

# A Study on the Social Interaction Mechanisms Between the Nuo Temple and Traditional Villages in Pingxiang, Jiangxi from a Cultural Space Perspective

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## Abstract:

This study employs spatial production theory, using extant representative Nuo temples as case studies. Through GIS spatial analysis and in-depth interviews, it investigates the social interaction mechanisms between Nuo temples and traditional villages in Pingxiang, Jiangxi. Findings reveal that Pingxiang's Nuo temples transform ritual knowledge into cultural capital through the overlay of sacred-secular spaces and clan rotation systems. While their social functions have weakened during modernization, their cultural resilience has strengthened. This research offers theoretical insights for preserving and revitalizing cultural spaces in traditional villages, providing practical case studies for enhancing the adaptability of traditional culture in modern society.

**Keywords:** cultural space, community life, Jiangxi Nuo temples, social interaction, traditional villages

## 1. Introduction

As a religious form within traditional villages in Pingxiang, Jiangxi, the Nuo temples not only highlight their distinct socio-religious and cultural spatial functions but also serve as core spaces embodying local identity, historical memory, and cultural transmission. The temples' regular ritual activities, village fairs, clan sacrifices, and festive events influence social interactions and emotional exchanges throughout the surrounding villages. Some scholars have approached the study of rural revitalization and traditional villages through interdisciplinary frameworks, examining perspectives such as rural economic

transformation, shifts in social organization, reconstruction of cultural identity, and national strategic orientations. Rural development is no longer viewed solely as preserving historical and cultural heritage but increasingly recognized as a vital spatial unit connecting regional identity, reconstructing local cultural memory, and fostering community emotional belonging—a “place practice of local affect” (Galderisi, A., Pisano, C., et al. 2024). This spatial capacity, embedded within local social structures and cultural psychologies, renders traditional villages indispensable as cultural and spatial connectors in rural cultural revitalization (Tang Xiaolong & Jin Shizhu, 2025).

In Pingxiang, Jiangxi, Nuo temple rituals (such as the Nuo deity's birthday celebrations) have been transformed into power distribution mechanisms through a clan rotation system. The space (the axis connecting the opera stage and the temple) serves as a material carrier of collective memory, where social interactions generate a “sacred-secular” overlay space, forming a trinity network of “ritual-space-power.” Most scholarly research on Nuo temples focuses on static functional descriptions, failing to reveal how the “ritual-space-power” triad interacts to generate social capital.

Under modernization pressures, the number of Nuo temples has sharply declined. Existing temples are revitalized through activities like temple fairs, yet the resilience mechanisms of these sacred spaces remain urgently in need of analysis. Therefore, this paper adopts a “cultural space” perspective, focusing on Nü temples—a typical religious-cultural space—in traditional villages of Pingxiang, Jiangxi. Using GIS spatial modeling, it quantifies the geographical correlation between Nü temple distribution and clan power, exploring the following aspects: How do Nü temples connect with daily life within the community space? How do Nuo temples optimize traditional village social structures and achieve coordinated development with cultural ecosystems amid modernization?

To address these questions, this study employs literature review, field surveys, in-depth interviews, case studies, and spatial analysis. It conducts on-site investigations in selected classic villages (Mashan, Laoguan, Wenquan, and Paishang) within Pingxiang, Jiangxi, analyzing the multidimensional impact of Pingxiang Nuoshan temples in traditional villages. This provides new theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence for the long-term development of rural cultural spaces. This study integrates Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, Bourdieu's field theory, and Putnam's social capital theory to construct a mutually reinforcing analytical framework. This approach provides a multi-level, structured analytical pathway from macro to micro scales, systematically elucidating the generative logic of cultural space, the power structures within it, and the resulting collaborative networks. It offers theoretical guidance and multidimensional interpretations for the complex interplay between Pingxiang's Nuo temples and traditional villages.

## 2. Literature Review

Cultural spaces are not merely physical vessels in a singular sense, but rather composite social domains generated through the interplay of multiple social, cultural, and ecological elements. Cultural spaces serve as repositories for collective memory and cultural symbols, while also functioning as pivotal nodes for residents' daily interactions and emotional belonging. Through activities such as celebrations and ritual ceremonies, cultural spaces are reinforced, strengthening emotional bonds between individuals and communities, thereby supporting the stability and continuity of local social structures (Li Lu & Xu Shanshan, 2021).

Within the context of traditional villages, cultural spaces are often constructed through the interaction of regional culture and social space. Their function is to intensify the density of interactions among community members, providing emotional resonance and spiritual symbols that underpin the stability and continuity of local social structures. The Nuo temples in Pingxiang, Jiangxi, serve as a quintessential example within traditional villages. Through ritual ceremonies, temple fairs, and celebratory events, it integrates members of different surnames, clans, and even non-kin into a unified community system, reconstructing trust mechanisms and social networks within rural society.

Building upon conceptual analyses of rural space and its reconstruction, Xiaoliang Huet al. (2019) constructed a multidimensional framework to understand rural spatial reconfiguration. This framework operates across three levels of the rural spatial system: material space, social space, and cultural space. Rural spatial restructuring represents a qualitative transformation where the rural spatial system actively or passively responds to internal and external environmental changes. Fangyi Zhu (2023) proposes renewal design strategies encompassing spatial layout, facility construction, cultural display, talent cultivation, and community participation. Using the case study of the craft cultural space renewal design in Gasa Huayao Dai Village, Yunnan, the author aims to protect and transmit the traditional craft culture of Gasa Huayao Dai Village. Yu Xiaoshe and Bai Dan (2025) propose that traditional village culture contributes to rural revitalization through a three-stage evolutionary path: “spatialization of cultural capital—reproduction of cultural space—capitalization of cultural space.” The spatialization stage anchors abstract cultural resources into tangible spatial carriers; the reproduction stage drives multidimensional reconstruction of material, spiritual, and institutional cultural spaces, transforming cultural capital into industrial momentum; while the capitalization stage generates systemic empowerment through the multidimensional release of spatial value.

Zhang Hongchang and Feng Tianhao (2025) developed an analytical framework of “spatial production—spatial alienation—resilient governance” from the perspective of spatial production theory. Focusing on material spatial production, cultural spatial production, and social spatial production respectively, they explored spatial alienation issues in traditional villages during rural development, including the gradual decline of traditional local culture, imbalances in development capacity and opportunities, the prominence of spatial injustice, and crises in village landscapes. Yi Lei et al. (2019) demonstrate how the full integration of intangible cultural heritage—specifically blue-printed cloth—with its spatial carriers fosters a virtuous cycle of cultural and spatial development. This integration manifests through cultural reconstruction, spatial and temporal dimensions, lifestyle transformations, and new functional applications. Against the backdrop of rural revitalization, efforts must simultaneously enhance villages' cultural substance and distinctiveness while exploring effective pathways for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Zhu Bing (2025) observes a growing imbalance between economic development and cultural ecology in traditional villages, where capital influxes often diverge from the humanistic values inherent in local village development. This manifests in conflicts between traditional building preservation and commercialization, the improvement versus compression of villagers' private living spaces, and the preservation versus destruction of cultural relics. Spatial regeneration serves as an effective approach to preserving and optimizing traditional village spaces. By integrating historical, cultural, and regional characteristics, it enhances cultural identity and uniqueness while boosting villagers' interaction and participation.

In summary, community space constitutes a vital component of society's overall cultural structure. Its cultural functions extend beyond serving as key nodes for transmitting individual emotions and social connections; it is the core source of cultural generation, social recognition, and local cohesion.

Pingxiang's Nuo culture in Jiangxi has long been a focal point for intangible cultural heritage research. The Pingxiang Nuo deity, commonly known as the Nuo God or General, is a protective spirit capable of bestowing blessings, warding off disasters and epidemics, and banishing evil spirits (Jin Zhilin & Li Peixin, 1993). As early as 1955, scholars including Huang Zhigang from the Chinese Opera Research Institute conducted in-depth investigations of Nuo dances in Nanfeng County. Jiangxi's Nuo temples feature built-in opera stages flanked by viewing galleries, forming relatively enclosed performance spaces known as “Nuo temple theaters.” The emergence of the Nuo Temple Theater holds significant importance for the development and evolution of Gan Nuo (Yan Baoquan & Zhang Jing, 2018).

Among Pingxiang's numerous intangible cultural traditions, none is older, more mysterious, or more beloved by the public than the Nuo culture. Over its long evolution, Pingxiang's Nuo culture has gradually formed a trinity system comprising Nuo temples, Nuo masks, and Nuo dances (Jin Haifeng & Chen Junlin, 2024). . Nüo temple architecture represents a crucial material manifestation of Pingxiang's Nüo culture, emerging from the interplay of folk beliefs, clan traditions, and commercial activities, and embodying rich architectural aesthetic values (Li Yuechuan & Qi Hao, 2019) . Individually, Nüo temples typically adopt the local courtyard-style residential layout. Collectively, they comprise fixed elements such as temple structures, opera stages, and banquet halls. Architecturally, Pingxiang Nüo temples exhibit pragmatic approaches to form, functional layouts reflecting recreational psychology, and spatial experiences imbued with mystical ambiance.

In summary, Nüo temples are not merely repositories of traditional culture or conduits for local memory and emotional belonging. Further research is needed on the interactive mechanisms between cultural spaces in Nüo temples and traditional villages. Building upon existing research and integrating theories of spatial production, field, and social capital, this paper analyzes the cultural functions and social interaction mechanisms of Pingxiang Nuo temples. It aims to provide theoretical insights for the preservation and revitalization of cultural spaces within traditional villages.

### 3. Research Methods

This study centers on Lefebvre's theory of the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991), integrating Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu, 1986) and Putnam's social capital theory (Putnam, 2000) to construct a three-dimensional analytical framework encompassing the physical, social, and symbolic dimensions as shown in Figure 1.

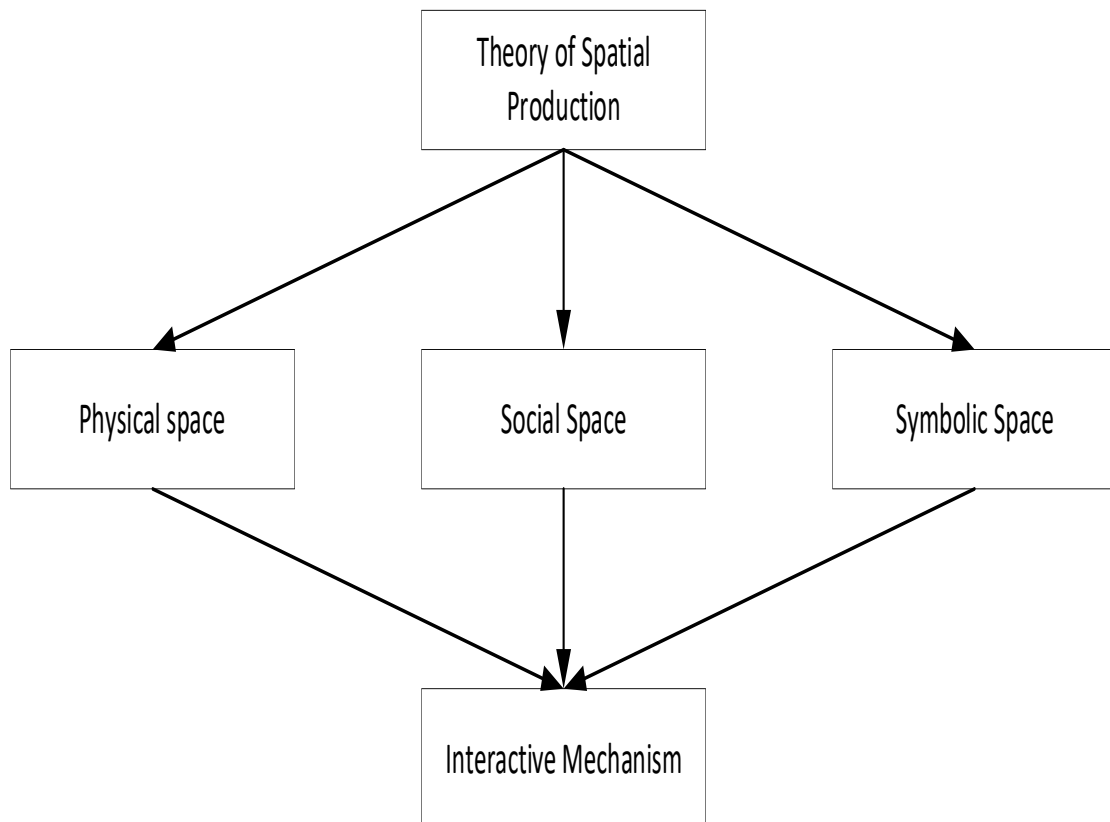


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Lefebvre's theory of the production of space reveals how the material form of Nüo temples—such as the axis connecting the stage and the sanctuary—is transformed through ritual activities into a vehicle for social relations. Bourdieu's field theory and its mechanisms of capital conversion explain how clans dominate spatial resources through a rotational duty system. Putnam's theory of social capital elucidates how Nüo temple rituals produce community trust networks. This theoretical integration possesses cross-cultural applicability and has been applied by Wang Haobing (2023) to research on the spatial genealogy preservation and inheritance of traditional villages in the region. The author employs temporal evolution as a thread, integrating the holistic, homogenous, interconnected, and cultural dimensions of Jiangsu's traditional village spatial genealogy theory. This approach fully reveals the mysteries of traditional village spatial genealogy through a “five-dimensional elements” framework, offering new avenues for exploring the preservation and inheritance of traditional villages. Methodologically, adopting a spatiotemporal perspective, the study builds upon approaches from history, cultural anthropology, and genealogy. It integrates new technologies such as three-dimensional historical environment reconstruction, GIS spatial analysis, and morphological quantification to explore a “digital technology-assisted research methodology for traditional village spatial genealogy.” In practical application, the study proposes a five-

dimensional integrated strategy and precise information reference system for the conservation, planning, and renewal of traditional villages. This provides a reference framework and practical approach for spatial planning, design, and construction of traditional villages in Jiangsu Province and across China. Zeng Yan (2016) also validated this approach in cultural-geographical research on traditional settlements and residential typologies: the urgent need for preserving traditional Chinese culture necessitates multidisciplinary research to establish a systematic understanding of traditional culture. By integrating architecture and cultural geography with geographic information technology, the author combines cultural zoning theory and settlement residential characteristics to delineate seven traditional settlement residential cultural zones in Guangdong Province, detailing the cultural landscape features of each. These zones are deeply analyzed through four dimensions—geographic environment and production, social culture and institutions, concepts, customs, and rituals, and construction techniques and materials—to elucidate the origins of their cultural landscapes. By examining the dynamic relationship between people and culture through a spatio-temporal lens in residential studies, the author proposes a theoretical framework for the cultural geography of residential architecture.

To reveal the profound impact of cultural spaces on community life, this study employs a multi-path approach guided by the aforementioned theoretical framework. It systematically analyzes the interactive mechanisms and social structures between the Nuo temples and traditional villages in Pingxiang, Jiangxi, thereby gaining a multidimensional understanding of the functions and roles of local cultural spaces in community construction.

As shown in Table 1, this study employs literature review to systematically trace the intrinsic connections, developmental trajectory, and current status between Pingxiang's Nuo temples and traditional villages. Subsequently, field investigations delve into Pingxiang's Nuo cultural regions to document social interactions and spatial practices during Nuo temple rituals, with triangulation enhancing data reliability. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local residents, cultural inheritors, and cultural administration officials to uncover the cultural identity logic and social significance of the interaction between Nuo temple culture and villages. Fourth, spatial analysis methods were employed to explore how the spatial distribution characteristics of Nuo temples across Pingxiang districts influence variations in community living standards among different villages.

Table 1. Research Methods
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Research Methods	Implementation Process	The core issue addressed	Theoretical Basis
GIS Spatial Analysis	Conduct coordinate modeling for 11 Nuo temples and overlay village layouts.	How does spatial distribution reflect clan power structures?	Theory of Spatial Production
In-depth Interview	Conduct interviews with 32 villagers/heritage bearers	How do Nuo temples foster community identity?	Field Theory
Participatory observation	Documenting the Entire Process of Three Nüwa Goddess Birthday Ceremonies	How do ritual practices reproduce social relations?	Social Capital Theory
Literature Analysis	Comparing the Pingxiang County Annals with Oral History Accounts	The Logic of Functional Transformation in Historical Change?	Social Capital Theory

4. Cultural Functions of Pingxiang Nuo Temples and Cultural Spaces in Traditional Villages

4.1 Cultural Functions of Nuo Temples

This study will conduct an in-depth field investigation of the Nüoshen Temple in Maoyuan Village from July to September 2024. Employing participatory observation, oral interviews with villagers and tradition bearers, and artifact analysis, the research will explore these questions through a multi-layered examination grounded in both historical continuity and contemporary embeddedness.





**Figure 2,3.** Overall View of Maoyuan Nuo Temple. Photographer: Myself. Date: July 3, 2024. Equipment: Drone. Location: Maoyuan Village, Paishang Town.

Figure 2 and 3 Aerial view of the spatial layout of Maoyuan Nuo Temple. The aerial imagery reveals that the entire spatial arrangement of the temple unfolds along a north-south central axis of symmetry. From south to north, it comprises a four-tiered spatial sequence: “San Yuan Gate → Plaza in front of the opera stage → Main Hall → Rear Hall,” aligning with the traditional Chinese “three courtyards and two halls” layout. Residential dwellings of neighboring villagers flank both sides. The mountain gate and front hall are symmetrically positioned, with an open sacrificial plaza reserved for ritual ceremonies. The yellow structure on the right houses the opera stage and storage rooms, resembling the form of a typical two-story rural dwelling (as described by villager Li, interview on July 3, 2024). Thus, the Nuo Temple integrates residential architecture, ancestral hall courtyard patterns, and temple-temple features in its spatial layout and structure. This configuration embodies traditional Chinese architectural aesthetics while fulfilling cultural functions spanning millennia: preserving clan beliefs, facilitating folk rituals, and sustaining communal village life. It also strengthens inter-village connections and cohesion. According to villager Li's oral account: During annual ancestor worship, sacrificial rites, or homecomings, villagers invariably visit the Dunuo Temple for worship. Particularly during ancestor ceremonies, villagers must return to participate regardless of their location. This phenomenon reflects not only reverence for ancestors but also the continuity and cohesive force of local traditional religious culture (Maoyuan Field Research, July 3, 2024).



**Figure 4.** Structural Layout of the Maoyuan Nuo Temple Stage

Photographer: Myself. Date: July 3, 2024, 2:30 PM. Equipment: Drone.

Figure 4 according to oral accounts from Master Chen, the inheritor: The stage is typically used during sacrificial rites and ancestral worship, serving the religious function of performing plays to honor the gods. Its architectural structure is a semi-open stage with a rectangular platform body. The stage base is elevated approximately 40–50 cm, and the front edge lacks railings to facilitate actors' access. To the left of the stage is a storage room for keeping props used in Nuo deity rituals. The overall clear height of the stage is approximately 3.2–4 meters, with an interior height of about 3 meters. The stage's front aligns with the main hall of the Nuo deity, forming a “stage-hall” structural configuration that facilitates rituals, ancestor worship, and performances (July 3, 2024).

Based on the oral accounts of the inheritor and analysis of the architectural structure, the design philosophy of this stage integrates traditional Chinese architectural philosophy and spatial order. Its overall composition incorporates the following four core elements:

First, practical functionality. The elevated platform base and absence of railings ensure ease of use for both performances and ritual activities.

Second, ritual order. The central stage area serves as the ceremonial axis, flanked by strictly defined pathways. Symmetrical to the main hall, it establishes a hierarchy of elevation, embodying traditional seating protocols and ritual etiquette: “order of seniority,” “order of rank,” and “distinction between left and right.”

Third, feng shui principles. Oriented north-south toward an open expanse, the stage aligns with the traditional cosmic concept of “embracing yin and holding yang.” The twin dragons playing with a pearl adorning the ridgepole serves not only as a visual symbol for the traditional functions of “inviting auspiciousness” and “protecting deities,” but also embodies the philosophical ideas of “gathering qi through feng shui” and “harmonizing yin and yang.” The central section features four main pillars. Based on the structure's orientation and surroundings, these pillars form the Chinese “Four Symbols” spatial arrangement (Green Dragon in the east, White Tiger in the west, Vermilion Bird in the south, Black Tortoise in the north), demonstrating a sophisticated application of celestial directions and symbolic systems.

Fourth, cultural symbolism. The entire opera stage architecture, from its spatial layout to its structural design, profoundly embodies traditional Chinese culture. On one hand, the stage's structure incorporates millennia-old Chinese ethical principles of “proper order and ritual” and “distinctions of rank and status.” On the other, its spatial arrangement embodies the philosophical worldview of “acting in harmony with nature” and “unity of heaven and humanity,” reflecting spatial wisdom. Within this architectural mindset, the interweaving of institutional theory and natural environment constructs a unique cultural symbolism system for the religious spaces of rural society.

Overall, the architectural structure of the Maoyuan Nuo Temple not only embodies the deep logic of traditional Chinese culture in its framework, layout, and decorative symbols, but also serves a social function in daily sacrificial and ritual practices by uniting the village and sustaining clan identity (Shen Leilei, Wu Di & Long Yujie. 2025). Its architectural space serves not only as a vessel for religious belief but also as the material expression of the local society's trinity of “faith-ritual-dwelling” (W Li, Q Xie, W Shi, H Lin, J He, J Ao. 2024).

To further explore the profound significance of Nuo temples in religious rituals and cultural symbolism, this paper will build upon the preceding analysis. Through field surveys and oral accounts from practitioners, it will conduct a detailed structural examination and analysis of the internal spaces of Nuo temples. This approach aims to reveal the cultural functions of Nuo temples at a deeper level.





**Figure 5,6.** Internal Structure of the Nuo Temple. Photographer: Myself Date: April 3, 2025 Equipment: Camera Location: Inside Maoyuan Village, Paishang Town

Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the layout and structure of the Nuo Temple from exterior to interior. Based on the aforementioned Figure 3-1, the overall architectural structure of the Nuo Temple, combined with oral accounts from practitioners, reveals it comprises three main sections. First is the main hall, primarily housing Nuo deity masks (including the



Tang, Ge, and Zhou deity masks) and the Wealth God (Zhao Gongming). This hall serves daily rituals and major ceremonies while fulfilling the local villagers' spiritual needs for “warding off disasters and resolving hardships” and “praying for wishes and wealth.” This functional role is fully demonstrated in practice. According to villager Wang, when facing difficulties or important matters, villagers enter the main hall to pay homage to the Nüwa deities. They then consult the oracle based on their specific requests to determine whether their affairs will proceed smoothly (Interviewed July 2025).



**Figure 7,8,9,10.** Divination by Drawing Fortune Sticks. Provided by Xiangdong Intangible Cultural Heritage Center

Divination by Drawing Fortune Sticks. Sticks are categorized as household sticks (for home, career, etc.) and medicinal sticks (for treatment prescriptions), selected

according to the inquiry. Then, locate the corresponding fortune slip on the stick rack by the number indicated on the stick(Figure 7,8,9,10).

Secondly, there are the side rooms (annexes), used for the temple keeper's residence and for providing fortune-telling and guidance services. Finally, the Guanyin Hall. It enshrines Guanyin Bodhisattva and Vaisravana, serving as a place for protection, prayers for children, disaster relief, and problem-solving. It is evident that the Nuo temple transforms its static internal spatial structure into a dynamic venue for cultural practices through religious activities. This process continuously activates and layers spatial functions, interweaving rituals, beliefs, culture, and spatial structure. The temple thus becomes the core vehicle for sustaining religious and cultural continuity (Liu Yuanfeng, 2022).

Field surveys and interview analyses reveal that Pingxiang's Nuo temples have not experienced cultural fragmentation due to temporal, spatial, ecological, or social shifts. Instead, the temple remains deeply rooted in the local community, continually adapting and integrating through interactions with village practices. It has evolved from a singular religious ritual site into a central cultural symbol within the local social structure. Through the synergistic interplay of architectural form, spatial layout, and cultural functions, the temple collaborates with the traditional village to construct a composite spatial-cultural system that integrates religious, social, and cultural symbolism, becoming a vital embodiment of the village's cultural identity.

#### 4.2 Spatial Structure and Cultural Characteristics of Traditional Villages

The preceding analysis of the Nuo Temple system in Maoyuan Village, Paixiang Town, Xiangdong District, has preliminarily clarified the spatial embedding patterns of Nuo temples within local villages and revealed their multifaceted functions in social roles and cultural transmission. As field research deepened, it became evident that Pingxiang's Nuo temples are not isolated phenomena but rather key nodes universally embedded within the region's social fabric. They not only serve as spaces for religious rituals but also interact with the broader society through practical activities, becoming vital hubs connecting social life with physical spaces. Gradually, they have evolved into significant symbols of regional cultural identity.

Pingxiang Nuo temples are not isolated cultural landmarks but spatial hubs deeply embedded within the social fabric of traditional villages. To systematically analyze the local knowledge they embody, this section employs GIS spatial modeling, local chronicle research, and in-depth interviews (fieldwork conducted July 2024–May 2025). From dual perspectives of spatial structure and cultural characteristics, it reveals the spatial organization logic and cultural DNA of Nü culture villages.

Table 2. Spatial Characteristics of Nüo Temples in Pingxiang

Town Name	Latitude and longitude	Core Settlement Cluster	Spatial Characteristics	Community Interaction Model
Heyou Town	27.68435678, 113.95432456	Shaziping Village	Adjacent to an industrial zone, a mix of old and new buildings	Multi-clan collaboration, with strong ceremonial cohesion
	27.68451234, 113.95453421			
	27.68478901, 113.95474567			
Xiangdong Town	27.65012345, 113.88098765	Phoenix Village	Flat terrain with convenient transportation	Clan-dominated
Xiabu Town	27.58523456, 113.81534567	Shanshan Village, Dehua Temple	Densely distributed across river valley plains, with convenient transportation access	Multi-clan governance, whole-village participation (Shanshan)
	27.58545678, 113.81556789			
	27.58567890, 113.81578901			
Laoguan Town	27.54034567, 113.75012345	Fengquan	Primarily hilly terrain with a rich historical and cultural heritage	Clan-dominated
Paixiang Town	27.61045678, 113.85023456	Maoyuan Village	Centered layout, residences surrounding	Clan Rotation (Kuang Liu Chen Clan)



Town Name	Latitude and longitude	Core Settlement Cluster	Spatial Characteristics	Community Interaction Model
	27.61067890, 113.85045678	(Fuchong Temple)		
	27.61089012, 113.85067890			
La Shi Town	27.56056789, 113.80034567	Dashatan g Village	Built along the contours of the mountain, the main structure employs a post-and-lintel timber framework.	Religious Affairs Bureau leads
	27.56078901, 113.80056789			
	27.56090123, 113.80078901			
Mashan Town	27.63012345, 113.89098765	Wenquan Village, Jingxing Village, Xiaoqiao Village	Scattered across the mountains, arranged in a staggered pattern according to the terrain.	Clan-led (Huang and Wen clans)
	27.63034567, 113.89076543			
	27.63056789, 113.89054321			

As shown in the table 2 above, the spatial form of traditional villages in Pingxiang exhibits a structure centered around Nuo temples. That existing Nuo temples are primarily distributed across Heyao Town (3 temples), Xiangdong Town (1 temple), Xiabu Town (3 temples), Laoguan Town (1 temple), Paishang Town (3 temples), Lashi Town (3), and



Mashan Town (3). Most Nuo temples are situated at the geometric center of villages or key transportation nodes, forming public spaces that radiate throughout the entire village. Villager Li (Maoyuan Village, 2025.7.3) described: “The square in front of the Nuo temple is the most open space in the village. Weddings, funerals, and festive gatherings are all held here.” Nong temple sites often align with traditional feng shui principles, such as the opera stage “facing south with its back to the north, embracing yin and yang,” reflecting the integration of natural order and human-made space.

The temple's three-tiered gate, opera stage, main hall, and rear chamber form a sacred axis serving rituals, divination, and divine offerings. The main hall houses Nüwa masks (representing the Tang, Ge, and Zhou deities) and the God of Wealth, serving as the villagers' spiritual anchor for “warding off disasters and resolving hardships” (as recounted by Mr. Wang, July 2025). The opera stage plaza functions as a flexible space, accommodating ritual performances (Nüwa opera), secular gatherings (village affairs discussions, market trade), and daily leisure (elderly socializing, children playing). During non-festival periods, Xiaqiao Village's Nüshan Temple square transforms into a basketball court and vegetable garden, exemplifying functional layering.

Residential dwellings cluster closely around the temple, creating an intimate “divine-human cohabitation” layout. This spatial proximity intensifies the interweaving of faith and daily life, as Huang from Wenquan Village described: “Opening the window reveals the temple eaves—it brings peace of mind” (May 2025).

The Nuo temple serves as both the spiritual center of the natural village and, through ritual activities like inter-village processions, connects broader territorial units. The Nuo temples in Jingxing Village and Wenquan Village of Mashan Town belong to the Wen and Huang clans respectively, yet “they jointly host temple fairs during the Nuo deity's birthday in October” (village oral accounts), forming a spatial hierarchical network where “a single temple unites a village—while linked temples integrate the township.” The construction and management of Nuo temples exemplify patrilineal order. The Nuo deity (dialect: “Nuo Shen Lao Ya”) transcends ritual status to deeply permeate daily life. Shaziping Village preserves 325 medicinal talismans for “healing illnesses and saving lives” (Zhang, oral account), while Wusi Village elders admonish children with “The Nuo Lord is coming” (Liu, oral account, May 2025), reflecting the faith's pragmatic rationality.

The architectural layout of Nuo temples embodies traditional ecological wisdom. The stage's “Four Symbols orientation” (Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, Black Tortoise) and the temple's overall “north-facing, south-oriented” alignment reflect alignment with natural forces. This spatial philosophy of “unity between heaven and

humanity” positions the Nuo temple as a symbolic node sustaining harmony between people and the land.

In summary, the spatial structure of Pingxiang's traditional villages is the material crystallization of clan systems, Nuo deity beliefs, ecological concepts, and communal life. The Nuo temple's central location, hierarchical network, and multifunctional integration not only fulfill ritual needs but also reproduce social relations and cultural identity through daily practices. While modernization has led to the decline of some Nuo temples and spatial alienation, the cultural DNA of “clan-belief-community” embedded within them remains a vital spiritual resource for spatial reconstruction in rural revitalization.

## **5. The Interaction Mechanism Between Pingxiang Nuo Temples and Traditional Villages**

### **5.1 The Impact of Nuo Temple Cultural Functions on Village Structure**

As a vital cultural vehicle for local folk beliefs, Nü culture's continuity not only perpetuates cultural mechanisms but also thrives within spaces facilitating interpersonal exchange. Utilizing GIS technology as described above, we systematically mapped the spatial distribution of Nü culture in Xiangdong District. Combined with archival research and field investigations, we analyzed its cultural characteristics. Findings reveal that Nü culture's vitality is closely tied to a community's historical evolution, demographic structure, and cultural identity.

Data indicates Xiangdong District comprises 8 towns, 2 townships, and 1 subdistrict, with 10 locations hosting Nüo cultural activities. These are primarily concentrated in Xiangdong Town (8 temples), Heyao Town (5 temples), Laoguan Town (4 temples), Xiabu Town (11 temples), Lashi Town (3 temples), Paishang Town (11 temples), Dongqiao Town (2 temples), Mashan Town (5), Baizhu Township (1), and Xiashankou Subdistrict (2). In some villages of the remaining townships, Nuo temples have gradually fallen into disuse or been repurposed due to historical factors and population migration, reflecting the uneven spatial transmission of Nuo culture.

The preceding discussion systematically explored the spatial development and cultural characteristics of Nuo culture, though limited to geographical and ritual definitions. As a symbol of local village spatial culture, Nuo culture's essence lies in its role as a vital medium for human-machine relationships, inheritance, collective activities, and interaction. According to oral accounts from villager Zhang of Shaziping Village, Xiangdong Town: The village's Shaziping Nuo Temple was constructed during the first year of the Xianfeng reign in the Qing Dynasty, primarily funded by villagers surnamed Zhang, Wang, and Li. Due to social and historical factors, it underwent multiple reconstructions over time. The

temple primarily enshrines the Nuo deity and Guanyin, with 100 fortune sticks and 325 medicinal sticks still preserved. On one hand, these oracles were used to predict auspicious fortunes (fortune sticks), while on the other, they served to heal the sick and save lives.

Zhang recalled: “What left the deepest impression on me were the annual sacrificial rites, ancestral worship, and other celebratory events. The temple would become exceptionally lively, transforming into the village's most vibrant and significant gathering place. During these times, every household in the village would come to help—those with wealth contributed money, while those without offered labor. Everyone would gather here to participate in the sacrificial activities together.” No matter where villagers resided, they would first visit the Nuo Temple to pay respects upon returning home each year (May 2025 field survey in Shaziping Village).

Such oral accounts clearly demonstrate that in traditional villages, the Nuo temple serves not only as a site of religious worship but also functions as an organizational and cohesive force within the local community. It acts as a vital node sustaining clan networks and regional emotional identity, fully embodying the intertwined interactions among clan, locality, and belief.

This case exemplifies social interaction within the region. To comprehensively explore the relationship between Nuo culture and community life, subsequent field research revealed distinct variations in organizational structures and community participation across different villages (Table 3).

Table 3. Centuries-Old Nuo Culture Villages in Xiangdong District

Date of Temple Construction	Management Mechanism	Scope of Participation	veneration	Function
Nüshan Town, Wenquan Village Nüshan Temple (Built in the Ming Dynasty)	The Huang Family	Clan Rotation	Nüwa, Guanyin	Sacrificial rites, ancestor worship, healing illnesses
Xiaheng Nuoshen Temple, Jingxing Village, Mashan Town (Late Yuan Dynasty) Nuoshen Temple, Xiaoqiao Village,	The Wen Family Surnames including Wen, Huang, Li, Liu, Luo,	Clan Rotation Whole Village Participation	The Nuo God, Lord Bao, Lord Zhang The Nuo God	Sacrificial Rites, Ancestor Worship, Healing Sacrificial Rites

Mashan Town (Late Qing Dynasty)	Lan, and others			
Laoguan Town Ban Zhu An Nuoshen Temple (Ming Dynasty, Wanli Era)	The Liu, Zhong, Yan, Zhang, Yan, Wang, He, and Li families presided over the negotiations.	The entire village participated.	The Nüwa God, Guanyin, Lady Li the Immortal, and Lord Guan.	Sacrificial rites
Fei Tian Nuo Temple in La Shi Town (Late Yuan Dynasty)	The Peng Clan	Clan Rotation	Nüwa, Guanyin, God of Wealth	Sacrificial rites, ancestor worship, healing illnesses
Nong Temple at Nangangkou, Dongqiao Town (Qing Dynasty, Tongzhi era)	The Deng and Wen Families	Deng and Wen families take turns	The God of Exorcism, the God of Wealth, and Guanyin.	Sacrificial rites, healing illnesses
Xiabu Town Shanshan Nuoshen Temple (7th Year of the Jiajing Reign, Qing Dynasty)	The Cheng, Deng, and Wen Families	The entire village participated.	Nüwa, Guanyin	Sacrificial rites, healing illnesses
Xiabu Town Dehua Temple (Late Ming)	The Deng Family		Nüwa, Zhong Kui	

Dynasty to Early Qing Dynasty)		Rotation within the Deng family		Sacrificial rites, ancestor worship, Medical treatment
Gaoshang Nuoshen Temple, Heyiao Town (Ming Dynasty, Jiajing period)	The Wen, Deng, and Chang families take turns	The entire village participated.	Nüwa God	Sacrificial rites, healing illnesses
Paixiang Town Fuhui Temple (Hongwu Era, Ming Dynasty)	Moreover, the Liu and Chen families took turns serving.	The entire village participated.	Nüwa, Bao Zheng	Sacrificial rites, healing illnesses
Xiaoshan Kou Street Rixin Erwang Temple (Late Qing Dynasty to Early Republican Era)	The Yao, He, and Lin families take turns	The entire village participated.	Nüwa, the Two Kings (Li Bing and his son), Guanyin, the Dragon King	Sacrificial rites
Nongsheng Temple in Mao'an Village, Baizhu Township (built in 1945) Erwang Temple in Wusi Village, Xiangdong Town (this temple combines three	The Tang, Chen, Liu, Yang, and Chen Clans Arguments Concerning the Deng, Chen, Lin, and Liu Clans	Whole Village Participation Whole Village Participation	Nüwa Temple Nüwa Temple, Temple of the Two Kings, Guanyin	Sacrificial rites Sacrificial rites, healing illnesses

shrines: Nongsheng Temple, Erwang Temple, and Guanyin Temple)					
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Based on the findings in the chart, the distribution, organization, and functions of Nuo temples across different villages in Xiangdong District reveal distinct spatial structures and social mechanisms. These variations not only reflect the profound influence of clan structures and regional cultures on Nuo temple practices but also highlight the temples' multifaceted roles in community integration, religious observance, and cultural transmission.

Overall, as cultural spaces embedded at the heart of villages, Xiangdong District's Nuo temples not only bear symbolic significance for local beliefs but also play a vital role in maintaining rural social order and organizational structures. Serving as spatial carriers for ritual practices and collaborative exchanges within villages, these temples foster neighborly relations, reinforce collective memory, and uphold local ethics through cooperative functions. In other words, the Nuo temple mediates both horizontal and vertical social relations within the village, generating a unique “space-practice-relationship” interaction mechanism in daily village operations.

5.2 Adaptation of Nuo Temple Functions Through Village Layout

Analysis of the social interaction mechanisms of Nuo temples in Xiangdong District villages reveals that Nuo temple culture in these villages is not only a symbol of local belief systems but also constructs local social identity and shapes unique cultural spaces through daily practices. Particularly as field research deepened and interview data accumulated, it became evident that the stable, long-term development of Xiangdong District's village social structures relies heavily on Nuo temple culture. This culture serves as a mechanism for cultural bonding across local clans and generations, fostering a deeply embedded and tightly organized social identity structure.

Nüe temple culture plays a vital role in the transmission of traditions within villages. According to oral accounts from Mr. Huang of Wenquan Village: The village's Nüe God temple was constructed in the first year of the Zhengtong era (1436) during the mid-Ming Dynasty. However, the origins of the Nüe deity in this village trace back to the late Tang Dynasty. His account, corroborated by the Huang family genealogy (Figure 11), reveals that the clan's ancestor, Shao Gong, was a devout follower of the Nuo deity. Known for his integrity, kindness, and loyalty, he was later framed by treacherous individuals. Facing an



imperial decree for the execution of his entire household, he received a warning from a friend. He fled the capital overnight with his family, carrying the Nuo deity mask. After a long and arduous journey, they settled in the Lulin area of Ji'an, Jiangxi. Centuries later, Huang Xigong, a descendant of the clan, brought the Nüwa masks and ritual garments to this location. In the early Ming Dynasty, he erected a marker to signify the establishment of their settlement (field survey conducted in Wenquan Village, Mashan Town, June 2025).



**Figure 11.** Huang Clan Inscription Stele. Photographer: Myself. Date: May 3, 2025, 10:00 AM. Camera: Address: Wenquan Village

This oral account and documentation not only reveals the intergenerational transmission pathways of Nuo temple culture but also demonstrates how clans construct collective memory and identity through symbolic objects (such as Nuo deity masks) and ritual practices. Simultaneously, it demonstrates that cultural continuity is deeply embedded within the village's social structure through temporal narratives (such as migration) and spatial symbols (like masks and temple architecture), thereby forming a stable, historicized local cultural space.

Based on the preceding analysis and subsequent interviews, Nuo temple culture in village societies not only serves as a symbol for clan inheritance and familial memory but also establishes a collective identity mechanism that transcends clan boundaries through rituals accessible to all villagers. For instance, the Nuoshen temples in Xiaqiao Village

(Mashan Town), Shanshan (Xiabu Town), and Ma'anli (Baizhu Township) are managed by dominant clans yet encompass rituals and participation open to all villagers. This “universal” practice of Nuo temples differs in organizational structure from the clan-centered Huang Clan Nuo Temple model mentioned earlier. According to oral accounts from Lan Lao, a villager of Xiaoqiao Village: In the early days, the village had no Nuo temple. By the late Qing Dynasty, as population migration and intermarriage between surrounding villages increased, some families gradually settled here. To ensure favorable weather and household safety, villagers pooled resources to construct the temple. Its architectural style and spatial layout blend local ancestral hall elements with religious beliefs, creating a cultural space symbolic of Xiaoqiao Village. Another villager, Mr. Wang, added: The architectural style of the village's Nuo temple was primarily shaped by the living arrangements and ancestral worship practices of the villagers, and was deeply influenced by the belief systems of the families who migrated here from their original hometowns. He recalled that his ancestors had been exposed to Nuo temple culture while residing in Taoyuan Village, Mashan Town, before migrating to this village. Consequently, the belief in the Nuo deity holds significant importance within his family lineage. Currently, the village predominantly hosts surnames like Li, Liu, Luo, Lan, and Huang, most originating from migrations from Wenquan Village, Jingxing Village, and Dukou Village. Multiple factors drove these migrations: proximity and, crucially, shared exposure to Nuo culture prior to relocation. This enabled the belief system to rapidly take root in Xiaoqiao Village, becoming the community's core spiritual anchor and cultural symbol. Following the establishment of Xiaoqiao Village's Nuo Temple, on major seasonal festivals and the birthday of the Nuo deity (locally known as “Nuo Shen Lao Ya”), the entire village would gather before the temple square to prepare for sacrificial rites. Collective ceremonies featured drumming, gong-playing, and lavish feasts. Households could also invite the Nuo deity into their homes for rituals seeking disaster relief, household peace, and other blessings (Figure 12). (Field research in Xiaoqiao Village, May 2025).



**Figure 12.** The Nüwa God Enters Homes to Ward Off Calamities and Resolve Difficulties. Photographer: Myself, Date: January 3, 2025, Equipment: Camera. Location: Xiaqiao Village

This demonstrates how Nuo culture has endured through generations during the village's development, becoming a vital bond for collective memory and cultural identity within local communities. As articulated by Edward Soja's "Third Space" theory: space is not merely a physical form, but a site where memory and place intertwine, serving as a vital medium for constructing social relations. The Nuo temples in Xiangdong District's villages manifest precisely as Third Spaces, organically integrating rituals with cultural and local experiences, imaginative beliefs, and social interactions—thereby reinforcing the sense of identity within the village community.

## 6. Conclusion

The Nüoshan temples of Pingxiang, Jiangxi, profoundly influence the construction of local cultural systems, carry forward belief systems, and serve as pivotal connectors in the developmental trajectory of traditional villages. They exert a significant impact on the stability and advancement of local social order. This study uses the Pingxiang Nuo Temple case to reveal the cultural spatial and social interaction mechanisms within traditional villages. Through its physical layout of "stage-square-shrine" and ritual pathways, the temple sanctifies secular space. Clans transform cultural capital into social authority through rotational management, weakening social discipline functions while enhancing cultural resilience. As a cultural space deeply embedded within local social structures, the operational mechanisms of Nuo temples demonstrate the value of traditional culture in promoting community integration, enhancing cultural confidence, and driving sustainable local development. The transmission of Nuo temple culture faces numerous challenges, such as the outflow of young populations and the discontinuity of ritual knowledge. Future research should further explore innovative pathways for Nüo temples in digital



preservation, cross-village collaborative governance, and holistic cultural ecosystem conservation. This will provide more constructive theoretical support and practical references for the contemporary transformation of traditional religious cultural spaces.

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