



A Study on the Cultural Connotations and Heritage Development of Nanfeng Nuo Dance Masks

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Received 18/08/2024

Revised 01/09/2024

Accepted 01/10/2024

Abstract

Background and Aim: As an intangible cultural heritage, mask dance holds a profound influence worldwide. Chinese Nuo Dance, particularly the Nanfeng Nuo Dance from Jiangxi Province, is renowned for its distinctive artistic style and rich cultural heritage. However, with rapid social development, the Nanfeng Nuo Dance and its associated mask culture are facing a crisis in inheritance, necessitating an in-depth study of the cultural significance of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks.

Materials and Methods: This study employs a literature review, field investigation, and interdisciplinary research methods to collect historical data on the Nanfeng Nuo Dance and the belief functions of its masks. It aims to analyze their cultural connotations and the challenges of inheritance while offering guidance for the preservation and development of this tradition.

Results: The research reveals the rich symbolic meaning of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks, their diverse deity worship, local cultural influences, and their value in contemporary society. In response to the practical difficulties of inheritance, the study proposes strategies such as enhancing cultural education and promotion, revitalizing intangible cultural heritage resources, building cultural brands, and integrating rural revitalization with cultural inheritance.

Conclusion: Based on the research findings, it is evident that the Nanfeng Nuo masks are not only products of an agricultural society but also hold significant cultural heritage value in modern society. This study advocates for enhancing cultural education, revitalizing intangible cultural heritage, and building cultural brands as key strategies to promote the sustainable development of Nanfeng Nuo mask culture.

Keywords: Nanfeng Nuo dance; Nuo masks; Cultural heritage; Cultural connotation

Introduction

As a significant form of intangible cultural heritage, mask dance exerts profound influence globally. From Japan's Noh theater to Korea's talcum, mask dances captivate researchers with their unique artistic forms and rich cultural connotations. However, among these widely recognized mask dance cultures, China's Nuo Dance remains relatively obscure, despite its long history and diverse forms. As an important intangible cultural heritage of China, Nuo Dance not only represents a key manifestation of ancient sacrificial culture but also embodies the concentrated expression of Chinese national cultural traditions.

Among the various forms of Nuo Dance in China, the Nanfeng Nuo Dance from Jiangxi Province stands out due to its distinctive artistic style and deep cultural roots. After thousands of years of inheritance and development, Nanfeng Nuo Dance has become a traditional performing art with strong regional characteristics. Its rugged, primitive, and powerful dance movements have earned it the title of "a living fossil of ancient Chinese dance" (Jia & Li, 1999) (Figure 1). In Nanfeng Nuo Dance, masks, as core elements, not only symbolize different roles and meanings but also carry specific functions and uses, profoundly reflecting local culture, customs, and belief systems.

However, with rapid social development and changes in the cultural ecosystem, Nanfeng Nuo Dance and its mask culture are facing a severe inheritance crisis. According to statistical data, in 2015, there were 136 Nuo troupes in the Nanfeng area, but only about half were active, with performances becoming shorter and more limited in scope (Yao, 2016:163). Even more concerning is that although there are over 2,000 Nuo Dance artists in Nanfeng County, only one has been recognized as a representative inheritor of national intangible cultural heritage projects, and one at the provincial level, with most inheritors receiving no official recognition or financial support (Yao, 2016:164). This situation not only reflects the difficulties in the transmission of traditional culture but also underscores the urgent need for in-depth research and conservation of Nanfeng Nuo Dance culture.

In light of this, the present study focuses on the cultural carrier of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks, aiming to conduct a comprehensive analysis of their historical evolution, cultural connotations, and significance in

contemporary society through systematic data collection and field investigation. The study will focus on the following issues: (1) the historical evolution of Nanfeng Nuo Dance and the content of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks; (2) the cultural connotations of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks; (3) the current state of inheritance of Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture and the challenges it faces; and (4) how to preserve and develop Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture in a modern context. Through in-depth research on these issues, this paper aims to provide theoretical foundations and practical recommendations for the conservation and inheritance of Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture, while also contributing new academic perspectives to the preservation and development of China's intangible cultural heritage.



Figure 1 Nanfeng Nuo Dance

Note: Retrieved from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/pkGcSPiKv4ZL6RcH9ttRfA>

Objectives

1. To collect the history of Nanfeng Nuo Dance and the content of Nuo Dance masks.
2. To analyze the cultural connotations and heritage development of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks.
3. To propose recommendations for the preservation and development of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture.

Literature Review

1. Nanfeng Region

The Nanfeng region is located in the eastern part of Jiangxi Province, China (Figure 2, yellow area on the left) and the southeastern part of Fuzhou City (Figure 2, yellow area on the right). Geographically, its coordinates are between 116°09' to 116°45' East longitude and 26°51' to 27°21' North latitude. Surrounded by mountains, Nanfeng County enjoys abundant rainfall and favorable agricultural climate conditions.

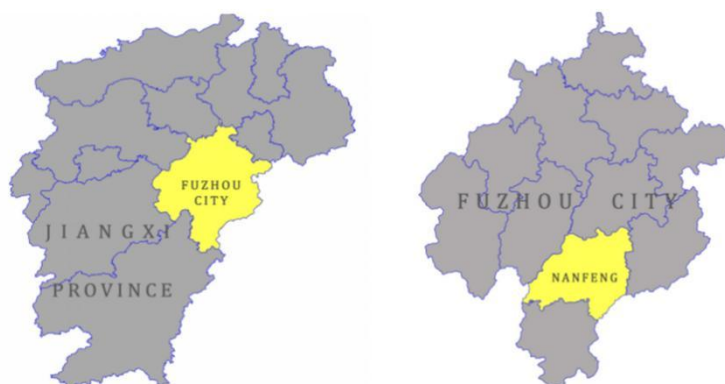


Figure 2 Map of Jiangxi Province (left) and Map of Fuzhou City (right)
Note: Adapt from 17.antv (<https://17.antv.antgroup.com/custom/tools/map>)

Nanfeng County has a long history, with human activity dating back to the Shang and Zhou dynasties (approximately 1600 BCE - 256 BCE). The county was officially established during the second year of the Taiping era of the Wu Kingdom in the Three Kingdoms period (257 CE), giving it a history of over 1,700 years. Over the past millennium, this region has developed a rich cultural heritage, with its most representative cultures being agricultural culture, Taoist culture, and Nuo culture (Liu, 2001:40).

2. The History of Nanfeng Nuo Dance

Nanfeng Nuo Dance, commonly referred to as "Nuo Dance," is a traditional dance art originating from ancient exorcism and epidemic prevention rituals. It represents not only a form of performance but also a vivid manifestation of China's profound historical and rich folk traditions. As the first region in China to be acclaimed as the "Hometown of Nuo Dance Art," Nanfeng in Jiangxi Province boasts a tradition of over two thousand years. The roots of this cultural tradition can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, when the Chu, Wu, and Yue ethnic groups in Jiangxi practiced ancestor worship, believed in witchcraft, and engaged in divination and sacrifice (Huang, 2019:144). The history of Nanfeng Nuo Dance itself extends to the 2nd century BCE. Historical records indicate that during his tenure as the magistrate of Fanyang County (present-day northeastern Poyang, Jiangxi), Wu Rui, the leader of the local Yue people, actively promoted the preservation of Nuo Dance among the locals to "expel evil spirits" and "drive away disasters caused by military weapons." This historical fact not only confirms the long history of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance but also highlights its significant role in society at that time (Zhang, 2006:112).

During the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), the imperial court set specific regulations regarding the time, location, ceremonial protocols, and the number and age of participants involved in local Nuo dances. These regulations made the management of Nanfeng Nuo Dance more standardized, increased its dissemination, and expanded its audience. Zeng Zhigong suggests that Nanfeng Nuo Dance during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) was likely influenced by royal court Nuo performances. He reasons that out of the eleven county magistrates who served in Nanfeng between 989 and 1012, seven were imperial guards, who likely brought the influence of the court Nuo Dance to Nanfeng (Zeng, 2019:24). During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1912 CE), Nanfeng Nuo Dance did not decline with the cessation of official Nuo rituals. Instead, it absorbed more folk stories and myths, leading to further development. At this time, Nanfeng Nuo Dance incorporated theatrical performances and martial arts movements, creating many new Nuo Dance programs (Xie & Zhang, 2007:234).

Today, Nuo Dance has disappeared in many regions. However, it is heartening that a small number of people in Nanfeng are still preserving this tradition. Yao Yuan remarked, 'As the world continues to modernize, Nanfeng Nuo Dance, a living fossil of Chinese dance, will face immense cultural challenges and severe tests of inheritance' (Yao, 2016:28).

2. Nanfeng Nuo Dance Masks

Nuo masks are an important component of Nuo dance performances, these masks are not merely artistic objects but also symbolic carriers rich in cultural significance, with each mask representing a specific role and embodying unique functions and profound cultural meanings (Wan, 1999:30).

In terms of production techniques, the craftsmanship of Nanfeng Nuo masks follows traditional methods. Artisans primarily use willow and camphor woods, shaping various forms through meticulous carving techniques. During production, artisans focus on detailed carving and apply painting and varnishing after the carving is completed, resulting in either rugged and primitive or solemn and exquisite artistic effects (Zeng, Wang & Li, 2006:79). This craftsmanship not only demonstrates the artisans' skill but also reflects the local aesthetic values (Figure 3).



Figure 3 Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks
Note: Photographed by the researcher.

According to Huang Chaobin, the artistic style of Shanggan Village Nuo masks is characterized by its strong expressiveness and rich symbolic meanings. By skillfully altering the features and decorations of the masks, artisans vividly portray various character images, allowing viewers to discern the characters' identities, genders, ages, and personalities. This artistic approach not only highlights the unique charm of folk art but also reflects the influence of the traditional Chinese "face mask" culture (Huang, 2019:149).

Overall, the expressive power of Nanfeng Nuo masks is profound, capable of depicting a wide range of complex character traits, from fierce, menacing, and majestic to gentle and benevolent, fully showcasing the rich connotations of Chinese folk beliefs and mythological legends. As an essential part of Nuo culture, Shanggan Village Nuo masks, with their unique production techniques, rich expressiveness, and deep cultural significance, provide a valuable window for studying the culture of the Nanfeng region, Nuo Dance art, and local folklore.

3. The Role of Nanfeng Nuo Dance Mask

The Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks are numerous and rich in religious significance, primarily featuring deities, but also including many folk heroes and mythical creatures, reflecting the local people's beliefs. According to Mr. Zeng Zhigong's research, these masks can be broadly categorized into six main types: epidemic-exorcising deities, folk deities, Daoist and Buddhist immortals, legendary heroes, mythical animals, and secular figures (Zeng, 2019:167).

Epidemic-exorcising deities constitute the core of Nuo Dance, embodying the most primitive functions of Nuo culture aimed at warding off evil and preventing epidemics. These masks include figures such as the Judge, the Mountain-Opener, the White Deity, and Zhong Kui, highlighting the strong desires of people to combat disease and remove inauspicious elements (Figure 4). Folk deities, such as the Earth God, Door God, and Kitchen God, reflect the protective beliefs in everyday life and express the psychological needs for a good life and for warding off disasters.



Figure 4 Judge Masks, the Epidemic-Exorcising Deity Masks

Note: Photographed by the researcher.

The presence of Daoist and Buddhist masks indicates the deep influence of both Buddhist and Daoist thoughts on local folk beliefs. This not only reflects the widespread nature of traditional Chinese religions but also demonstrates the assimilation and transformation of different religions within folk beliefs (Huang, 2019:147). Heroic figures, such as King Wen of Zhou, Jiang Ziya, and Sun Wukong, represent the admiration for heroic individuals and the veneration of extraordinary abilities and noble virtues.

Masks featuring mythical animals are largely derived from mythological stories such as "Journey to the West" and "The Legend of the White Snake". Although primarily used in Nuo Dance performances, these masks also reflect traditional Chinese cultural concepts of the relationship between humans and nature and the imagination of mystical powers. Secular figure masks, such as Meng Jiangnu and Xu Xian, illustrate the integration of folk stories into Nuo culture and demonstrate the close connection between Nuo beliefs and everyday life (Zeng, 2019:169).

Overall, the belief system reflected in Nanfeng nuo masks not only showcases the unique cultural characteristics of the region but also provides valuable material for understanding the complexity and diversity of traditional Chinese culture.

Conceptual Framework

This study encompasses several key aspects:

First, it provides a systematic literature review on the overview of the Nanfeng region, the history of Nanfeng Nuo dance, and the contents of Nuo dance masks.

Second, it delves into the cultural connotations of these masks, interpreting their symbolic elements and cultural metaphors from semiotic, religious, and folkloristic perspectives, and elucidates their role and significance in the spiritual life of the Nanfeng community.

Third, it focuses on the current state of inheritance and the challenges faced by the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask tradition. Through field research and interviews, collect first-hand information on the inheritance of Nuo dance masks, analyze the impact of modern social changes on the inheritance of Nuo dance mask culture, and identify obstacles and problems in the process of protection and inheritance.

Finally, it proposes innovative strategies for the protection and development of the mask culture in Nanfeng. This study aims to offer practical recommendations and solutions for the preservation, inheritance, and innovative development of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture from an interdisciplinary perspective.

To further clarify the research concepts and approach, the researcher has developed a conceptual framework (Figure 5):

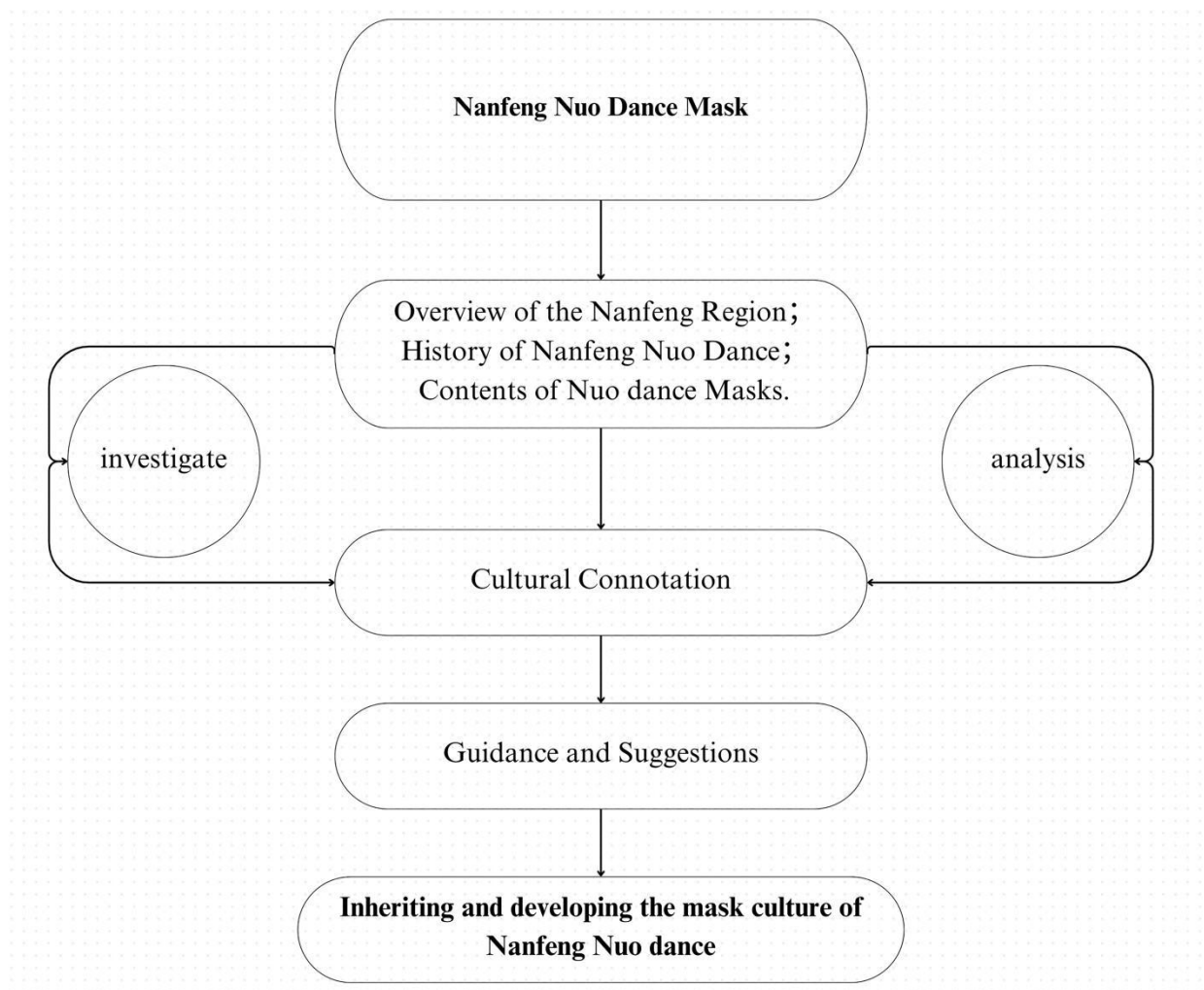


Figure 5 Conceptual Framework
Note: Constructed by the researcher

Methodology

To ensure both the depth and breadth of the study, the following methods and theoretical approaches will be employed:

1. Literature Review

As the foundational method, this approach involves systematically collecting and analyzing historical documents, academic works, and local chronicles related to the Nanfeng Nuo Dance and its masks. This will aid in constructing a comprehensive understanding of the historical background, cultural heritage, and current status of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks.

2. Field Investigation

This method involves conducting field research in the Nanfeng area. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, primary data will be gathered on the production, usage, and symbolic meanings of the Nuo Dance masks, and the associated beliefs and ritual activities of the residents.

3. Participant Observation

The researchers will immerse themselves in the local community, engaging in the production and use of the Nuo Dance masks. By observing and recording the social activities and rituals related to the masks, the study aims to gain a deeper cultural understanding.

4. Interdisciplinary Research

Combining theories and methods from cultural anthropology, folklore studies, religious studies, and art studies, this approach will provide a multi-faceted and layered analysis of the cultural connotations of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks.

Results

1. Cultural Significance of Nanfeng Nuo Dance Masks

1.1 Symbolic Significance: Exorcism, Blessing, and Fertility

The study finds that the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks embody symbolic meanings centered around exorcism, blessing, and fertility, reflecting the most basic desires of the ancient Nanfeng people. The Nanfeng Nuo masks represent the exorcism function inherent in the original Nuo rituals.

Firstly, the masks continue the essential function of the Nuo Dance in exorcising evil. Figures such as the "Mountain-Opener" (Figure 6) and "Zhong Kui" embody the primitive religious concept of "using evil to drive away evil" and "using ugliness to counteract ugliness." These masks are endowed with mystical powers through specific rituals and consecration ceremonies, symbolizing the struggle against disease and disaster.



Figure 6 "Kaishan, an ancient Nuo deity, is used for exorcism activities at the beginning of the performance."

Note: Photographed by the researcher.



Secondly, the Nuo masks feature numerous legendary figures known for their loyalty and bravery, as well as mythological characters associated with blessings and good fortune, such as "Guan Gong," "Hua Guansuo," "Buddha," and "Eight Immortals." These figures, revered for their contributions and their role in seeking wealth and protection, reflect the people's hopes for happiness and safety. Additionally, certain Nuo Dance performances, such as "Harmony," correspond to themes of seeking a bountiful harvest. These masks not only exhibit solemnity and sanctity in appearance but are also imbued with the power of blessing in rituals, symbolizing hopes for prosperity for families and villages.

Thirdly, some elements in the Nanfeng Nuo Dance express desires for fertility and family continuity. For example, the obligatory "Nuo Gong Nuo Po" performance symbolizes prosperity and the continuity of descendants. Moreover, the statue of the Nuo deity in the Shanggan Village Nuo Temple of Nanfeng, holding a "Round Lotus" or "Interlocking Children," represents sexual and reproductive symbolism, becoming an object of villagers' prayers for offspring. This reflects the cultural significance of fertility worship in the ancient agricultural society, where having many descendants was crucial for family and village welfare.

Overall, the cultural significance of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks profoundly reflects the spiritual world and values of traditional Chinese agricultural society. These fundamental desires (exorcism, blessing, and fertility) are not only embodied in the mask's designs and symbolic meanings but also permeate the entire Nuo Dance ritual and performance, carrying the cultural heritage and values of traditional Chinese society over the centuries.

1.2 Characteristics of Belief: Diversity and Inclusiveness

The research indicates that the belief system represented by the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks exhibits characteristics of diversity and inclusiveness. Firstly, the deities depicted in the Nuo masks originate from a wide range of sources, encompassing folklore, mythological tales, and heroic deeds from different historical periods. This diverse sourcing reflects the close connection between Nuo culture and folk literary traditions, as well as the demand for entertainment and narrative richness in Nuo performances.

Secondly, the deity system in the Nanfeng Nuo masks integrates elements from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, while also incorporating ideas about local secular heroes. This amalgamation of religious cultures reflects the traditional Chinese characteristic of "three teachings as one" and demonstrates how folk beliefs absorb and transform orthodox religions.

It is noteworthy that, despite its origins in primitive religion, Nuo Dance has relatively weak religious connotations and lacks a systematic ideological framework. This characteristic allows Nuo culture to exhibit great inclusiveness and flexibility in absorbing elements from other religions.

Lastly, since Nuo performances are primarily carried out by local villagers who do not deliberately construct a rigid pantheon, this openness enables the folk pantheon of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks to easily accommodate various local deities, forming a highly intricate polytheistic worship system. To clearly illustrate this complexity, the researcher has summarized it in a table (Table 1).

Table 1 Table of the Belief System of Nanfeng Nuo Dance Masks

Types of Deities		Representative Deities	Source of Deities
Pestilence-Deities		Kaishan, Zhong Kui, Qianliyan, Shunfeng'er, Zhang Tianshi, Lei Gong	Pestilence-exorcising rituals in Nuo culture
Folk Masks and Daoist Buddhist Masks	Deities	Tu Di, Men Shen, Zao Shen, Kui Xing, Fu Xing, Lu Xing, Shou Xing, He He Er Xian	Folk beliefs and blessing rituals
	Deities	Nu Wa, Yu Huang Da Di, Tai Bai Jin Xing, Han Zhong Li, Lü Dong Bin, Guan Yin, Tathagata Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, Eight Immortals	
Heroic Masks		Jiang Ziya, Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, Yang Jian, Mu Guiying, Yang Wulang	Legendary novels and historical stories
Mythical Animal Characters Masks		Monkey Spirit, Yellow Robe Monster, Spider Demon, White Snake Demon, Crab Demon	Mythological stories such as "Journey to the West" and "Legend of the White Snake"
Secular Mask		Meng Jiangnv, Xu Xian, Fa Hai, Scholar, Young Nun	Historical folk stories and daily life scenes

In summary, the complex and diverse deity worship associated with the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks provides a valuable perspective for studying Chinese folk beliefs. It not only showcases the diversity and



inclusiveness of folk beliefs but also reflects the "three teachings as one" characteristic of traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, this belief system's composition reveals the psychological needs and values of the people, offering important insights into the spiritual world of traditional Chinese society.

1.3 The Influence and Integration of Local Culture on Nanfeng Nuo Dance Mask Culture

The study also reveals that the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks profoundly reflect the ongoing integration of local culture, a feature that endows the Nanfeng Nuo Dance with distinct regional characteristics. Firstly, the long history of the Nanfeng region has nurtured a rich cultural heritage, with farming culture, Taoist culture, and Nuo culture forming the three main pillars of local culture. This multi-faceted cultural background provides abundant material and inspiration for the development of Nuo Dance masks.

The influence of farming culture on Nuo Dance masks is primarily evident in festive customs. For example, typical farming customs such as the "Spring Community" have been incorporated into Nuo Dance rituals, reflecting the local people's wishes for favorable weather and bountiful harvests. These agricultural elements are manifested in the design and symbolic meaning of the masks.

The flourishing of Taoist culture has also had a profound impact on Nuo Dance masks. Since the Southern Tang period, Taoist temples have been established in Nanfeng County, creating a strong Taoist cultural atmosphere. This influence is reflected in the images and symbols of Taoist deities on the Nuo Dance masks, enriching their religious connotations.

It is noteworthy that over more than two thousand years of development, Nanfeng Nuo culture has continuously absorbed and integrated local farming and Taoist cultural elements, forming a distinctive cultural form. This integration is reflected in the design, colors, and symbolic meanings of the Nuo Dance masks, making the Nuo Dance masks a comprehensive carrier of local culture.

1.4 The Contemporary Value of the Cultural Heritage of Nanfeng Nuo Dance Masks

Research indicates that the cultural heritage of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks, as a significant part of China's intangible cultural heritage, holds immense value in contemporary cultural preservation.

First, the cultural heritage of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks serves as a vital link for cultural identity and spiritual continuity among the people of Nanfeng. By preserving and passing down the Nuo Dance mask culture, residents can maintain a strong sense of cultural identity and reinforce community cohesion. The traditional values embodied in the masks, such as exorcism, blessing, and fertility, reflect the profound spiritual pursuits and cultural wisdom of the Chinese people, conveying aspirations for a better life and a steadfast commitment to traditional morals. (Ai, 2023:115) Particularly in the context of modernization, the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture can symbolize cultural awareness, helping people to reassess and cherish their indigenous culture.

Second, the cultural preservation of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks represents the continuation and protection of historical culture. The Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks carry thousands of years of historical memory and cultural accumulation, making them invaluable for understanding and studying ancient Chinese society, religious beliefs, and folk culture. As many traditional cultures gradually disappear over time, the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks, as "living fossils," provide precious physical evidence for research into ancient Chinese dance, ritual ceremonies, and religious beliefs. Their continued preservation in contemporary times not only helps safeguard this cultural heritage but also offers ongoing support for academic research.

Third, the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks are a testament to cultural diversity. In the context of globalization, cultural diversity and uniqueness become particularly important. As an essential part of traditional Chinese culture, the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture showcases the richness and diversity of Chinese culture and its regional characteristics. Its preservation in contemporary times contributes to protecting and promoting cultural diversity, resisting the trend of cultural homogenization. Through this cultural continuity, the unique charm of traditional Chinese culture can be displayed, while also fostering cultural exchange and understanding between different cultures.

Fourth, it contributes to cultural innovation and the realization of contemporary value. The Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture holds significant potential for innovation in modern society. Integrating traditional cultural elements with contemporary art forms can promote cultural innovation and development, bringing new vitality to the culture in a modern social environment. For example, incorporating Nuo Dance masks into modern performing arts, film production, or cultural and creative products can not only enhance their cultural value but also turn them into valuable resources for the contemporary cultural industry. This approach can facilitate cultural preservation while also generating economic benefits, thereby realizing the contemporary value of the culture.



Fifth, it aids in local cultural identity and modern cultural transmission. The preservation and development of Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture in contemporary society have significant educational implications. On one hand, it helps the younger generation understand and learn about traditional culture, fostering their interest in and identification with local culture. On the other hand, cultural courses, workshops, and practical activities raise awareness of the importance of cultural preservation, helping students maintain cultural roots and identity in a globalized world.

In summary, the importance of preserving the cultural heritage of Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks in contemporary society lies not only in their cultural and historical value but also in their ongoing role in modern society. Through conscious preservation and transmission, this cultural heritage can contribute to various aspects of society, including cultural identity, historical research, cultural diversity, innovation and development, and educational transmission, becoming a crucial cultural link between the past and the future.

2. Realistic Challenges and Guidance for the Inheritance and Development of Nanfeng Nuo Dance Mask Culture

Based on the above research findings, it is clear that the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture, as an important intangible cultural heritage, carries rich historical and cultural significance and requires attention, protection, and development. However, in the context of rapid modern societal development, the inheritance and development of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture face severe challenges.

Firstly, a major issue is the cultural transmission gap. With the modernization of society, local youth in Nanfeng have increasingly less understanding of Nuo Dance culture. This generational disconnect from traditional culture results in a lack of identity and continuity among younger generations, leading to difficulties in cultural inheritance.

Secondly, the destruction of traditional ecological environments has also negatively impacted the continuity of Nanfeng Nuo Dance culture. With the advancement of science and technology and the progression of modernization, the ecological environment essential for the survival of traditional culture is under continuous threat. The staged performances and commercialization of Nuo Dance, while raising its visibility, have also diminished its authenticity and cultural content.

To address these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed:

(1) Enhance Cultural Education and Promotion: Introduce courses on the science of Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture into the local education system to increase youth awareness and recognition of local culture. Additionally, utilizes modern media and online platforms to widely promote Nanfeng Nuo Dance culture, enhancing its recognition and acceptance among broader social groups.

(2) Activate Intangible Cultural Heritage Resources: Draw on successful cases of intangible cultural heritage activation domestically and internationally, and integrate Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture with the modern cultural and creative industries. Promote its commercialization and artistic development while maintaining cultural authenticity, and rejuvenate its market presence through innovative design and creative reinvention.

(3) Build a Cultural Brand: Package and promote Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture as a regional cultural brand to enhance its cultural value and market competitiveness. Integrate related cultural elements such as Nuo Dance and Nuo Drama into a unified cultural symbol to expand the overall influence of Nanfeng Nuo culture.

(4) Promote the Integration of Rural Revitalization and Cultural Inheritance: Stimulate local villagers' awareness of the value of local culture and encourage their active participation in cultural inheritance and development. Support this through policy measures and resource guidance, facilitating the creative transformation and innovative development of Nanfeng Nuo Dance culture to achieve dual revitalization of culture and economy.

It is hoped that through these measures, the inheritance and development of Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture will find new pathways in modern society, continuing to shine brightly in the continuum of history and culture.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study delves deeply into the cultural connotations of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks and their preservation and development in contemporary society. Through a combination of literature review, field investigations, and interdisciplinary analysis, we have uncovered the rich cultural meanings of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks in terms of their historical evolution, belief systems, local cultural influences, and



contemporary transmission value. The findings underscore the significance of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks as an intangible cultural heritage and provide concrete recommendations for addressing the challenges in their preservation and development.

Firstly, the symbolic meanings, belief characteristics, and local cultural influences of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks constitute their unique cultural connotations. These masks not only embody the simple desires for exorcism and blessings but also reflect the worship of diverse deities and the continuous integration of local culture. These findings align with existing research and further enrich our understanding of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance culture. However, the study also reveals that some traditional crafts are disappearing, indicating that the threat posed by modernization to this cultural heritage is far greater than anticipated.

Secondly, this research reaffirms the importance of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks in traditional culture and highlights the challenges they face in contemporary transmission. These challenges include the discontinuity in cultural transmission and the destruction of the traditional ecological environment. To address these challenges, we propose strengthening cultural education, revitalizing intangible cultural heritage resources, building cultural brands, and integrating rural revitalization with cultural preservation. These measures aim to provide new avenues for the preservation and development of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture, ensuring that it continues to flourish in modern society.

Moreover, the strength of this study lies in its systematic research methodology and theoretical framework, which ensure both depth and breadth in the analysis. However, the study's limitation is its strong regional focus, which may limit the generalizability of some findings. Therefore, future research should expand the scope of the investigation to explore Nuo Dance mask cultures in other regions and further analyze their evolution and adaptation in the context of globalization.

In conclusion, this study provides a theoretical foundation and practical recommendations for the preservation and transmission of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture, contributing a new academic perspective to the protection and development of China's intangible cultural heritage. Through these efforts, we hope that the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture will find new vitality in modern society and continue to be passed down and developed.

Recommendation

The researchers suggest that future studies could further explore how to effectively preserve and innovate this cultural heritage within the context of globalization, ensuring its vitality and influence in modern society. The specific recommendations include the following aspects:

1. Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies. Future research could compare the Nanfeng Nuo Dance masks with similar cultural heritage from other countries or regions. This would involve exploring the symbolic meanings, methods of transmission, and adaptability of masks within different cultural contexts. Such comparisons could help identify more universal paths for cultural preservation and innovation in a globalized world.

2. Digital Preservation and Dissemination. With the advancement of technology, digital means are playing an increasingly important role in the protection and dissemination of cultural heritage. Future research could focus on how to utilize technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) to widely promote and showcase the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture, thereby attracting the attention of younger generations and the international community.

3. Socio-Economic Research. Further studies could investigate the relationship between the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture and local economic development, particularly how cultural industrialization and branding could drive sustainable local economic growth. This approach would not only help in preserving and transmitting the cultural heritage but also bring economic benefits to the local community, thereby enhancing the culture's vitality and impact.

4. Education and Community Engagement. Future research should focus on how to increase residents'—especially the youth's—sense of identity and participation in the Nuo Dance mask culture through education and community involvement. This could include integrating Nuo Dance culture into school curricula and organizing cultural workshops, and community activities to ensure the living transmission of the cultural heritage.

5. Policy Support and Cultural Legislation. Further research could explore how policy support and cultural legislation can be used to establish more robust mechanisms for cultural protection, providing legal safeguards for the long-term preservation and development of the Nanfeng Nuo Dance mask culture.



Research in this area could offer a theoretical foundation for the formulation of more effective cultural policies.

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