symbolizing the strength of the acting troupe. These paraphernalia often included flags, banners, backrests, and other items symbolizing the identity and status of the acting troupe, while also serving as advertisements and promotions. Given that drama is a comprehensive art form, consisting of performances as well as costumes, paraphernalia, props, and stage effects, they all serve as standards to measure the competitive strength of the acting troupes within the courtyard. These standards often play an important role in attracting audiences.

Due to competition and commercialization of performances, ordinary audience members transformed into the gods of the courtyard's acting troupes, which was unimaginable before Washe appeared. The different preferences and entertainment needs of the public became the standard for measuring the quality of the acting troupes, and to some extent, also determined the future survival or demise of the acting troupes. In order to satisfy the audience's demand, various acting troupes spontaneously formed a competitive mechanism, not only improving the performance level of the actors but also driving the continuous development of drama in the Song Dynasty.

Entertainment Culture

Washe, as a newly emerged large-scale entertainment venue in the Song Dynasty, targeted the common people rather than the upper-class individuals. This predetermined its difference

from the previous official performances in nature. The essence of the vaudeville's folk performances is popular culture, and the inseparable nature of popular culture is the entertainment of the performance. The previous official performances were aimed at a minority of the upper class, with various restrictions on the types of performances and an atmosphere that could not compare with Goulan. The performances in Washe are free, open, and unrestricted. Performers make a living through Goulan, and the audience enjoys entertainment consumption, establishing a harmonious and equal relationship. The entertainment nature of the Vaudeville became more pronounced during the Southern Song Dynasty.

Inside Washe, in addition to watching performances, consumers could experience integrated enjoyment of eating, drinking, and playing. Before the emergence of Washe, audience members also had the option of eating and drinking while watching performances, but it was limited. It was only after the establishment of Washe that consumers could have a comprehensive experience inside. Apart from food and drinks, the goods sold inside Washe, including food and entertainment items, were integrated with the performance. For example, there were sugar sculptures of theatrical characters, various types of facial makeup, and paintings of theatrical characters, all of which were manifestations of the commercialization of theater.

The basic characteristics of Washe culture laid the foundation for the development of the entertainment industry within Washe. The demands for commercial and cultural aspects prompted the formation of a series of comprehensive management mechanisms for art industry development within Washe culture, faintly indicating shadows of contemporary art management development models.

Competitive Culture

Washe was considered an ideal performance space due to its location from medium to large cities, where residents had robust purchasing power. Performances held in Washe were not subject to time restrictions, offering extensive profit potential to those who secured a slot in these fixed venues. Consequently, actors with lower skills were relegated to performing in the streets and alleys, unable to secure a spot in Washe. Moreover, disparities in geographical location and facilities among Washe venues also translated into differences in rental costs and earnings. The artistic caliber of performances determined which actors could secure slots in the more prestigious Washe venues, offering the potential

for substantial returns. Fierce competition raged among Washe venues, motivating artists to continually refresh their performance content, improve the quality of their acts, and enhance their skills to attract more spectators and secure a position in venues with superior facilities. Failure to do so often resulted in the grim fate of being eliminated, in accordance with the natural law of "survival of the fittest." This rigorous competitive mechanism propelled significant advancements in the art of variety drama, both in terms of performance skills and artistic forms. The relentless competition within Washe culture played a crucial role in propelling the significant progress of Chinese ancient drama across actors, performances, and theater venues. Without the rigorous conditioning of the Tiled House culture, the development of Chinese ancient drama would likely have progressed at a much slower pace (Yang, 2016).

Washe and Entertainment Commercialization Management

In contemporary art management, the field is broad, encompassing stage presentations of performing arts such as drama, theatre, musicals, and dance performances. It also includes related industries like theaters, dance troupes, and performance groups, as well as profit and non-profit artistic institutions associated with visual arts such as painting, sculpture, art installations, and crafts. This encompasses art galleries, museums, auction houses, event planning, execution, public relations, promotion, and marketing, all falling within the realm of art management. The Song Dynasty Washe was the first large-scale venue for entertainment for the common people in history, housing a relatively mature art management and operation system.

In terms of external management of Washe, officials or music officials were appointed by the court to manage it. Different opera troupes rented different pavilions and had to pay a unified rent to the court. First and foremost, as a large-scale comprehensive entertainment venue, there are many operational aspects involved. Therefore, without competent management personnel, it is difficult to ensure the smooth operation of Washe and Goulan. In "Performing Arts in the Capital," Volume Five of *The Eastern Capital: A Dream of Splendor*, it is stated that since the Chongguan period, in the technical arts of the capital, Tingsou Zhang and Zishu Meng were principal advocates.... From this passage, we can infer that Zhang and Meng were likely the managers of Washe at

the time, responsible for overseeing various related matters. Meng was documented to have served as a music official in the imperial music bureau, demonstrating familiarity with the cultural industry, and thus adept in managing Washe and Goulan. Effective management not only enhances the quality of performances but also improves the scientific management of operations. Therefore, it is undeniable that, as profitable cultural venues, Washe and Goulan require dedicated management (Han & Sui, 2019).

In addition to the opera troupe occupying the main position in Washe, consumers at a Washe could also experience an integrated enjoyment of food, drink, and play. With the continuous development of Washe, the commercialization of drama became more mature. In addition to food and drink, the commodities sold at Washe (including food and entertainment items) were also closely linked to the performances, such as sugar figurines of some drama characters, as well as various types of face masks, and drama character paintings. From the perspective of contemporary art management, the drama-related products near the pavilion seem to be equivalent to today's cultural and creative products. Contemporary cultural and creative products are packaged by professional teams to form an industrial chain and fixed intellectual property. The drama products at Washe have not formed a fixed product chain in comparison to contemporary cultural and creative products. People's awareness of property rights has not yet formed, and most of the products are sold by the opera troupe inside Goulan or the small vendors nearby. Although contemporary people tend to think that the concept of cultural and creative products originated in the UK, the variety of products derived from Washe drama in the Song Dynasty has left a colorful mark in the history of cultural and creative development in China.

The selection of geographical locations for Washe and Goulan was also a crucial factor in the management of the entertainment industry during that period. These venues were typically situated in large and medium-sized cities, where the citizens had strong purchasing power, providing a stable audience base for the establishments. The fixed performance spaces of Washe and Goulan allowed for unrestricted showtimes, and the potential for performers to maximize their profits. This geographical positioning created a favorable commercial environment for the venues and laid the foundation for the sustained prosperity of the entertainment industry.

Goulan and Theatres

Commercial Competition

Goulan is considered to be the earliest commercial theater in China. Before Goulan appeared, people used to sit in open-air venues in the fields to watch operas. As a result of the constant rainy weather, makeshift shelters were built, and eventually Goulan emerged with the development of a commodity economy and the collection of rent by the government from the Goulan opera troupes. Gradually, Goulan developed the commercial characteristics of paid entry, which is why they are called commercial theaters. From the perspective of artistic management, Goulan has a series of relatively mature artistic management mechanisms.

Similar to today's theaters, audiences entering Goulan to watch performances have to pay admission fees, and different types of performances have different ticket prices, similar to modern theaters. As to whether payment is made upon entry or as a token of appreciation during the performance, it is of little importance. Often, a single Washe accommodates more than one Goulan, and if two adjacent Goulan sing the same song, the so-called opposite shed is formed. The opposite shed is the opposite stage. This is akin to staging a theatrical performance. This scenario illustrates the relentless market competition prevalent in this commercialized entertainment context. Inside Goulan, the theaters set different seating areas based on the ticket prices. There are three basic forms of audience seating: the God Tower, the Waist Shed, and standing in an open space to watch the performance. The God Tower refers to the higher platform facing the stage, while the Waist Shed refers to the gradually rising platform from the stage, forming a three-sided surround around the stage (Wu, 2001). The establishment of different priced seating areas also reflects the commercial awareness of the people in the Song Dynasty. The most artistic management action of Goulan is the competition between different opera troupes for the audience, which has evolved into modern competition between theaters. The existence of commercial competition has led to a series of competitive measures to attract audiences.

In addition to collecting fees from the audience, the gatekeeper at the entrance of the Goulan also acts as an advertiser, known as Zhaozi in the Song Dynasty. Owing to the commercial inclinations of Goulan and Washe, the opera troupes that performed within them gradually developed strategies to market themselves, entice audiences, and

cultivate an inviting atmosphere. As documented in the *Qinglouji*, it was customary for performance spaces in Goulan and Washe to display their names prominently, enabling patrons to make personalized selections and requests. This practice may be likened to an early form of performance advertisement. The displays featured the name of the opera troupe or its origins, such as certain scattered music, and also included the names of lead actors or stage personas. Moreover, they listed the repertoire of the performance. In addition to physical ad displays, such as banners and backrests, Goulan opera troupes, through their performances, effectively engaged in self-promotion that exhibited clear advertising attributes. Before the performance, each opera troupe would hang their Zhaozi at Goulan entrance, indicating the program content and the repertoire for the day, which is an effective and common competitive method among opera troupes. Another important aspect of competition was the arrangement and display of the opera troupe's strength, known as Shouqi. This refers to the set-up of the stage and the installation of Shouqi at Goulan entrance, including flags, banners, and backdrops, which symbolize the identity and status of the opera troupe. Because opera is a comprehensive art form, its components include not only performance but also costumes, Shouqi, props, and stage effects, all of which are standards for measuring the competition strength of the opera troupe within Goulan. These standards often play an important role in attracting audiences, similar to the stage set-up in modern theaters, where lighting, space, and props play a crucial role in the performance.

Given that it is a matter of paying for enjoyment, it is only natural to expect the performances to be of a high standard. Washe propelled many talented actors and actresses to fame. According to *The Eastern Capital: A Dream of Splendor*, a list of seventy to eighty professional actors and performers of the Song Dynasty have been documented. Notable individuals included Shishi Li, an acclaimed courtesan singer, Dousai Ding, a versatile female artist in various roles, Sanchuan Kong, an esteemed master of court music, Shanren Zhang, renowned for comedic performances, and Changmai Yin, an expert in storytelling, among others too numerous to mention. During that time, female performers, especially popular leading ladies, held prominent positions in Goulan and even became the hallmark of the entire troupe. It appears that there was also a fixed reciprocal performance relationship between the troupes and Goulan. As recorded in *Records of the Abundant Achievements of the Old Man of the West Lake*, the northern district of Lin'an had thirteen Hook Fences, and two of them were devoted to storytelling; for instance, the

"Little Zhang Silang's Goulan" gained its name from the fact that Little Zhang Silang had occupied this Goulan exclusively for storytelling in the northern district, but never performed in other venues. This technique, known in modern times as "star-studded collaboration," leverages the celebrity effect to attract customers. During the Northern Song Dynasty in China, the management personnel of Goulan already possessed a strong sense of commercial planning. As the capital of the Northern Song, Kaifeng attracted a large number of talented artisans and craftsmen. Similarly, the performing artists in Goulan and Washe were all highly skilled in their craft. Figures such as Kong, the founder of court music, Yin, known for his performances at the imperial palace, and Waining Li, all possessed a topicality that made them the talk of the town among the people of Kaifeng at the time. In Washe, regardless of social status, anyone with a ticket could witness the splendid performances of the artists during tea or after dinner. The social status of artists was not particularly optimistic in many dynasties, but in the Song Dynasty of China, Goulan used their fame to attract customers, indirectly reflecting the degree of openness and inclusiveness in society at that time. Additionally, the exquisite performance skills of the artists were also used as publicity gimmicks. They would either reveal performance plots or mystify to pique the audience's interest. For instance, in the art of storytelling, performers often concluded their acts at the height of the narrative, and at the end, they would frequently say, "To find out what happens next, please stay tuned for the next part," leaving the audience with a feeling of wanting more.

The captivating performances at Goulan and Washe had a significant appeal. At times, the monarchs and court dignitaries also sought entertainment, during which the leading figures of Goulan might receive special invitations to perform. The court's requisition of Goulan troupes to perform within the palace is extensively detailed in *The Eastern Capital: A Dream of Splendor*. The fees paid might not have been substantial, but for the artists of Goulan, it served as the most influential form of advertising. Subsequently, some would affix the words "Imperial Performance" to their signboards outside Goulan to elevate their worth and attract a wider audience. The leading figures selected by the court for special performances were also occasionally enrolled in the royal music bureau. Notably, at the Lianhua Pavilion in the northern district of Lin'an during the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties, a playbill denoting "Imperial Variety Show" hung, with performers such as Zhao Tai and four others taking to the stage. Essentially, it meant that the plays enacted here

were those performed for the emperor, which was particularly attention-grabbing.

In addition to these, there was another category of entertainers during the Song and Yuan dynasties known as “Luqi Ren,” who did not perform in Goulan but instead stayed on the roads and at marketplaces in towns and villages. Often, these were family units, or related brothers and sisters-in-law. Upon reaching a location suitable for performing, they would set up a stage, display banners and advertisements, wield various props such as swords, spears, and shields, and play instruments like gongs, drums, planks, and flutes to attract passersby. While it can be generally stated that the artistic skills of the “Luqi Ren” were inferior to those of Goulan performers, the former group roamed between urban and rural areas, tailoring their performances to the local tastes and seizing the moment wherever they went. Compared to Goulan performers with their fixed locations, the “Luqi Ren” were closer to the lower strata of the populace and constituted the grassroots of folk arts, enriching the spiritual lives of the urban and rural masses.

The Role of Art Education

As a popular entertainment product for the common people, traditional Chinese opera possesses the basic characteristics of commercialization, daily entertainment, and mass appeal. The prosperity of Goulan Theater during the Song Dynasty further promoted the popularization of traditional Chinese opera and disseminated various types of traditional opera. Similarly, modern theaters, as public entertainment institutions, also target the common people as their audience. As people’s living standards were improved, modern theaters have gradually shifted towards mass appeal. The social influence is the key to the success of theaters, and artistic education is the source of their competitiveness. To a certain extent, the role of artistic education in modern theaters is akin to the promotion of mass appeal for traditional opera facilitated by Goulan during the Song Dynasty.

Throughout the history of Chinese drama development, the commercial attributes of traditional opera prior to the Song and Yuan dynasties generally presented a greater emphasis on entertainment value than commercial value. The development of a commodity economy during the Song Dynasty significantly strengthened the commercial attributes of cultural products, and the rise of Goulan Theater further promoted the commercialization of traditional opera, which indeed embodies characteristics of mass culture. Traditional

opera, as a product, was born out of human demand, and the audience served as the only carrier for traditional opera. The popularization of traditional opera refers to the process of broadening the acceptance and viewership of traditional opera by more audiences. The influence of Goulan Theater on the popularization of traditional opera is mainly manifested in three aspects. Firstly, it facilitated the flourishing of traditional opera creation. During the development of Goulan Theater in the Song Dynasty, various opera troupes, in order to produce more appealing scripts, often collaborated with local literary societies and tasked educated members to write more exciting scripts. This demand-driven market facilitated the gradual development of these literary society members into traditional opera playwrights, possessing higher cultural literacy, and able to compose scripts that align with audience tastes. Traditional opera writers, together with the opera troupes, created a large number of sensational traditional opera works. Secondly, Goulan Theater promoted the standardized operation of theaters. As mentioned earlier, the entry fees, specified seating arrangements, as well as the hanging of signs and the maintenance of Goulan all reflect the gradual standardization of theater operations. Thirdly, it expanded the scope of traditional opera dissemination. Goulan Theater, which first appeared during the mid to later reign of Emperor Renzong of the Northern Song Dynasty and declined around the mid-Ming Dynasty, lasted for approximately 400 years (Wang, 2019). Through the popularity of Goulan Theater throughout the Song Dynasty, a certain extent of its dissemination range was formed between Bianliang and Luoyang, and gradually spread from north to south, prevailing on a national scale. When the impact of Goulan Theater on the popularization of traditional opera had reached a significant level, traditional opera had become one of the most prevalent and widely-known forms of entertainment during the Song Dynasty. At this point, the educational role of traditional opera also reached its pinnacle. The widespread popularity of Goulan Theater attracted a large audience, making traditional opera one of the main forms of entertainment for the Chinese people after the Song Dynasty. From this perspective, Goulan occupied an important position in advancing the development of traditional Chinese opera history.

Conclusion

Since the introduction of contemporary art management to China, it has taken root and flourished in the nourishment of

Chinese culture. Although it is considered a relatively new discipline due to its recent introduction, it has increasingly gained acceptance as time has progressed. Most people associate the term “art management” with its introduction from the United States. However, “art management” is not simply a “foreign import”; it encapsulates political systems, cultural industry development, cultural economy, and market dynamics that resonate within the historical development context of ancient China (Ma , 2019). Art managers serve as a “bridge” between art and the market, encompassing all activities that can connect these two, falling within the scope of art management. During the Song Dynasty, which represents a golden period of ancient Chinese artistic development, the institutional norms of the official art represented by the Painting Academy and the market management and industry chain development of the folk art embodied by Goulan and Washe, all reflect the embryonic form of the development model of ancient Chinese art management.

At the folk art level, commercial competition drove the overall improvement of the drama teams. The term “level” encompasses not only the performance level of the actors, but also the enhancement of the entire drama team’s promotional abilities as well. Similar to contemporary commercial competition in the theater industry, the prominent theaters strive to enhance their competitive edge, constantly introspect to drive innovative self-development. The performance level, stage setup, and online and offline promotional methods continue to advance and refine through competition. At the onset of Goulan’s rise in the Song Dynasty, the ever-changing aesthetic and cultural demands of various audiences spurred the continual enhancement of performance standards by the theater group, ultimately fostering the professionalization of theater groups and the widespread commercial competition process.

Moreover, the demands of commercial culture at the folk art level have driven the formation of a series of complete and standardized art industry development management mechanisms, giving rise to the embryonic form of creative products. Once a gathering ground with commercial attributes is established, industry management norms follow suit. Washe of the Song Dynasty formed a unique Washe culture, as a large-scale amusement park with distinct characteristics of the Northern Song Dynasty, providing a fixed performance venue for various artists from urban and rural areas, and it also broke the previous separate official and folk performance formats. The coalescence and exchange of various performance forms allowed artists to fully unleash their talents, unrestricted

by government constraints, thereby showing a wide array of performance types. Washe, emerging products of the commodity economy, formed a new pattern integrated with the market, in turn driving the economic development of the Northern Song Dynasty. As Washe gained popularity and the commodity economy developed, the facilities within Washe gradually became well-equipped. In addition to watching performances, people could also experience integrated enjoyment including food, drink, and entertainment. Simultaneously, the products sold within Washe became linked to the performances, such as candy figurines of dramatic characters, various types of facial makeup, and paintings of characters from dramas. Over time, these drama-related products paved the way for the development of a contemporary cultural and creative industry with a complete value chain. The embryonic forms of these contemporary cultural and creative products significantly stimulated commodity consumption within Washe at that time, while also representing the distinctive cultural features of Washe.

In conclusion, the development model of ancient Chinese art management was undoubtedly methodical, rigorous, and comprehensive. Through the comparison of the verticalities of the art development of the Song Dynasty and contemporary art management, one can discern that despite spanning a millennium, the art management of the Song Dynasty and contemporary art management share certain lineages.

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