

A Study on Regional Folk Beliefs in Nuo Culture of Pingxiang, Jiangxi: Rituals, Identity, and Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

Nuo culture is regarded as a living fossil of Chinese ritual drama, offering critical insights into the spiritual world and regional folk customs of grassroots Chinese society. The Nuo culture of Pingxiang, Jiangxi, sustains local community identity and cultural inheritance while embodying profound regional folk beliefs. With the global modernization and the conservation of intangible cultural heritage, questions arise regarding the current state of the internal belief system of Nuo culture in Pingxiang, Jiangxi, as well as the transformations it is undergoing. Adopting fieldwork methods, this study conducted empirical investigations in Pingxiang, Jiangxi, from July to August 2025. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 participants, including cultural inheritors, Nuo ritual troupe members, local villagers, and cultural administrators. Multiple Nuo ceremonies were observed and documented, and local chronicles and academic literature were integrated to analyze the folk beliefs inherent to Pingxiang Nuo culture. The findings indicate that Pingxiang Nuo culture constitutes a belief system characterized by both pragmatism and syncretism. Through structured deity hierarchies and stylized rituals, its folk beliefs provide spiritual solace for local residents and fulfill essential functions of social integration. From a global modernization perspective, this study reveals the cultural resilience of traditional folk beliefs amid widespread modern challenges. The conclusions provide practical references for the living heritage conservation of Pingxiang Nuo culture and offer a valuable case for cross-cultural folk custom research.

Keywords: Nuo culture; regional folk custom; belief; Pingxiang, Jiangxi; identity;

intangible cultural heritage

1. Introduction

Amid the waves of globalization and modernization, numerous traditional folk cultures rooted in local communities are facing inheritance crises. Many young people pay less attention to traditional culture due to a lack of understanding of its value. To safeguard intangible cultural heritage including oral traditions, performing arts, and social practices, UNESCO has adopted the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, of which China is a State Party. As a “living fossil of Chinese ritual drama”, Nuo culture deserves in-depth research. Studies on Pingxiang Nuo culture in Jiangxi respond to the global trend of cultural conservation, embody cultural awareness and cultural confidence, and serve as a practical effort to maintain the diverse cultural landscape of the Chinese nation.

Nuo in Jiangxi, China, represents a comprehensive folk belief phenomenon. The behavioral logic of Nuo rituals is deeply embedded in people’s daily life practices. Nuo culture functions as a “living text” through which to observe and understand the spiritual world, cosmological concepts, and communal relationships of local participants in Pingxiang. Nevertheless, most existing studies focus primarily on artistic forms or historical accounts, lacking in-depth discussions on how the internal belief systems of folk cultures transform and adapt amid modernization. Accordingly, based on Peng Zhaorong’s theoretical framework outlined in *Theory and Practice of Anthropological Ritual*, this study examines the belief system of traditional Nuo culture. It explores how the belief system of Pingxiang Nuo culture sustains itself and evolves under the impacts of modernization, aiming to fill the academic research gap regarding Pingxiang Nuo as an integrated and dynamically changing belief system in Jiangxi, China.

2. Literature Review

There is no cultural form abroad equivalent to the Chinese concept of “Nuo”. Foreign scholars have mainly conducted research on other types of folk cultures. Bae et al. (2015) conducted an in-depth investigation of the folk culture of Korea’s Hahoe Mask Dance. They argued that the Hahoe Mask Dance no longer belongs exclusively to local villagers; instead, it has evolved into a nationally recognized cultural resource open to global audiences for appreciation and learning. Its cultural significance influences not only local residents and Korean citizens but also international

communities worldwide. RDiah (2014), taking the “Malang Mask” as an example, examined copyright issues related to the expression of folk culture on a global scale, suggesting that traditional cultural expressions should be incorporated into copyright systems and that governments should establish specific laws and institutions for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. Dasha (2025) explored the ghost-related folk customs embedded in Haitian folk dances. Supernatural and ghost-themed elements remain prevalent in contemporary Haitian folk dance, representing the collective wisdom of local people accumulated through labor and cultural development. Joan (2024) pointed out that the distinctive musical and dance ensembles of Ibiza and Formentera constitute vital cultural heritage, and that tourism can effectively promote the prosperity and intergenerational inheritance of such traditional culture. Nimac (2010) studied the Baraban custom. Based on extensive ethnographic records and interviews with local storytellers, the research illustrated that the Baraban tradition contains profound spiritual and religious elements. Through dramatic performance, it depicts the suffering of Jesus’ death, expresses resistance toward the choice of Barabbas, and conveys condemnation of social evil and injustice.

Kexin (2025) suggested that Chinese paper-cutting in Shanxi carries rich folk culture and spiritual beliefs. By integrating innovative cultural elements into modern society, paper-cutting provides spiritual consolation for contemporary people. Abdurahimova (2021) indicated that cultivating young generations with a comprehensive, harmonious, and healthy lifestyle has become an urgent contemporary challenge. A nation’s traditional culture, folk beliefs, and universal moral and ethical values are essential to the healthy development of adolescents. Sarula (2024) noted that China possesses abundant folk cultural resources, including folk art, music, literature, fine arts, quyi, acrobatics, traditional opera, dance, daily customs, and folk beliefs. It is necessary for China to explore pathways for the transformation, innovation, and sustainable development of folk culture. Harte (2018) proposed that regional folk beliefs enable working-class groups to alleviate mental pressure amid hardship and adversity and can effectively stimulate individual potential. Kathleen (2002) regarded belief as a form of symbolic culture, emphasizing that individuals in rapidly modernizing societies should maintain and inherit their traditional beliefs.

Numerous domestic scholars have conducted extensive research on Nuo culture. Early leading researchers, including Qu Liuyi and Qian Fu, approached Nuo from the perspectives of dramaturgical genesis and artistic morphology, establishing the academic recognition of Nuo as a “living fossil of drama”. In 1997, Qu Liuyi published

Chinese Nuo Opera and Nuo Culture, arguing that Nuo studies as a humanity discipline originated in the 1980s. In the early 1980s, as scholars gradually recognized the spiritual connotations of Nuo culture, related research expanded rapidly, and Nuo culture came to be regarded as an intangible cultural property. Qian Fu contended that “all Chinese people ought to understand Nuo”, emphasizing that the beliefs embedded in Nuo culture foster kindness and interpersonal harmony. With the deepening of academic inquiry, scholars have recognized Nuo as a complex cultural phenomenon and begun to examine its sacrificial rituals, folk functions, and social organizations such as Nuo troupes. Researchers have further situated Nuo within its local rural social context, exploring the connections between Nuo culture, seasonal festivals, life-cycle rituals, and community governance. Lin(2020) investigated Xiangxi Nuo(Hunan Province) dance from a religious cultural perspective, noting that Nuo dance features diverse artistic forms and strong religious undertones. Rooted in indigenous historical culture and primitive folk beliefs, local Nuo culture has also been profoundly shaped by Buddhism, Taoism, and other religious traditions. Liu,N.,Liu, K., et al. (2019) described Nuo culture as a distinctive regional system, arguing that Jiangxi Nuo culture embodies the collective material and spiritual wealth of local residents. With modern social transformation, an increasing number of Chinese scholars have adopted anthropological and religious theories to explore the deity systems, ritual charms and talismans, taboos, cosmological worldviews, and ritual specialists within Nuo ceremonies. Li, Y.C., & Qi, H. (2019) and Liu, P., & Liu, R. Y. (2019) explored two core questions: how Nuo constructs a symbolic world of human-divine interaction, and how Nuo provides local communities with a cognitive framework to interpret and cope with existential crises such as illness and disasters?

In summary, foreign scholars have mainly focused on folk belief culture and emphasized its social and cultural significance. Domestic scholars have conducted extensive research on Nuo culture and recognized its practical social functions. Existing literature lacks in-depth exploration of the folk belief dimensions of Jiangxi Nuo culture and fails to construct a holistic understanding of Pingxiang Nuo as an integrated belief system. Accordingly, this study regards Pingxiang Nuo culture in Jiangxi as a unified whole, conducts an in-depth analysis of its regional folk belief system, and systematically examines the inner conceptual world of local Pingxiang Nuo culture.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Data Sources

The data for this study were collected in Pingxiang City, Jiangxi Province, in three stages from July to August 2025.

In the first stage, the researcher consulted local chronicles including *Pingxiang County Records*, *Zhaoping Brief Chronicles*, as well as newly compiled volumes such as *Pingxiang Municipal Records*, *Shangli County Records*, and *Xiangdong District Records*. Relevant records concerning Nuo, Nuo exorcism, yu sacrifices, and Nuo deities were extracted from the chapters on local customs, ancestral rituals, religion, and arts. Meanwhile, memoirs, survey reports, and other materials related to Nuo culture were systematically collected from the *CPPCC Cultural and Historical Materials* and *Compilation of Cultural Gazetteer Materials* issued by Jiangxi Province, Pingxiang City, , and its subordinate districts and counties.

In the second stage, the researcher retrieved academic literature on folk beliefs and Nuo culture from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) to examine the historical evolution of Nuo in Pingxiang and clarify its functions and status in traditional society. On this basis, field visits were conducted to local Nuo troupes and Nuo temples in Pingxiang, Jiangxi. Photographic records were collected of Nuo ritual scripts, deity invocation texts, incantations, and ritual talismans.

In the third stage, a structured interview outline was formulated. Interviews were conducted with cultural inheritors, members of Nuo troupes, local cultural scholars, intangible cultural heritage administrators, temple custodians, and Nuo worshippers. These interviews offered in-depth insights into their perceptions of Nuo- related beliefs, inheritance mechanisms, and contemporary social functions.

3.2 Research Methods

3.2.1 Literature Review Method

This study adopted the literature review method. Relevant literature was retrieved from CNKI with the following keywords: Nuo culture, folk belief, ritual, Pingxiang Nuo, regional culture, intangible cultural heritage, Nuo, Folk Belief, Ritual, Chinese Shamanism, and Intangible Cultural Heritage. Key information from the collected publications was systematically organized and analyzed to construct a comprehensive literature review.

3.2.2 In-depth Interview

This study adopted purposive sampling to ensure the sample covered diverse social roles closely associated with Nuo culture. Core leaders of local Nuo troupes were selected; they have been officially recognized by authorities with more than ten years of practical experience in Nuo cultural activities and master core ritual procedures,

incantations, and talismans. As authoritative inheritors of orthodox Nuo knowledge, they represent the normative paradigm and official narrative of the Nuo cultural system.

Regular members from different Nuo troupes were recruited as key participants. Each has engaged in Nuo dancing for at least five years and undertakes fixed deity roles, such as Zhong Kui and Prince Deity. As direct practitioners of folk beliefs, they provide an insider perspective on ritual experience and participation. Local villagers are regarded as the recipients and recognizers of Nuo culture. This study selected residents aged 40 and above who have lived in the surveyed villages for generations. Ultimately, in-depth interviews were conducted with 3 cultural inheritors, 5 Nuo troupe members, 5 villagers (worshippers), and 2 cultural administrators. The interview outline is presented in the appendix. All interview records were sorted, coded, and analyzed to identify core themes and conceptual definitions raised by the participants.

3.2.3 Fieldwork Method

From July 15 to August 25, 2025, field investigations were conducted in Pingxiang City, Jiangxi Province. The researcher visited local Nuo troupes and Nuo temples and documented Nuo ritual scripts, deity invocations, incantations, and ceremonial talismans through photography. Key towns and villages with profound Nuo cultural heritage, including Shangli County and Xiangdong District, were intensively investigated. This process yielded first-hand data on Pingxiang Nuo culture. Combined with local chronicles and historical documents, the study further interprets the cultural connotations behind Nuo ritual practices.

3.3 Data Analysis Process

Upon completing the fieldwork, the researcher organized transcripts from 15 in-depth interviews and cross-referenced and supplemented the content with photographic and video materials collected in the field. The qualitative analysis software NVivo was employed for thematic coding. For instance, the statement “When you wear the mask during Nuo dancing, you are no longer yourself but a deity” was coded as “identity transformation” and “sacred possession”. The remark “General Ouyang Jinjia is invoked for his mighty power to suppress evil spirits” was categorized under “spiritual functionalism” and “exorcism”. The expression “Holding Nuo rituals during the New Year brings migrant workers back home and vitalizes the village” was coded as “community cohesion” and “annual ritual”. Ultimately, relevant codes were integrated and synthesized to form overarching themes, such as “the construction of ritual sacredness” and “pragmatic rationality of folk belief”, providing analytical support for subsequent discussion.

4. Results

Based on investigation and analysis, this study concludes that Nuo culture in Pingxiang, Jiangxi, is not merely a form of folk artistic performance. Instead, it constitutes a comprehensive folk belief system deeply rooted in the regional society of western Jiangxi, featuring a rigorous structural framework and diverse social functions. The beliefs of Nuo culture are expressed and sustained through an elaborate deity system, standardized ritual practices, and daily social interactions.

4.1.1 A Deity System Integrating Pragmatism and Syncretism

The spiritual world of Pingxiang Nuo in Jiangxi exhibits distinct hierarchical structures and functional differentiation, reflecting the pragmatic principle of “believing solely in efficacious deities” and the syncretic characteristics inherent to Chinese folk religion. Field investigations reveal that, although the principal deities enshrined in village Nuo temples vary—such as the Three Generals (Tang Hong, Ge Yong, Zhou Wu), General Ouyang Jinjia, and the Nuo Prince Deity—all function as supreme patron deities. Rather than abstract embodiments of morality, they are revered as martial deities endowed with formidable spiritual power. As described by Inheritor L in Shangli County during an interview: “Our Lord Nuo God (referring to Ouyang Jinjia) is the most powerful. All malevolent spirits retreat at the sight of his mask. He is always the first to be invoked to preside over the commencement of Nuo rituals.” Centered upon these major patron deities, Nuo culture has developed a well-structured pantheon of specialized gods to address the diverse practical needs of local communities. For example, the Goddess of Fertility and child Nuo spirits are dedicated to granting offspring and protecting children. At the Shidongkou Nuo Temple, numerous gratitude banners and red sacrificial cloths were observed bearing inscriptions such as “In gratitude for divine grace for granting me a child”.

Deities such as the Two Harmony Immortals and the God of Wealth are invoked during household Nuo dances to bless families with prosperity and good fortune. Historically, mining flourished across Pingxiang. Accordingly, masks and shrines dedicated to the Coal God or Kiln God have been found among Nuo troupes near mining areas, demonstrating the close integration of folk belief with local modes of production. Fierce-looking figures including Zhong Kui and the Judge are responsible for capturing demons and judging evil forces. Their formidable appearances and exaggerated, vigorous dance movements symbolize the suppression and punishment of chaotic and destructive powers.

As reiterated by Inheritor L from Shangli County: “Our Lord Nuo God, Ouyang Jinjia, is supremely powerful; every malicious entity flees before his mask.” People’s daily demands—such as conceiving children, accumulating wealth, and dispelling illness—correspond directly to specialized deities, fully embodying the pragmatic rationality of “worshipping whichever deity delivers tangible blessings”.

The deity system of Pingxiang Nuo culture in Jiangxi demonstrates profound integration with institutional religions. Taoist incantations such as “Supreme Lord Taishang, hasten forth in accordance with the divine decree” frequently appear in Nuo rituals. The employment of ritual implements (including priestly knives, command tablets, and divination blocks) and magic talismans fully reflects the technical and ceremonial system of Taoist ritual arts. Many Nuo ritual masters are also household Taoist priests who possess formal inheritance of Taoist liturgical traditions. In several Nuo temples, statues of Guanyin Bodhisattva and Maitreya Buddha are enshrined alongside local Nuo deities. Although Buddhist elements are less prominent than Taoist practices within ritual procedures, their coexistence vividly illustrates the inherent inclusiveness of folk belief.

The deity system of Pingxiang Nuo is an open and functional belief framework, which takes local patron deities as its core, adopts Taoist magical arts as its primary ritual methodology, and incorporates Buddhist elements and various folk gods. The general public pays little attention to the religious affiliations of these deities; instead, they only care about whether the gods are efficacious and responsive to their prayers.

4.1.2 Ritual Process of Sacred Narratives

At the beginning of Nuo rituals in Pingxiang, Jiangxi, senior ritual masters lead their disciples in reciting lengthy *Deity Invocation Texts* before Nuo temples or altars. The texts honor Taoist supreme deities, Buddhist bodhisattvas, local mountain and water gods, and ancestral masters of successive generations within the Nuo troupe. This opening procedure is defined as deity invitation or ritual purification. Divination by casting blocks is then performed to confirm that divine spirits have descended and embodied within the masks, a local ritual concept known as “divine descent”. Once masked, performers transcend ordinary human identity and incarnate divine beings. Accordingly, the entire ritual space is purified and sacralized.

For instance, *Prince Deity Dance* narrates the heroic deeds of the Nuo God Prince in subduing demons and eliminating evil. Beyond entertainment, such dances manifest and validate divine power so as to strengthen the devotion of worshippers. In *Zhong Kui Captures Ghosts*, Zhong Kui wields a sword to chase and strike evil spirits

throughout every corner of households. Household owners follow closely and wipe these areas with paper offerings, symbolizing the removal and incineration of misfortune. Such dramatic imitative acts ultimately achieve tangible purification effects. Following the performance of *Harmony Immortals*, performers scatter auspicious candies, rice, and beans among spectators, who eagerly scramble for these items. Believed to be infused with sacred spiritual energy, these blessings convey the distribution and sharing of divine grace.

A complete Nuo ritual constitutes a spiritual journey that transitions from the secular to the sacred and finally returns to mundane reality. Its fundamental framework consists of four sequential stages: ritual purification and deity invocation, divine descent and spiritual possession, sacred narrative performances such as *Zhong Kui Captures Ghosts*, and deity send-off to restore cosmic and social order. The household practice of wiping spaces struck by Zhong Kui's sword with joss paper serves as a typical symbolic act, demonstrating how dramatic simulation brings about practical purification within folk ritual life.

Once all rituals have concluded, a solemn deity send-off ceremony must be held to respectfully escort the invoked divinities back to the heavenly realm. The final procedure is the Nuo sealing ritual, in which masks are reverently placed back into shrines or storage cabinets and sealed with paper talismans. This act marks the conclusion of sacred time and space and the restoration of everyday social order. The entire ritual process reflects a return to peace and regular order following a period of "sacred chaos".

4.1.3 Profound Folk Belief

The belief practices embedded in Pingxiang Nuo culture are deeply intertwined with local social structures and perform extensive socio-cultural functions beyond individual spiritual needs. Annual Nuo activities stand as the most significant public event within single villages and neighbouring communities. The preparation, fundraising, and ritual organization require collective cooperation across the entire village. For young migrant workers returning home during the Spring Festival, participating in and witnessing Nuo ceremonies serves as an important reason for their homecoming. Such practices consolidate geographical and kinship identity and reconstruct the traditional sense of communal territoriality. As a village official frankly stated: "Few residents remain in the village throughout the year. Only when the Nuo dance is held during the New Year does the village regain vitality." This statement indicates that Nuo rituals function as a core mechanism for reconstructing communal

identity.

Rich traditional values are embedded within Nuo dance performances and Nuo opera narratives. For example, *Lord Guan* symbolizes loyalty and righteousness, while *Meng Jiangnü* embodies chastity and filial piety. Through sacred and accessible artistic expressions, these stories deliver subtle yet persistent moral education to community members, particularly younger generations. In the face of life uncertainties such as illness, disasters, and occupational setbacks, Nuo rituals provide a coherent interpretive framework and practical coping measures. Local residents attribute misfortune to disturbing malevolent influences or inauspicious annual fortunes, and seek resolution by inviting Nuo troupes to perform ceremonial rites and Nuo dances. No matter the outcomes are good or not, such ritual actions offer psychological comfort and positive suggestion, strengthening individual confidence and resilience in adversity.

During field interviews, numerous villagers recounted anecdotes of perceived efficacy, including the recovery of ill family members and improved business fortunes following Nuo performances. These recurring narratives continuously reinforce the perceived potency and credibility of local Nuo beliefs.

5. Discussion

The case of Nuo culture in Pingxiang, Jiangxi, indicates that local folk belief systems should not be simply confined to essentialist classification frameworks defined as either “religion” or “performance”. Instead, they ought to be interpreted as dynamic cultural mechanisms deeply embedded in everyday social life. This study finds that Pingxiang Nuo culture embodies a form of diffused religiosity and permeates multiple dimensions of local society. It is manifested in household-level prayers for blessings and disaster elimination, community festivals, individual life-cycle rituals, and localized production practices such as mining. Such characteristics demonstrate that Nuo tradition is not an institutional religion centered on doctrines, but a practice-oriented system of meaning construction and social action.

From a functionalist perspective, Nuo rituals provide a culturally legitimate interpretive framework for local communities, enabling individuals and groups to understand and cope with practical dilemmas such as illness, disasters, fertility concerns, and economic uncertainty. Narratives centered on perceived spiritual efficacy are continuously reinforced through oral communication, thereby forming a socially constructed knowledge system of ritual effectiveness. Accordingly, the sustainability of Nuo culture relies not on doctrinal uniformity, but on its capacity to be empirically validated by participants on an ongoing basis.

Furthermore, Nuo activities can be regarded as a form of social drama in the sense proposed by Victor Turner. Through the periodic ritual narratives of exorcising evil and invoking good fortune, the community collectively responds to and symbolically resolves the structural tension triggered by illness and adversity. During the liminality phase of the ritual, both performers and worshippers temporarily detach from their daily social roles and enter a shared sacred space. Within this process, individuals experience intense emotional resonance and collective participation, which helps restore cosmic order at the symbolic level and strengthen community cohesion from a social perspective.

Nevertheless, under the dual influences of modernization and the institutionalization of intangible cultural heritage, Pingxiang Nuo culture is undergoing a profound transformation. As a local cultural symbol, Nuo has gradually been incorporated into the tourism economy and official cultural performance systems. In this process, core ritual elements such as Nuo dance have been selectively extracted, condensed in rhythm, aesthetically refined, and reconstructed for staged presentation. Performance venues have shifted from original sacred spaces, including ancestral halls and household shrines, to secular sites such as public squares and scenic areas. Meanwhile, the audience has changed from devout worshippers to tourists and cultural evaluators.

This transformation reflects the inherent tension between ritual authenticity and heritage commodification. On the one hand, commercialization may result in the fragmentation of traditional ritual systems and the gradual weakening of sacredness. On the other hand, it also provides renewed economic motivation and broader communication channels for the sustainable inheritance of Nuo culture. Notably, this study reveals that such cultural transformation has not led to the disappearance of folk beliefs. Instead, it has fostered a dual structure. Externally, Nuo traditions are reconstructed as display-oriented cultural performances; internally, their fundamental functions as ritual practice and spiritual belief continue to operate steadily within rural society. This coexisting dual model demonstrates the cultural resilience and adaptive capacity of folk beliefs within contemporary social contexts.

6. Conclusion

This study defines Nuo culture in Pingxiang, Jiangxi, as a regional folk belief system with a complex structure and coherent internal logic, whose core characteristics are manifested in pragmatism, syncretism, and prominent social functionality. Centered

on the core logic of exorcising evil and invoking good fortune, Nuo culture forms an organically integrated cultural whole through a hierarchical deity lineage, standardized ritual practices, and embodied performance forms. This study indicates that the rationality embedded within Nuo culture does not derive from systematic theology, but from a practice-oriented practical religiosity. The functional differentiation of its deity system, together with the absorption of Taoist, Buddhist, and local folk religious elements, reflects the core feature of Chinese folk beliefs, which prioritizes spiritual efficacy over doctrinal dogma.

More importantly, as a periodically enacted mechanism of social practice, Nuo rituals play a pivotal role in coping with uncertainties and maintaining social order. Through a series of symbolic behaviors and sacred narratives, Nuo ceremonies effectively alleviate individual and collective anxiety and mitigate tensions within social relations. In this process, they continuously reproduce communal identity and collective cohesion. In this sense, Nuo can be interpreted as a cultural technology of social resilience, serving as an essential mechanism for the self-sustenance and self-healing of traditional rural societies.

Meanwhile, this study also reveals the profound impacts of modernization and intangible cultural heritage conservation policies on local belief systems. Rather than simply leading to the dissolution of tradition, these external forces have promoted the recombination of rituals, performances, and cultural heritage discourses. Future research should move beyond static descriptions of tradition to dynamically trace the evolving processes of folk belief. Furthermore, Through cross-regional and even cross-cultural comparisons, further exploration can be made to reveal both the specificity and universality of folk beliefs.

This study also has several limitations. First, systematic analysis regarding the differentiated role division within Nuo troupes remains insufficient. Second, the understanding of certain ritual details requires further in-depth exploration. On the basis of long-term fieldwork, future studies may further refine the analysis of ritual procedures, role interactions, and intergenerational inheritance mechanisms, so as to comprehensively reveal the internal structure and operational logic of Pingxiang Nuo culture.

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Appendix

Interview Outline

1. This interview is for academic research purposes only. All your information will be kept strictly confidential, and your responses will be presented anonymously in the thesis.

2. The interview will be recorded to accurately capture your viewpoints. If you feel uncomfortable with any question, you are free to skip it or request that the recording be turned off.

3. There are no standard answers in this interview. We are eager to hear your most genuine thoughts and personal experiences. Thank you for your valuable time and generous sharing!

I. Interview Outline for National/Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritors and Nuo Troupe Members

Theme: Internal Knowledge System, Inheritance, and Core Beliefs

1. Personal Background and Inheritance Lineage

Please introduce yourself. When and how did you begin learning Nuo culture and Nuo performance? Who was your master?

Does your Nuo troupe have inheritance genealogical records or oral formulas? Could you talk about the history of the troupe and its important masters across generations?

What qualifications are required to become a senior Nuo master (Lao Zuo)? What does the learning process entail? (Are there strict rules and taboos?)

2. Spiritual Concepts and Core Beliefs

Please tell us about the principal deities enshrined in our Nuo temples (such as General Ouyang Jinjia, the Three Generals Tang, Ge, and Zhou, etc.). What is their origin and divine power?

In addition to the principal deities, which other important deities are featured in our masks (such as the Ancestor God, Zhong Kui, the Gods of Harmony and Union, the Prince, etc.)? What are their respective responsibilities?

In your opinion, what is the most crucial aspect of performing Nuo? Is it the precision of movements, or the sincerity of devotion? How do the deities “possess” the masks?

How do you understand the power of “Nuo”? How does it drive away evil spirits

and bring good fortune?

3. Ritual Knowledge and Practice

Please elaborate on the main procedures of a complete religious ritual or Nuo dance performance (e.g., inviting deities, divination, exiting the cave, Nuo dancing, exorcism, and sending off deities), and explain the significance of each procedure.

What are the cultural connotations and functions of ritual implements used in ceremonies (e.g., Nuo halberd, priest's knife, command tablet, and divination blocks)? What do the patterns and inscriptions on these objects symbolize?

How is the mask consecration (kai guang) ritual conducted? How is an ordinary wooden mask transformed into a deity with spiritual power?

What differences exist in rituals held for various occasions, such as blessing ceremonies during the Spring Festival, exorcism for new residences, and spiritual relief rituals for the ill?

4. Contemporary Challenges and Cultural Inheritance

In your opinion, what are the most significant changes in modern Nuo performances compared with those in the past (e.g., villagers' attitudes, ritual procedures, and practical functions)?

Are young people willing to learn Nuo traditions at present? What are the greatest difficulties facing Nuo inheritance?

Since local Nuo culture has been designated as intangible cultural heritage by the government, what benefits and influences has this recognition brought?

To attract tourists, will commercialized Nuo dance performances conflict with traditional rituals? What is your perspective on this issue?

II. Interview Outline for Ordinary Nuo Troupe Members

Theme: Participatory Experience, Identity, and Personal Understanding

1. Participation Motivation and Experience

Why did you join the Nuo troupe? Is it due to family inheritance, personal interest, or other reasons?

What role do you mainly take charge of, and which Nuo performances do you participate in? What has been the most difficult part of the learning process?

Do you remember your feelings during your first public performance? Were you nervous or excited?

2. Understanding of Nuo Culture

In your view, what is the primary purpose of performing Nuo? Is it for public entertainment, a continuation of tradition, or a practice embodying genuine spiritual

power?

When you dance wearing a Nuo mask, do you regard yourself as a performer or the incarnation of a deity? What kind of experience does this bring to you?

Among the performances you take part in, what stories and symbolic meanings lie behind the roles you portray?

3. Social Interaction and Future Perspectives

Do your family members and friends support your participation in Nuo activities? What are their attitudes toward Nuo culture?

What differences do you perceive between performing in external public shows and hosting traditional rituals for local villagers?

Would you hope that the younger generation in your family learns and inherits Nuo dance? Please explain your reasons.

III. Interview Outline for Villagers and Worshippers

Theme: Narrative of Spiritual Efficacy, Community Functions, and Conceptual Changes

1. Personal Connections with Nuo

Do you watch Nuo performances every year? What does Nuo dancing mean to you and your family?

Have you or your family ever invited a Nuo troupe to conduct rituals for specific needs, such as recovering from illness, constructing a new house, or praying for a child? Could you share that experience and its outcomes?

How do you perceive the Nuo deities? Do you believe in their spiritual power, or regard them merely as a cultural tradition?

2. Community Functions

In your opinion, what overall benefits do annual Nuo activities bring to the village (e.g., creating a lively atmosphere and enhancing community cohesion)?

What differences have you noticed between current Nuo ceremonies and those you observed in your childhood? What has changed, and what has remained the same?

IV. Interview Outline for Management Staff

Theme: Macro Perspective, Policy Evaluation, and Academic Interpretation

1. Value Evaluation

In your opinion, does the core value of Pingxiang Nuo culture lie in its artistic characteristics, religious beliefs, or social functions?

Compared with Nuo cultures in other regions (e.g., Guizhou and Anhui), what are the most unique features of Pingxiang Nuo?

2. Practice and Reflection on Conservation and Development

What major measures has the local government adopted to conserve and promote Pingxiang Nuo culture (e.g., cultural documentation, inheritor subsidies, campus inheritance programs, and tourism development)?

What difficulties and dilemmas exist in current conservation practices? For example, does commercialization undermine the cultural authenticity of Nuo traditions?

In the practice of living heritage inheritance, how to strike a balance between preserving the original cultural form and pursuing innovative development adapted to modern society?