

# Research on the Operating Strategy of Tongliang Dragon Dance & Lantern Festival

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**Abstract:** The Tongliang Dragon Dance is a traditional folk dance art form and one of the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage in China. This paper examines the Tongliang Dragon Dance&Lantern Festival from aspects such as its organizational structure, operation model, marketing strategies, and internal competitiveness, and makes a horizontal comparison with the operation of another similar performing art in the region - the Zigong Lantern Festival, to investigate the reasons behind its achievements. Furthermore, a SWOT analysis is conducted to provide suggestions for its future development.

**Keywords:** performing arts, cultural management, Tongliang Dragon

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## Introduction

The focus of this exam paper is put on the Dragon Lantern Festival (DLF for short) in the Tongliang County, Chongqing City, China. The festival is a multi-disciplinary art festival devoted to the promotion of the traditional visual arts and performing arts of the county and the development of the county's cultural impact within the region (referred to the Chongqing Municipality and the Sichuan Province) through the symbol "dragon".

It was initiated in 2019 by the government of the county Tongliang, which means, this is the beginning year and first time of the festival. The festival lasted from January 13th to March 8th, 2019. As it is supposed to be multi-disciplinary, the festival consists of 2 main parts: visual arts – varieties of lanterns spread all over the streets within the county (the biggest zone is in the National Park); performing arts – the dance with the dragon lantern and with fire (made from the molten iron) shown in the National Park. This festival is a result of the cooperation of two organizations – the Lantern Show is organized by the County Government while the dragon dancing team is offered by the HGL Company of Cultural Communication (HGL for short).

DLF has been selected as a case study for its significance of promoting the traditional visual arts and performing arts of such a small county by using the symbol of the city – Chinese dragon. How can the festival help to promote the county's cultural identity within the city? And within the region? How is the cooperation going on? What are the advantage and disadvantage exposed in this first time? What can other counties or cities learn from the experience of it? Is it possible to be a regular festival or is the first time also the last time?

The stress of the research is put on policy and management of the festival, while the last part concentrates on the competence of DLF in this region by doing a comparison to similar festivals within the region.

## 1. Dragon Lantern Festival and dragon dance team from HGL company

### 1.1 Internal structure

Since the part of performing arts - dragon dance is mainly organized by the HGL company, figure 1 below is only shown the general organizational chart of the company:

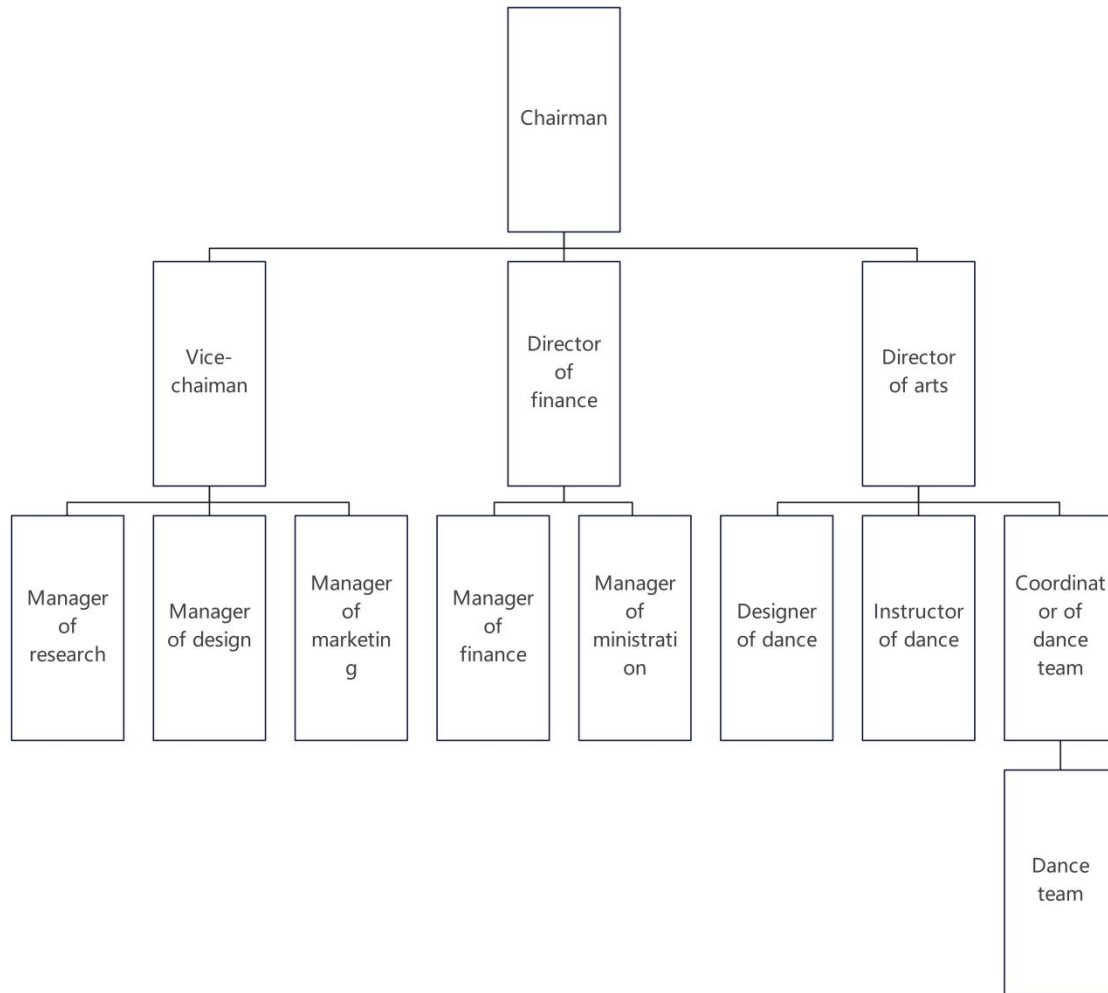


Figure 1 General Organization of the Company

We can tell from the chart that the structure of the company is typically hierarchical, departments are divided by the functions of financing, marketing, and performing. Some of potential weakness and strengths or opportunities are as followed:

**Weakness:** The chairman and vice-chairman are brothers and the vice-chairman is in charge of the marketing department. I wonder how to make the decisions more deliberate and objective when the final say belongs to the brothers. And here is an obvious problem – the majority of the members is more than 40 years old so the elderly team may couldn’t catch up with the current aesthetic trend to cater for the young generation and the team may have problems in online operation. What deserves to be mentioned is that the majority of the dance team members are high school students who don’t have a stable schedule for performance and each time for rehearsing there are some changes temporarily. So there is a need to cultivate a professional and regular team consisting of young adults.

**Opportunity:** Here is an external collaborator – the instructor of dance which was sent by the Center of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tongliang, he is the former leader of the dragon dance who can bring the company not only technical instruction but also a connection to the cultural institutions in Tongliang.

## 1.2 Program

As mentioned, the main programs of the festival consist of 2 parts: the dragon lanterns and the dragon dance. The dragon lanterns were made by folk craftsmen and citizens with low incomes, purchased and set all over the county by the County Government of Tongliang while the dragon dance was performed by the dragon dance team from the HGL

Company.

### 1.3 Financing and budgeting

Since the festival is one kind of corporation between the County Government and the HGL company, the budget is both from the profit of the performance and the subsidies. So the festival is considered to have 2 characters: commercial and artistic.

The visit to the National Park is free to everyone which means the visitors could appreciate the lanterns without any cost, however, the ticket for dragon dance performance costs 60 yuan per person (online booked: 55 yuan) – about 7 euros.

During the festivals, the number of tourists sums about 4 million person-time with an increase of 85.5% and tourist income sums 1.25 billion yuan (about 0.16 billion euros) with an increase of 73%.

### 1.4 Sustainability

The festival is hosted by the Committee of Culture and Tourism Development of Chongqing and the People's Government of Tongliang County with the help of the new cultural policy introduced by the Ministry of culture and tourism of China in 2019. - *Implementation of Measures for Acceptance, Recognition, and Management of National Tourism Demonstration Zones (Trial)*

The local government highly emphasized the festival and has established a committee of the festival which organized the whole process from preparation to follow-up. The plan for the next festival is already in designing.

### 1.5 Media and advertising

During the process of the festival, 71 media from home and abroad have reported the festival through news, lives on the internet, lives on TV and short videos. More than 3 million visitors have watched the lives and 4 million tourists have visited the festival.

However, there still hasn't been an official website of DLF, neither the official account on Chinese social network. On the largest Chinese ticket-booking network C-trip and Qunar there is no information about the festival, either.

## 2. Competence within the region

Since Tongliang is a small county with the biggest feature as the hometown of the Chinese dragon, the festival brings much attention and appreciation from the whole country. However, there are also similar festivals or activities within the area (Chongqing and Province Sichuan) which may shunt the audience, so it is necessary to do some comparison in order to analyze where are the advantages of Tongliang and what could be the potential or existing threats. Here is taken Zigong Lantern Festival (ZLF for short) as an example.

ZLF is also a festival on which there is a lantern show but no dance performance. And Zigong is famous as the site of fossils of dinosaurs. Here is a formulate in which we could do the comparison of the 2 festivals in different spheres (table 1):

Table 1 The Comparison between the DLF and ZLF

Sphere	DLF	ZLF
Identity	National Intangible Cultural Heritage	National Intangible Cultural Heritage
Area	Tongliang, a county of Municipality Chongqing	Zigong, a prefecture-level city of Province Sichuan
Population	0.7 million	3.2 million
Symbol of city	Chinese dragon	Dinosaurs
History of the festival	From 2019	From 1987
Organizer	Local government	Local government

Programs	Lantern show, Dragon dance show, Sichuan Opera.....	Lantern show
Price	Free tickets and 7 euros for dragon dance.	13 euros
Collaborating company	Hong Guanlong Cultural Communication Co., Ltd., (HGL for short)	Zigong Lantern Culture Communication & Operation Co., LTD(ZGL for short)
Official website	No, only the website of HGL company	Yes
Service and information on the official website	No official website	Introduction, pictures, online booking, virtual tour, local service, feedback, news, map, tourist instruction,contacts.....
Official accounts on social network	Weibo: no Wechat: no, only the account of HGL company	Weibo: 4000+ followers Wechat: 4 articles
External collaborators	The Center of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tongliang	C-trip, Qunar(ticket booking)

So from the formula, we could see the obvious advantages of ZLF. The City Government could offer much more help than the County Government and also the population is much larger. And ZLF has a relatively long history and is held once per year which could ensure its sustainability while 2019. is the first year of DLF. However, these are the external situation which we couldn't change.

There are much more types of performances on DLF such as lantern show, dragon dance, Sichuan opera and so on. However, the organizer seemed not to make the best use of them. There's no official website which means they are lacking in the necessary introduction and advertising. On the 2 most popular Chinese social network – Weibo and Wechat they have nothing. They haven't offered the online audience much useful information or they could not receive the feedback of audience especially while the ZLF website offers clear access to booking the tickets, finding the way, parking cars, traffic routes, and restaurants. The online virtual tour is a really fantastic experience.

In a word, as we mentioned the team of DLF seems a little elderly so they have problems in online operation which is really necessary for nowadays competition. We could not change the external environment, but we could do some structural reforms in order to adjust to the new generation.

### 3. SWOT analysis

The new policy of Implementation of Measures for Acceptance, Recognition, and Management of National Tourism Demonstration Zones	O
71 media have reported the festival	O
External investors coming to the county	O
Collaboration with other cultural organizations and famous artists	O
Held and organized by the local government	S
A long history of dragon culture developed lantern-making skills and distinct dancing team	S
The identity as the National Intangible Cultural Heritage	S

Developed infrastructure in the tourist zone (restaurant, hotel...)	S
In the zone, there is also an old town which also attracts tourists.	S
Citizens with low income have taken part in the lantern making which is a “win-win” strategy	S
A relative complete system of security and maintenance(during the festival, there was regular inspection with 100 guards each day, 3 emergencies have been solved while 4000 lanterns have been maintained.)	S
Online operation is really weak(for one day the online booking system was broken and tourists got no access to the zone)	W
The large crowd of tourists needs to be organized	W
The majority of the staffs of the company are more than 40 years old.	W
No official website or accounts on social networks.	W
Members of the dance team are mainly students who have no stable schedules.	W
Lack of collaborations with online booking networks.	W
Lack of experience since this is the first year.	W
Within the region, there are still other developed lantern festivals in larger cities with a more improved online operation.	T
Relied much on external investment.	T

We could notice that the festival’s organizer is just like other typical cultural organizations with an elderly team. They deliberate much when doing the preparation and make sure the security. They emphasize the integration of the industries in the county and try to make the best use of the concept “dragon”. They expect commercial interest but also care about the citizens’ employment and cultural life.

However, they ignored the power of new media. Maybe they need new blood joining the team since the online operation is really pale, they need more effective and efficient advertising and complete system of tickets booking and feedback and so on...

#### 4. Conclusion and suggestions

The core of the DLF is the dragon dance and they add the lantern show and Sichuan opera to enrich the content. However, the Sichuan opera turned out to be a burden before the dance, it was boring, unprofessional and full of commercial advertisement which gave the audience a bad experience. So my first suggestion is to avoid unnecessary programs to save time and the audience’s passion.

The second is to employ new young members who are in charge of the online operation and external collaboration. Now we are in the generation of information and good online advertisement could do much better than printing advertisement.<sup>[1]</sup> Through the official website not only the audience could easily know about and virtually visit the festival, conveniently book the tickets but also the organizer could get useful feedback from the audience in order to do adjustment and improvement according to the needs.<sup>[2]</sup>

The third suggestion is based on my personal experience – the infrastructure need be improved. What’s more, the firework (molten iron) was used all over the process of dance and kept spurring to the public which was too dangerous. The audience kept moving further from the center whenever the firework started to spur but still somebody was hurt by the fire. So the infrastructure and security should get much improvement.

Finally, as the report said, the integration of relevant industries need to go further. Marginalized groups with low incomes were employed to make the lanterns which is a really significant method but there is still a lack of workers. Maybe they could be offered with more salaries or welfare so more people will be attracted to take part in the work. The

infrastructure, peripheral restaurants, and hotels need to be standardized, especially the places where there were already emergencies or tourists complain much about. I will keep an eye on how the next festival be held.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

### **References**

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