

An Analysis of the Historical Development of Russian Theatre Policy and New Contemporary Initiatives

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Abstract: Theatre occupies an important position in reshaping the country's cultural image, uniting the national spirit, contributing to the construction of a unified cultural space and promoting the country's cultural diplomacy. Starting from the historical base of Russian theatre policy, this paper provides a discursive background by analysing the specific measures of contemporary Russian drama policy in the "Long term Development Plan for the Drama Industry in the Russian Federation before 2030", in order to provide experience and inspiration for the development of the drama industry.

Keywords: Contemporary Russia; Theatre policy

1. History of Russian theatre policy

Russian culture is a type of cultural history created by the Russian people, which stands in the forest of world culture with its rich spiritual core and unique cultural character. It is fascinating that a country with virtually no endogenous tradition of theatre culture created in only one century, the nineteenth century, a theatre art that in artistic value, in scope of influence and in all other respects is comparable to the glorious works of England and France. In Russia, the formation of cultural institutions and general culture is directly related to the evolution of the Russian state. This article will explore the historical evolution of Russian drama policy in three periods: Tsarist Russia, Soviet Union, and contemporary times.

1.1 Theatre policy in the Tsarist Russia period

Theatre policy, which embodied the will of the state, is not unique to the present day; the origins of Russian theatre policy can be traced back to the royal policy of patronage of cultural activities a century ago, when the development of the theatre arts depended on the attitude of the rulers towards the theatre. Theatre in Tsarist Russia was dominated by court and religious dramas, and the rulers used theatre as a means of consolidating the imperial dictatorship, promoting religious theocracy, and suppressing and forbidding all theatrical and artistic activities by wandering folk artists. Until the reform of Peter the Great in the 18th century, Tsar Peter I brought the advanced experience of Western Europe into the Russian Empire in all fields. He believed that the theatre was an effective cause to promote social progress. 1702, Peter I constructed the first State Public Theatre in the Red Square, which put on a large number of plays by various styles and genres of the Western European troupes, although it was a very popular theatre in Russia. In 1702, Peter I built the first state public theatre in Red Square, which staged a large number of Western European theatre productions of various styles and genres, which, although lacking in nationalism and innovation, laid the foundation for Russian theatre art. In the late 18th century, Ekaterina II further promoted the transformation of Russian theatre into a reality, and the Queen's favour enabled theatre to gain the admiration of the aristocracy and the upper classes, who set up serf theatres on their estates, while the number of private theatres in the private sector also increased considerably. This top-down theatrical wave pushed the Russian national theatre towards realism. During 19th century the Russian theatre went through the "Golden Age" and the "Silver Age", when the intellectual class, in the context of the state's theatre policy, tried to regain its "Russian" identity. Stasov hopes that Russian art can be liberated from European control, "Through their own native traditions, they may be able to create a truly national art of high artistic standards and originality that can compete with Europe."

1.2 Theatre policy in the Soviet period

During the Soviet period the concept of "cultural policy" wasn't used, and was replaced by the following terms The terms "Party leadership of literature and art" and "cultural construction" reflected the entire essence of the State's cultural policy^[1]. The art of theatre was assigned the role of political education of the masses, strengthening of civic activism and participation in the construction of socialism, and centralisation of the field of theatre became one of the main tasks of the Soviet state in the field of culture. In June 1918, the Ministry of People's

Commissars set up a Department of Theatre, which was responsible for "to carry out cultural and educational tasks in the field of theatre and performance"^[2] and to provide overall leadership of the state theatre. The Decree on the Unification of the Theatre Business of 26 August 1919 was the most important document in the field of theatre policy, according to which the Central Committee for the Theatre was subordinated to the People's Committee for Education, which still has an impact on the focus of theatre policy development in Russia to this day.

1.3 Contemporary Russian Theatre Policy

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country lacked a unified ideology, and the new regime was unable to unite people's hearts and minds and lacked political authority, so Russian theatre arts suffered multiple crises brought about by the transition of the system of theatre operation, the identity crisis brought about by the cultural transformation, and the crisis of theatre creation brought about by the transformation of society, etc. The first half of the 1990s has been described as "the period of stagnation" in the development of Russian theatre. The first half of the 1990s has been called the "standstill period" in the development of Russian theatre, and theatre critic Bavel Rudnev considered the period from 1988 to 1995 as "seven years of shame" for the Russian theatre industry. With the publication of Putin's "Russia at the turn of the millennium" in 1999, which comprehensively explained his "new Russia"^[3], under the guidance of this state ideology, theatre policy has always been an important part of Russia's national arts and culture strategy, and has been given high priority by the government. A national "Year of the Theatre" was launched in 2019, with a large number of interregional touring performances that strengthened the interconnectedness of the country's unified theatre space and effectively promoted ethnic exchange.

2. Specific Initiatives of Theatre Policy in Contemporary Russia

Theatre, as a form of performing arts, holds a high position in the social and cultural life of Russia. This chapter mainly summarizes and evaluates the specific measures of contemporary Russian drama policies in the "Long term Development Plan for the Drama Industry in the Russian Federation before 2030".

2.1 Constructing a Unified Theatre Space

The Russian Federation provides the necessary conditions for the development of all types of theatre and theatres with a special mission, including the State theatres that make up the republics of the Russian Federation, and increases access to theatre for the people of the country. First and foremost, the Concept seeks to develop theatre styles and improve the theatre network. The progressive coverage of the theatre network, mainly State theatres, the strengthening of the national unity of the theatre space with the "Grand Tour" project, the creation and financial support of additional theatres in the border regions and republics, 126 theatres of the Federal Republic operating in 22 republics to maximise the guarantee of full enjoyment of cultural wealth by citizens of Russia's regions. Secondly, in order to compensate for the lack of theatre, the uneven distribution of talent, and the imbalance in citizens' access to theatre, Russia ensures access to theatre for the country's people geographically (theatre networks, theatre tours), economically (pricing policy), informationally (promotion of theatre arts), through the diversity of theatre offerings, and by allocating the necessary financial resources from the budgets of all levels, act as coordinators and guarantors of the solution of these problems.

2.2 Improving the market for theatre services

According to Article 44 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the provision of theatre arts to Russian citizens is an important factor in the realisation of the constitutional right to participate in cultural life and to acquire cultural property. In terms of institutional policy, the mechanisms of management of the public theatre sector will be defined, taking into account the specific features of theatre creation, implementing the practice of the state decentralisation of part of the powers of management of the cultural sphere to public institutions, as provided for in the Outline of the State Cultural Policy, and developing independent and objective institutions for reviewing decisions of vital importance for the activity and development of the theatre; in terms of the economic policy, the theatre arts will be provided with economic support, using a variety of instruments, including the provision of financial support from the state (municipal) and the municipal authorities. economic support, including direct subsidies for core activities from state (municipal) theatre budgets at all levels, financial support for independent non-profit theatre projects on a competitive basis, and the promotion of charitable, patronage and foundation donations. In the Russian Federation, the market for theatre services is being deregulated through a combination of decentralisation and encouragement and support, taking into account the specific aspects of the creative and production process of creating and presenting theatre to the public, and, in particular, the mission of Russia's non-profit theatres.

2.3 Improving the system of theatre education

In terms of theatre popularisation and audience development, Russia tends to cultivate the theatre-going habits of young people and children. Starting in 2017, performances for children and young people constitute a separate direction of the federal touring programme. At the same time, the federal budget began to provide special subsidies for the creation of new works and the purchase of equipment for theatres for

young people and puppet theatres, and from 2018 the Russian Federation Government Prize for the creation of children's and young people's classical works was established. Such attention from the state level in Russia testifies to its understanding of the special mission of children's theatre, which is a powerful tool for the socialisation of the individual, the formation of artistic taste, and an effective mechanism for the development of an aesthetic, creative personality.^[4]

3. The Experience of Russian Theatre Policy

Culture enables us to maintain our identity in an increasingly globalised environment, where social development and political and economic transformation are inseparable from a sense of a common human destiny. In this context, the enlightening and educational function of the theatre should not be underestimated, as it reflects the level of spiritual development of the society. The study of the cultural policy of the Russian theatre is in fact an exploration of the ways of cross-fertilising the regional peculiarities of the development of different national cultures with global trends in the process of the development of the world community. It is necessary not only to take into account the objective need of the state to support the theatre art in terms of quantity and form, to maintain the achievements of the domestic stage art and the dynamic development of the theatre business, but also to formulate a historically appropriate policy in the form of national traditions, without rejecting the use of the world's experience and recognising the country's own innovations in the field of theatre. It is an indelible truth of theatre art creation that the vitality lies in the people.

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