

Shanxi-Shaanxi Merchants, Bangzi Opera and the Cult of Guan Gong on the Lu Canal in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

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Article Info:

DOI: 10.22399/ijcesn.1833

Received : 25 February 2025

Accepted : 12 April 2025

Keywords :

Bangzi opera,
Grand Canal,
Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall,
Worship of Guan Yu,
Cultural and natural heritage.

Abstract:

Regarding the Grand Canal from Beijing to Hangzhou, it was not only a transportation route for transporting grain from the south to the north, commercial travel, and water conservancy irrigation, but it was also a cultural belt that integrates the diverse regional cultures of Qi-Lu, Yan-Zhao, Chu-Han, Huai-Yang, and Wu-Yue. Over the span of five and a half centuries, merchants from Shanxi and Shaanxi exerted a profound influence along the canal during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1912). Taking the Lu Canal, also known as Huitong River in Shandong as a research thread, this paper explored the cultural and commercial activities of Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants who established guild halls, set up theatres, and worshipped the God of Guan along the canal during the Ming and Qing dynasties. These activities not only facilitated the spread of the clapper theatre, but also promoted the widespread inheritance of the worship of Guan Gong, further consolidating the cultural influence of the Shanxi and Shaanxi merchant clans. By studying these phenomena, this paper revealed how Shan-Shaanxi merchants connected commerce and culture through guild culture, enriching the social and cultural heritage along the Lu Canal.

1. Introduction

The Grand Canal, an extensive and historic waterway in China, had long played a vital role in connecting the country's northern and southern regions. One of its significant segments was the Lu Canal, which traversed Shandong Province. This portion connected to various other canals, included the South Canal, North Canal, and Tonghui River leading to Beijing, as well as the Middle Canal, Inner Canal, and the Jiangnan Canal, which extended to Hangzhou. Stretching from Linqing to Tai'erzhuang, the canal passed through four cities—

Linqing, Liaocheng, Jining, and Tai'erzhuang—and was formed by the confluence of the Wenshui and Sishui rivers. It also intersected with natural lakes such as Dongping Lake, Nanyang Lake, Zhaoyang Lake, and Weishan Lake, spanning a total length of 480 kilometers. Serving as a crucial waterway transportation artery between northern and southern China, the Lu Canal linked the capital city of Beijing in the north with the Yangtze River and Huai River in the south. This article concentrated on a unique architecture, the guild hall, created by Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants, to examine the residential, customs, and cultural characteristics of

beliefs in the Ming and Qing dynasties along the Shandong section of the Lu Canal.

2. Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants' activities on Lu Canal

The development of the canal experienced varying degrees of influence across different periods, with the Ming and Qing Dynasties marking the most prosperous stage in the Grand Canal's history. Towns along the canal flourished during this time [1]. The seamless flow of the Grand Canal connected Shandong with northern and southern provinces, forming an efficient waterway transportation network. This led to higher levels of economic development along the canal compared to surrounding areas, attracting businesspeople from across the country to engage in commerce, with Shanxi merchants being the most prosperous.

Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants were active in all walks of life along the canal. Cities such as Linqing, Liaocheng, Zhangqiu, and Jining experienced rapid growth and became favored trading locations for these merchants. As stated in the inscription on the Shanxi and Shaanxi Association's stele, *Due to the land's proximity to the canal, countless merchants from all over the country gathered here, and among them, Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants were the most numerous.*

Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants chose Shandong for several reasons. First, Shandong was geographically closed to Shanxi, making it a natural choice for trade expansion. Second, the canals in the region provided convenient transportation options, facilitating the movement of goods and people. Third, the government-organized immigration activities at the time contributed to the influx of people from Shanxi to Shandong.

According to Cao (1995), approximately 600,000 people migrated from Shanxi and ultimately settled in Dongchangfu in western Shandong and Yanzhou in southeastern Shanxi. About 90% of the population in the Dongchangfu area were immigrants, while those who relocated to the vicinity of Yanzhou Prefecture accounted for around 60% of the local population [2].

3. Distribution of Shanxi-Shaanxi guild hall

Based on the research by Li and Wang (2006), during the Ming and Qing dynasties, over 40 guild halls were present in the Shandong Canal area. Among these, 22 guild halls and temples were constructed by Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants, accounting for half of the total [3], as illustrated in Table 1. A considerable number of these *Pavilions and Temples* could be found in Liaocheng. This

indicated that Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants were most active in the Liaocheng region of Shandong Province.

Table 1 is the list of Shanxi-Shaanxi Merchants' Hall in Shandong Canal Area during Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Furthermore, the activities of Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants were most frequent in Dongchang Prefecture (currently Liaocheng) and Linqing, primarily due to their geographical advantages, such as proximity to Shanxi and adjacency to Hebei and Henan. In addition, the efficient water transportation attracted numerous merchants from the west to conduct business in the area. Following the completion of the Huai River project during the middle of the Yongle period, the Grand Canal extended through Liaocheng outside Dongguan, transforming the region into a hub for merchants, particularly those from Shanxi and Shaanxi. Initially, they established the *Taifen Guild Hall* (intended for Shanxi merchants from Taiyuan and



Figure 1. National key cultural relic protection unit

Fenzhou), which later evolved into the *Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall* due to the increasing number of merchants from both provinces. Figure 1 shows National key cultural relic protection unit Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall; It is located next to the gate of Shanshaan Guild Hall. The Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants wielded a strong influence across various sectors, leading them to establish guild halls along numerous canals and waterways. Jining, formerly known as Jizhou, was once a city with limited influence and economic value. However, following the development of canal navigation, Jizhou experienced rapid growth and became a crucial transportation hub connecting the north and south. It also emerged as an important commodity distribution centre in southwestern Shandong. Particularly during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, merchants from Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Henan provinces gathered and collaboratively built the

Table 1. List of Shanxi-Shaanxi Merchants' Hall in Shandong Canal Area during Ming and Qing Dynasties

No.	Name of Guild Hall	Location	Founder	Source
1	Shanxi Guild Hall	De county	Shanxi merchants	Volume 4 of the De County Gazetteer of the Republic of China
2	Shanxi Guild Hall	En county	Shanxi merchants	En County Local Gazetteer of the Guangxu Emperor Era
3	Shanxi Guild Hall	Wucheng City Four women Temple	Shanxi merchants	Field survey
4	Shanxi Guild Hall	Guantao	Shanxi merchants	Volume 8 of the Guantao Local Gazetteer of the Guangxu Emperor Era
5	Shanxi Guild Hall	South Guantao	Shanxi merchants	Volume 8 of the Guantao Local Gazetteer of the Guangxu Emperor Era
6	King Temple	Linqing Canal west	Shanxi tea merchants	Volume 11 of the Linqing Prefecture Gazetteer of the Qianlong Emperor Era
7	Temple of the Machine God	Linqing	Shanxi silk merchants and Linqing weavers	Volume 11 of the Linqing Prefecture Gazetteer of the Qianlong Emperor Era
8	Shanxi Guild Hall	Guan County	Shanxi merchants	Volume 2 of the Guan County Gazetteer of the Daoguang Emperor Era
9	Taifen Public Hall	Liaocheng	Shanxi merchants	Inscription on the Shanxi-Shaanxi Association Hall Stele in Liaocheng
10	Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall	Liaocheng	Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants	Well preserved. There were 19 stone tablets.
11	Shanxi Guild Hall	Chaocheng	Shanxi merchants	Chaocheng Local Gazetteer of the Guangxu Emperor Era
12	Yunsi Guild Hall	Acheng Town, Yanggu County	Shanxi salt merchants and salt transport bureau	There are still the main hall, lintel, etc.
13	King Temple	Acheng Town, Yanggu County	Shanxi merchants	Field survey
14	Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall	Acheng Town, Zhangqiu County	Shanxi merchants	There were still the main hall, lintel, etc.
15	Shanxi Guild Hall	Acheng Town, Zhangqiu County	Shanxi merchants	Field survey
16	King Temple	Acheng Town, Zhangqiu County	Zhu Zhiyun and other Xi merchants	Volume 10 of the Zhangqiu Gazetteer of the Kangxi Emperor Era
17	Shanxi Guild Hall	Dong'e County	Shanxi pawnshop merchants	Volume 2 of the Dong'e County Gazetteer of the Daoguang Emperor Era
18	Shanxi Guild Hall	Jinkou Town, Liangshan	Shanxi merchants	Volume 8 of the Liangshan Historical and Cultural Materials
19	Shanxi Guild Hall	Dongping	Xi merchants	Volume 15 of the Dongping County Gazetteer of the Republic of China
20	Xijin Guild Hall	Wenshang	Shanxi salt merchants	Existing stone inscriptions
21	Three Provinces Hall	Jining	Merchants from the three provinces of Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Henan	Volume 2 of the Jining Prefectural Gazetteer of the Daoguang Emperor
22	Shanxi Guild Hall	Zou County	Businessman in Changzhi, Shanxi Province	Volume 5 of the Historical and Cultural Materials Compilation of Zouxian County

guild halls of the three provinces. The spatial distribution of economic activity strongholds played a significant role in representing the distribution of economic activities. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the spatial distribution of Shanxi-Shaanxi Halls displayed a clear spatial dependence [4]. Consequently, for *western merchants*, the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall served as the best testament to their business activities. Among these, the Liaocheng Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild

Hall in Shandong was the most complete, exquisite, and representative, as shown in Figure 2.

3.1 Overview of Liaocheng Shanxi-Shaanxi guild hall

A guild hall was a place where people from the same city, the same prefecture, or the same county, migrated and gathered in groups, built premises, and met together to strengthen their friendship and



Figure 2. Liaocheng Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall entrance

fellowship connections [5]. Liaocheng, known as *Dongchang Fu* in ancient times, was situated in the western part of Shandong Province. The Grand Canal, constructed during the Yuan Dynasty, passed through the city. During the Hongzhi period of the Ming Dynasty (1488-1505), Liu Guangheng, a Shangshu, documented Liaocheng's prosperity at the time. According to Zhang (2002), the city thrived due to the continuous flow of imperial envoy's guests and the smooth transportation of goods, including the completion of tribute for various items. The supply of warehouses and granaries met demand, and laborers were rotated to ensure fair compensation without the need for criticism or punishment [6]. Liao cheng's rise and fall was tied to the canal, making it a typical canal cultural town. The Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall on the canal's bank serves as a historical witness to Liaocheng's commercial prosperity during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Records indicated that in the eighth year of Qianlong (1743), Shanxi merchants such as Xu Bi, Xing Dazuo, and Li Liangru raised 49,643 taels of silver and spent nearly four years constructing a grand Shanxi-Shaanxi Temple on the west bank of the ancient canal in Liaocheng [7]. As described in the *Preface to Rebuilding the Main Hall of Guandi Temple*, the guild hall served not only as a meeting place for merchants from Shanxi and Shaanxi but also as a site for religious sacrifices and entertainment activities [8].

The Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall, built along the canal and facing east, embodied the auspicious meaning of *water gathered wealth, and purple air came from the east*. Its site selection was deeply influenced by ancient Chinese geomancy culture. The layout adhered to traditional Chinese palace-style architecture: along the central axis, from east to west, there were mountain gates, theatre buildings, passing buildings, left and right mezzanine buildings, the second floor of bells and drums, north-south viewing buildings, Guandi Hall,

and Spring and Autumn Palace Pavilion. The three courtyards gradually increased in height and were well arranged [9]. Its wood carvings, stone carvings, brick carvings, and paintings were exquisite and rich, provided valuable material for studying the history of ancient theatres, ancient buildings, commerce and trade, canal culture, and the budding of capitalism in the Qing Dynasty. The theatre building inside the guild hall offered strong evidence for studying the occurrence and development of drama at that time.

The theatre building of the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall faced east and west and was the main structure of the first courtyard, situated on the central axis of the entire courtyard, opposite the main hall.

According to the stele *The Story of Rebuilding the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall Opera Stage Mountain Gate Bell and Drum Pavilion* from the 25th year of Daoguang (1845), the stage caught fire in the first lunar month of the 21st year of Daoguang due to an artist's carelessness. The stage and the bell and drum pavilions on both sides were destroyed, and the current stage and other buildings were rebuilt in the 25th year of Daoguang. The newly built stage hosted over a hundred disciples from the Liyuan Garden, who participated in competitions annually. Dressed in bright neon clothes and feathers, they competed for brilliance amidst the resplendent gold and green, making even the heavenly Qionglou and Yuyu seem insignificant. The bell and drum pavilion at the mountain gate also appeared more majestic than ever [10].

On the backstage of the theatre building, the walls of the lounges on both sides, and the walls of the dressing room, ink marks left by artists from opera troupes in Shanxi and Shandong between the 25th year of Daoguang in the Qing Dynasty (1845) and the 8th year of the Republic of China (1919) could still be seen [7]. Based on these ink marks, 28 opera troupes and nearly 150 repertoires had been identified [11]. Investigations and research had found that most of the opera troupes performing in the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall in Liaocheng came from other places, with the majority being Xifu Qin Opera or Bangzi opera troupes from the Shanxi-Shaanxi area.

Performances at the guild hall typically took place under the following circumstances: upon the completion or repair of the guild hall; during the birthdays or anniversaries of the gods of the guild hall (such as Guan Yu's birthday); when a merchant's shop opened; or when a businessman was punished for violating the rules of the guild hall.

Similar to ancient temple stage performances, the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall stage performances served not only as an activity to worship and

entertain gods but also as a place for Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants to reinforce their values of *righteousness*. However, profit remained the fundamental pursuit of businessmen, and guild performance activities were merely their means to advocate *justice* and *profit*.

In conclusion, the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall in Liaocheng provided a fascinating insight into the rich history of commercial, cultural, and social activities of the Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The theatre building within the guild hall served as a testament to the significance of opera and performance arts in their lives, as well as their values of righteousness and profit.

The detailed architecture, layout, and artistic elements of the guild hall exemplified the meticulous planning and execution of the merchants in creating a space for worship, entertainment, and fellowship. Furthermore, the guild hall performances not only provided a platform for merchants to express their devotion to gods and values, but also played a significant role in creating a sense of community and unity among them. By bringing merchants together for cultural and religious events, the guild hall served as a space where they could reinforce shared beliefs and social bonds and strengthen their collective identity. A deeper exploration of the history of the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall in Liaocheng provided valuable insight into the multifaceted relationships between commerce, culture, and religion during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. By examining the historical context of this guild hall, we could gain a better understanding of the driving forces behind the merchants' pursuits, and the intricate interplay between their economic interests, cultural values, and religious beliefs. Through this lens, we could discern how the guild hall served as a hub for merchants to engage in cultural and religious activities, build social connections, and negotiate their place in the local and regional economy. Ultimately, this knowledge helped us appreciate the dynamic and complex nature of merchant communities in traditional China.

3.2 Examining confucian culture through architectural decoration

The Liaocheng Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall, situated in the Shandong region, was heavily influenced by Confucian culture. The *Picture of Filial Piety* on the main hall's forehead of the Guandi Hall served as an excellent example. The ancients believed that *filial piety was the foundation of all virtues*. In traditional Chinese families, an individual's moral character was often assessed based on their loyalty

and filial piety. Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants used this picture to instruct future generations to honor their elders and treat others with kindness. Images such as *The Picture of the Boy Giving Money*, *The Picture of Three Sons*, *The Picture of Extended Succession of Children*, and *The Picture of Children Playing* further emphasized filial piety culture. These images reflected the merchants' aspirations for familial happiness and their deeply ingrained agricultural cultural heritage.

A pair of stone plaques adorned the mountain gate of the guild hall, bearing the inscriptions *Lǚ Zhong* and *Dao He*. *Lǚ Zhong* referred to practicing the doctrine of the mean, while *Dao He* cautioned future generations to embrace humility, emphasizing the importance of peace. The combination of *Lǚ Zhong* and *Dao He* embodied the Confucian principle of *The Doctrine of the Mean*, which promoted harmony and balance.

Li culture was another crucial aspect of Confucian culture. The guild hall's architectural decorations consisted of Xuanzi color paintings and Su-style color paintings. One might wonder why Hexi color paintings were absent; this was because color paintings had specific rankings. Hexi color paintings were exclusive to palace buildings, and their use in residential buildings was prohibited. Moreover, a pattern of Seven stacked seal scripts existed, rather than *Nine*, due to the etiquette standards in which *Nine* was reserved for the emperor.

3.3 Identifying regional characteristics through architectural decoration

Although the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall was in Liaocheng, Shandong Province, elements of the *Shanxi-Shaanxi hometown* were evident throughout the structure. To alleviate their homesickness, Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants employed craftsmen from their hometowns and used bricks and stones fired there to construct the guild hall. For instance, decorative components like the six-story ruyi bucket arch were popular in Shanxi but had never appeared in Liaocheng folk houses. The lion-body column foundation of the Liaocheng Shanxi-Shaanxi guild hall closely resembled that of the Henan Sheqi Shanxi-Shaanxi guild hall, while local column foundations tended to be drum-shaped and relatively plain [12]. Liaocheng's local courtyards typically featured green brick and tile houses with hard mountain roofs, whereas the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall's roof consisted of green and yellow glazed tiles arranged in a diamond pattern, creating a striking visual effect. The hall's intricate carvings and stone sculptures, which depicted local figures,

landscapes, flowers, and birds, adorned various parts of the structure, including the mountain gate, screen wall, stage, main halls, ridges, beam purlins, architraves, column foundations, and walls. The main structure of the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall served as an outstanding example for its time, blending both official and private elements in its design. Elements like cornices and heavy arches, typically reserved for official buildings, were not permitted for private construction. Although Shanxi was known for producing coloured glaze, wealthy families often opted for Bowa tiles. However, the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall, as a private building, featured glazed bricks and tiles for its pavement due to its unique characteristics [13]. This not only reflected the robust financial resources of the Shanxi merchants but also expressed their inner aspirations and pursuit of their social class. Through the hall's architectural decoration and design, we could observe the influence of Confucian culture and regional characteristics while gaining insight into the values and ambitions of the Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants during the time.

4. Bangzi Opera on the Lu Canal

As the largest business group in modern China, the Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants developed in the Ming Dynasty, prospered in the Qing Dynasty, and declined in the Republic of China. Similarly, Bangzi Opera, one of the largest vocal operas in China, experienced a similar trajectory. The birth, development, and decline of the two occurred almost concurrently. What hidden connections existed between them?

As the main trade and transportation route of the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal, the Shandong area often gathered and developed operas from various places due to trade and commerce, gradually forming a local tune opera. For instance, Shanxi-Shaanxi Bangzi originated in the Puzhou and Tongzhou areas at the junction of Shanxi and Shaanxi. It flowed into the Guanzhong area, evolved into Qinqiang, and became Beilu Bangzi in northern Shanxi. It was called Puzhou Bangzi in Hedong. *Shandong Bangzi* formed under the influence of the Shandong dialect and had been deeply loved by the local people. The locals even created a jingle: *When plowing the field and raking the ground, who could sing two lines of Bangzi opera* [14].

Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants had a great appreciation for Bangzi opera, and most of the guild halls they built included theatre buildings. *Every festival or the first day of the month, fellow villagers gathered together to worship gods and ancestors and had a feast* [15]. Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants spared no expense in inviting hometown opera troupes to

perform hometown operas. Firstly, this enriched their spiritual lives and alleviated their emptiness and loneliness; secondly, they demonstrated their economic strength through performances while also connecting with fellow villagers, local people, and officials; thirdly, the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall had become an important place for disseminating Shanxi-Shaanxi drama culture. As shown in Figure 3, a very complete and exquisite ancient stage building was preserved in the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall. There were Bangzi operas in areas with *Western business* activities, which corresponded to a proverb that stated, *the road of business was the road of opera*.



Figure 3. A stage in Liaocheng Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall

The popularity of Qin Opera in the local area could be observed through the following information: *Linqing County Chronicle* in the Republic of China: Linqing had the most Qin opera, followed by Luantan, and those who performed Luantan were almost like Guangling's unique tune [16]. The *Qingping County Chronicle* of the Republic of China also said: In addition to Qin Opera and Luantan, those who played leather reeds in the Qing customs, if they played four strings and bounced in remote areas. [17].

Herewith the internal records of the performance of Qin Opera in the Liaocheng Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall: The ink notes of the Guild Hall Theatre included plays such as *Killing the Lou* which depicted Song Jiang's anger and killing of Yan Po-Xi. In Beijing opera, it was known as *Sitting on the Lou to Kill Xi*, while in Han opera and other forms it was called *Song Jiang Kills Xi*. Only in Qin opera was it referred to as *Song Jiang Kills the Lou*. Other plays from the ink notes such as *Qing Shi Ling*, *Beauty Portrait*, *Loyalty and Righteousness Portrait*, and *Five Blessings Hall* were also commonly seen in Qin opera, while they were not often performed in Beijing opera or Yu opera. In addition, traditional Qin opera plays such as *Eight Portraits of Righteousness* (adapted in Beijing

opera as *The Orphan of Zhao* and *Searching for the Orphan*), Butterfly Cup, Yellow River Formation, Famen Temple, and Spring and Autumn Match were all mentioned in the Shanxi Guild Hall ink notes [3]. In addition to the Qin Opera, Hebei Bangzi was also popular in Dezhou, Liaocheng, and Linqing in Shandong Province. The ink records of the Shanshan Guild Hall Opera House in Liaocheng had documented traditional Hebei Bangzi plays, such as *Qingdingzhu*, *Baolian Lantern*, *Butterfly Cup*, *Zhanzi*, *Fazidu*, and so on.

Not only in the Shandong area but in the 22nd year of Jiaqing (1817), *Hanzhou Zhi* recorded, when discussing folk dramas in the Guang'an area: When it came to drama performances in newspaper competitions, Westerners used Qinqiang, Southerners use Kunqiang, and Chu natives mostly called it Gaoqiang (The Gazetteer of Hanzhou, 1817). The Taigu Guild in Zhangjiakou was also built by Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants, who often hired opera troupes from their hometown to perform

Bangzi Opera here. In addition, Jilin Dongguan Guandi Temple served as a Shanxi Guild Hall (built in 1711), with Jin people raising funds to build, every year festival township meeting, wooden Clappers Opera [18]. It could be seen that Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants had contributed significantly to the development and spread of Wooden Clappers throughout the country.

According to the *Taihe Zhengyin Pu* written by Ming Dynasty Zhu Quan, there were 36 famous opera artists in the Ming Dynasty, 18 of whom came from along the canal, accounting for half of the total. Most of the remaining artists were also located on the extension line of the canal, which further confirmed the saying that *the commercial road is the opera road*. Through the study of the flow of theatre artists along the Grand Canal, it was found that the Grand Canal not only provided a certain material foundation for the development of canal towns in Shandong but also objectively increased the exchange of culture between the north

Table 2. Opera artists moving along the canal [19]

Artists	Native place	Present province	The canal flows through the area?
Lu Gang	Xian Yang	Shaanxi	NO
Qin Wuye	Shaanxi	Shaanxi	NO
Li Liangchen	Tu Yang	Anhui	NO
Li Hongda	Tu Yang	Anhui	NO
Liu Tingjian	Tu Yang	Anhui	NO
Zhang Zhongshi	Tu Yang	Anhui	NO
Li Bingzhi	Tu Yang	Anhui	NO
Yang Jinghui	Feng Yang	Anhui	NO
Yu Yunzhong	Wan Ping	Beijing	YES
Hao Guoqi	Wan Ping	Beijing	YES
Wang Shanfu	Wan Ping	Beijing	YES
Mei Jingchu	Wan Ping	Beijing	YES
Yu Jingzhong	Wan Ping	Beijing	YES
Jin Shiming	Wan Ping	Beijing	YES
Li Shijing	Tong Zhou	Beijing	YES
Liu Yanda	Tong Zhou	Beijing	YES
Li Tong	Wan Ping	Beijing	YES
Shi Jiugao	Hang Zhou	Zhe Jiang	YES
Hua Shiliang	Hang Zhou	Hang Zhou	YES
Pu Touwang	Hang Zhou	Hang Zhou	YES
He Congshan	Hang Zhou	Hang Zhou	YES
Xu Shijie	Hang Zhou	Hang Zhou	YES
Jiang Kangzhi	Jin Ling	Jiang Su	YES
Zhang Zhongwen	Yang Zhou	Jiang Su	YES
Gan Zhongping	Zhen Jiang	Jiang Su	YES
Li Boju	Zhen Jiang	Jiang Su	YES
Jiang Yuanzuo	Chang Zhou	Jiang Su	YES
Tang Zhizhong	Pei Xian	Jiang Su	YES
Wu Youzhi	Bian Liang	He Nan	NO
Li Yanzhong	Bianliang	He Nan	NO
Wang Junyou	Zun Hua	He Bei	YES
Wang Zijing	Lin Qing	Shan Dong	YES
Hu Weizhong	Ji Ning	Shan Dong	YES
Feng Yangao	Tai Zhou	Fu Jian	NO
Fu Bingwen	Yong Ping	Yun Nan	NO
Jiu Jingzhi	Se Mu	Central Asia and the Middle East	NO

and south, especially the exchange of regional theatre culture. This enriched the spiritual and cultural life of the local people. The concept that *the commercial route was the theatre route* had been further validated, as shown in Table 2.

5. Folk belief on Lu Canal – Worship of Emperor Guan Guandi

Temple was built to enshrine Guan Yu, the general of the Shu Kingdom during the Three Kingdoms period. It was also known as Wusheng Temple, Wenheng Temple, Zhongyi Temple, and Laoye Temple. The Guandi Temple itself was also inextricably linked to the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall. The author found that Chinese society and religious systems united, *Guild Hall* and *Temple* directly showed this characteristic with blurring boundaries, mutual use of the name, and convergence of their functions [20]. Some Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Halls were also called Guandi Temples by the world. Regarding the relationship between the two, it was difficult to explain clearly in one or two sentences. Not all Guandi temples were Shanxi-Shaanxi guild halls, and there were also Guandi temples that were not related to the guild hall. In terms of historical development, the Guandi Temple appeared earlier than the guild hall [21]. Guan Yu was born in Shanxi Province and changed his surname in Shaanxi Province. The character of *loyalty, benevolence, righteousness, and courage* he represented conformed to the psychological needs of Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants' identity: worship of Guan Yu was not only the embodiment of self- moral cultivation, but also the moral restraint of business partners. Every time Shanxi and Shaanxi

merchants formed a commercial force, they would concentrate manpower, financial, and material resources to build a *Guild Hall*, and each guild hall must have worshiped Guan Yu, as shown in figure 4, this was the statue of Guan Yu enshrined in Liaocheng Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall. Shandong was an area where the worship of Guan Yu was relatively developed, especially along the Grand Canal during the Ming and Qing dynasties. There were numerous records of Guandi temples in the region. During the Qianlong period, there were 11 official Guandi temples set up both inside and outside the city of Dezhou [22]. In the Qing dynasty, the city of Liaocheng in Dongchangfu was filled with Guandi temples on every street and alley, with reportedly over a hundred temples inside and outside the city. Some of the famous ones included the Shanxi-Shaanxi guild hall on the bank of the Grand Canal, the Guandi temple built along the west gate city wall, the *One Step Three Guan Temple* on the south gate city wall and underneath, the *Chidi Dangyang Temple* on the west bank of the canal in the eastern gate, the Yanggu Temple on Grain Street (established by Yanggu opera actors with their own funds), and the *Temple on Temple* on Dongguan Street (the temple had two levels, with the god of wealth worshipped on the lower level and Guan Yu on the upper level). According to incomplete local records, there were 34 Guandi temples in the jurisdiction of Liaocheng during the Ming and Qing dynasties (2 in Liaocheng, 1 in Linqing, 3 in Tangyi, 3 in Qingping, 4 in Boping, 1 in Shenxian, 1 in Guancheng, 1 in Chaocheng, 3 in Guanxian, 1 in Gaotang, 2 in Dong'e, 2 in Chiping, 4 in Yanggu, 3 in Shouzhong, and 3 in Zhangqiu). These were only the temples that had clear records in local gazetteers, and some smaller or more remote temples may not have been recorded in the gazetteers. The Gazetteer of Chiping County in the Republic of China recorded that in addition to the two Guandi temples in the east of the city and Nan Guanqiao, there were also 16 Guandi temples in various villages and towns [23]. Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants, especially the Jin merchants, worshiped Guan Yu not only in their business practices and philosophy of life but also in their architectural residences. For example, in the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall in Liaocheng, there were many painted operas on the beams and columns that extolled Guan Yu's life experience and philosophy of loyalty and righteousness, such as The Oath of the Peach Garden, Three Battles Against Lu Bu, Three Visits to the Cottage, Beheading Yan Liang, Presenting the Red Hare Steed, Granting Authority and Sealing Titles, Crossing the Ba Bridge in Silk Robes, Nightly



Figure 4. The Guan Yu Idol in Liaocheng Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall

Observations of the Spring and Autumn Annals, Reunion of Brothers, and so on. The reverence for Guan Yu reflected the values and cultural beliefs of the Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants, demonstrating the deep influence of the general's legend on the lives of people in the region. The couplets on the inner columns extolled the military strategies and moral character of Guan Yu, as shown in Table 3. Those on the outer columns inspired and encouraged future generations to stay grounded in their pursuits and uphold the values of *Loyalty, filial piety, loyalty and righteousness*, without betraying trust or abandoning their principles.

Table 3. Guan Yu's couplets

There were two couplets in praise of Guan Yu on the hall of Tributes opposite the opera theatre in the Shanshan Guild Hall	
Couplets on the inner column	Great and heroic throughout history, with a resolute and fiery heart, he was a true gentleman of his time in the Han dynasty. With utmost sincerity to the heaven and earth, he was a heroic and valiant man of the Jin dynasty for thousands of years.
Couplets on the outside columns	Rather than dying for a noble cause, who among us could maintain our integrity? Many spoke of their knowledge, but scholars who could apply it were few; those who only talked of history were mere pretenders.

The reason why the worship of Emperor Guan was strong in Shandong, and it was not only due to Guan Yu's character of loyalty, benevolence, and justice aligning with the traditional values of the people, but also because many Shanxi merchants came to operate in the Shandong canal area during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Firstly, Guan Yu's spirit of loyalty was an ethical pursuit of Shanxi- Shaanxi merchants, who followed the moral norms of *valuing faithfulness, eliminating hypocrisy, respecting loyalty, contemptuousness and egoism, offering universal love and hatred to the poor* [9]. Secondly, they believed in the *God of Wealth* Guan Yu, praying to bless their finances with rolling prosperity and peace. Thirdly, they worshiped Guan Yu as an idol to alleviate homesickness and form bonds of unity of friendship and kinship. Finally, Guan Yu's image of *Loyalty, Faithfulness, Benevolence and Righteousness* could also be shaped to improve their status in the places where they resided. Therefore, Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants and their guild halls had become important mediums and carriers of Guan Yu culture.

6. Conclusions

This article had a multi-line research structure, as shown in figure 5, explored the relationships between Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants and canals,

Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants and guild houses, Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants and Bangzi Opera, and Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants and Guan Yu worship. Although it may have seemed complicated, the main line was clear - it examined the development of Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants and Bangzi Opera under the influence of canal culture, as well as the role of Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants in promoting the development of Bangzi opera. In general, the article explored and studies the viewpoints of The Commercial Road was The Opera Road and The Waterway was The Opera Road. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal not only influenced the development of the commercial territory of Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants but also had a profound influence on the development and spread of the Bangzi Opera and the Guan Yu culture that Shanxi-Shaanxi merchants loved most. They also witnessed the rise and fall of the Grand Canal together.

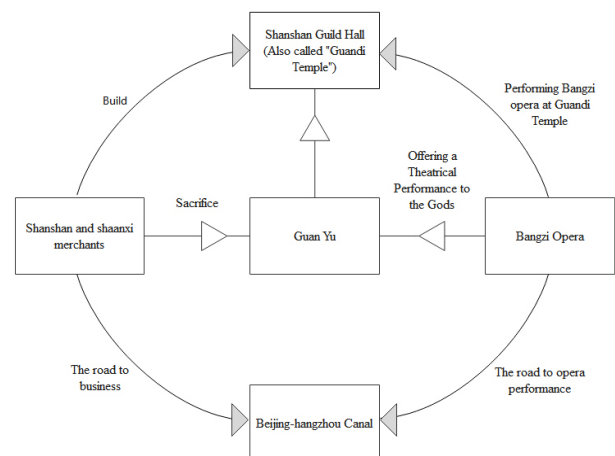


Figure 5. Relationship between Guan Yu and other elements associated to merchants

Author Statements:

- **Ethical approval:** The conducted research is not related to either human or animal use.
- **Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper
- **Acknowledgement:** The authors declare that they have nobody or no-company to acknowledge.
- **Author contributions:** The author solely conceived the research idea, conducted the historical analysis, and completed the writing of the manuscript.

- **Funding information:** The authors declare that there is no funding to be acknowledged.
- **Data availability statement:** The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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