

# Operation and Development of National Theater of Korea

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**Abstract:** Since the 1980s, Korea has been focusing on the development of cultural industry before it later formulated the strategic goal of “strengthening the power of the nation through its cultural development”. The music and culture industry of Korea boomed globally with greater market share and heavier impact. Founded in 1950, National Theater of Korea came as the earliest national theater in Asia and the only production theater in Korea for the creations and promotion of Korean traditional performing arts to the world. From the perspective of art management, the rich practical experience in organizational structure, art production, art education, etc. of National Theater of Korea can be of certain reference significance.

**Keywords:** Theater; Development Operation

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## 1. Historical Background and Current Development of National Theater of Korea

After the establishment of the Korean government in August 1948, a national performing arts center came as the great expectation of both the government and the people in the circles of literary and art works. Through the joint efforts of the Institute of Performing Arts and the Minister of Culture and Education, after a meeting held by the Operation Committee of National Theater of Korea in October 1949, National Theater of Korea was decided to be open in the Bumyongwan in Seoul. However, before long, the newly established National Theater was completely paralyzed upon the outbreak of Korean War. In 1952, the National Theater was relocated in Daegu Cultural Theater during the turmoil, before it returned to Myeongdong Theater in Seoul in 1957.

In the 1960s, Korea began to promote industrialization and modernization. In 1967, based on the consideration of the needs of national development at that time, the Korean government made the decision on the establishment of a number of venues for national public art education, as well as the construction of a new national theater. In 1965, Lee Hee-tae's architectural scheme was adopted for the construction of the national theater, and a new performance center representing the country was established in Namsan. In 1973, Jangchungdan National Theater was gradually completed. Before moving out of the Myeongdong Art Museum, the government issued Presidential Decree No. 6770 to establish a new system in line with the operation of the National Theater in the new era. During this period, the stage of the national theater was mainly dominated by historical plays for the advocacy of heroism and cult of personality. The contents and genres of the performances were influenced by national consciousness and rulers. From 1987 to 1999, the national theater experienced the stage of democratic development, and the focus were shifted more on the artistic features of the performances. In 2000, National Theater of Korea was restructured into a responsible operating agency with independent administrative and financial powers in line with national policy. Through independent operation, administrative efficiency and productivity were improved to better serve the public. However, it also meant that the theater must adapt to the market competition mechanism and create more and better performances to increase the revenue.

Since its establishment in 1950, National Theater of Korea, together with the Republic of Korea, has seen the prominent historical moments of the country like war, reforms, national rejuvenation, and economic take-off during the 72 years, and witnessed the rejuvenation and development of the great nation. As the earliest national theater in Asia, National Theater of Korea has been inheriting and carrying forward traditional national art and adhering to and consolidating the development of traditional culture. In the new era, National Theater of Korea has seen further advancement as a showcase of Korean traditional culture and arts, embracing the world through its strengthened connection with the development of culture and arts in the world and consolidating the social status of Korean culture.

## **2. Production Mode of National Theater of Korea**

National Theater of Korea consists of Haeoreum Grand Theater, Daloreum Theater, Byeloreum Theater and the open-air Haneul Theater. There are three performance groups in total: National Changgeuk Company of Korea, National Dance Company of Korea and the National Orchestra of Korea. Through the forms of creation, popularization and communication of arts, National Theater of Korea introduces the world's excellent culture and arts, inherits and carries forward its own national culture, so as to provide quality cultural resources for citizens, thus further promoting the development of public arts and culture education.

### **2.1 Organizational Structure of the Theater**

After being transformed into a responsible operation organization in 2000, National Theater of Korea enjoys more flexibility in its operation, finance and administration, yet shoulders more responsibilities and obligations. Facing the fierce market competition, how to improve the core competitiveness of the theater, so as to increase the economic benefits of the theater and improve the popularity of the theater, comes as the top concern of the operators. With the goal of to build the theater into an organization branding Korean art creation, art production serves as the core business of the theater, and creation of excellent plays as its focus.

In 2000, National Theater of Korea decided to invest the limited funds in recruitment and production by streamlining its organizations upon the reduction of the number of exclusive theater groups. Professional talents with rich practical experience and theoretical background, who define the artistic level of the works, are the key to ensure the quality artistic production of the theater. In February 2000, the theater formulated a long-term development plan, in which the organization and management of exclusive groups changed from the original director system to the art supervision system. At the same time, this system could also draw more professionals to the national theater. To cooperate with the art director, ensure the quality of the art production and create excellent public performances, a performance planning department was set up to assist the director in writing, composing, directing, choreography, etc. A detailed employment system for the recruitment of planning personnel was formulated by National Theater of Korea for the recruitment of personnel with certain professional background, relevant degrees and rich work experience.

At present, 95 staff are serving in the four departments of National Theater of Korea along the way of its scientific and efficient development. Each department is relatively independent, but also connected with each other, for the businesses like performance management, repertoire rehearsal, program publicity, art education call for collective efforts of multiple departments. In the new era, National Theater of Korea will continue to promote the inheritance and development of national arts, follow the laws of arts and market development, enhance the sense of innovation and development, and constantly improve the administrative institutions to ensure the stable development of the theater.

### **2.2 Marketing Plan of the Theater**

The marketing concept and operation method of modern theater should highlight the characteristics and advantages of the theater itself, in that the audience has put forward higher requirements for the theater in the new social environment. Theater managers need to enhance the operation mode of the theater upon constant reflections so as to better realize the social and commercial value of the theater.

First of all, the positioning of the theater comes as the core issue, which directly affects the marketing plan of the theater. The goal of National Theater of Korea is to create a public performance arts that stands for the Republic of Korea. By making Korean classical and creative plays, while absorbing foreign cultures, it should secure the world status of Korean national culture. As a representative theater of Korean performing arts, when promoting the operation projects, it puts the focus on Korean traditional dance, changgeuk and national music, and launches a certain number of new works upon consideration of the reality of the theater's performing forces.

Secondly, publicity represents the most important link of marketing. In order to maximize the economic benefits of the art projects planned by the theater, it is necessary to attract consumers through publicity and effectively boost ticket sales through communication and promotion. In terms of organizational structure, National Theater of Korea invests most of its human resources in the Public Performance Planning Department, which, as the core and most critical department of National Theater of Korea, is not only responsible for the planning and implementation of the theater's performances, the formulation of exclusive group public performances, but also for the publicity of the theater's public performances, the publicity and marketing towards the audience, the production of supplies for the publicity of public performances, the promotion and marketing of overseas events, etc.

### **2.3 Public Art Education of the Theater**

As a national art performance center, National Theater of Korea undertakes public functions of both cultural exhibition and art

education. In 2012, National Theater of Korea set art education as a separate department in its organizational structure. In terms of culture and art education, the National Theater carries out various art education projects for children, teenagers, adults and foreigners every year, with different art education events for different social groups, mainly in the forms of teaching, experiencing and participating.

Since 2016, the education projects of the National Theater have basically centered on the projects such as traditional art academy, the changgeuk academy, the performing arts lectures, the national music academy for foreigners, the art school for children, and vocational training for teachers. With the advantage of the platform, National Theater provided the academies with opportunities of systematical education on traditional art through courses by excellent art performance masters. The purpose of art education is to spread and expand the audience base of traditional arts, improve the public awareness of traditional arts, expand the opportunities for national cultural enjoyment, and make contributions to the development of traditional arts. Among them, the more distinctive project is the national music academy for foreigner, an art education project specially designed for foreigners living in South Korea, to strengthen cultural exchanges between different countries through traditional arts.

As an important venue invested and constructed by the state for public culture, National Theater of Korea bears the social responsibility of benefiting the public with culture and art and guiding and improving the national cultural and artistic quality in the construction of a social public cultural service system. By carrying out the public art education events, the theater has not only achieved the dual goals of publicity and artistry, but also achieved the unified development of the social and economic benefits of the theater.

### 3. Conclusion

As one of the most important components of the performing arts industry, the theater has served as an important carrier of cultural events, brand building and publicity against the strategic background of economic transformation and development. The theater is the symbol of the spiritual civilization of a city, and as a landmark, it is closely related to the cultural development of modern cities and consciously undertakes the social functions of culture, entertainment and education. Therefore, we can see to the various aspects of the cultural development within a city through the theaters. The analysis and research of a country's representative national theater can reveal the connotation of a country's cultural policy, cultural development and national spirit. China and Korea, both located in the eastern continent, share similar cultural origins and historical backgrounds. Compared with the difficulties and obstacles encountered in the development of China's cultural industry, Korea's cultural industry has gained rapid paces in recent years, and grown into an important major power in the international cultural market with enormous benefits.

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