

Taboos and Cultural Literacy Education in Ritual Performance of *Chizhou Nuo Opera*, China

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ABSTRACT

Chizhou Nuo Opera is a sacrificial folk opera performance organized by clans, characterized by mask-wearing performances, and aimed at “worshiping gods and ancestors, praying for blessings and eliminating disasters” (He, 2012). There are many taboos in ritual performances. These human-imposed taboos not only maintain the sacredness of the rituals, but also play an important role in cultural literacy education. This study explores the taboos in the ritual performance of Chizhou Nuo Opera and its role in cultural literacy education. This study was conducted in Guichi District, Chizhou City, where Nuo Opera is prevalent, and adopted a multidimensional approach that included documentation, interviews with key informants such as inheritors, Nuo Opera artists, cultural experts and villagers, as well as thematic analysis of data collected through participatory and non-participatory observation methods. This study discovered the taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera rituals regarding language, behavior, gender, time and space, and further uncovered the profound insights of taboos in cultural literacy education such as etiquette, shame, occupation, health, knowledge, and civilization. This study also explored the performance process of Chizhou Nuo Opera and the cultural significance of taboos. This research has important value both in terms of identifying taboo culture and promoting cultural literacy education within the community. Based on these findings, this research suggests that all stakeholders should work together to integrate excellent traditional cultural education and promote cultural literacy.

Key words: Chizhou Nuo Opera, Ritual, Taboo, Education, Cultural Literacy

INTRODUCTION

Taboos are a common folklore phenomenon among all peoples of the world. Taboos endow various taboo things a sacred attribute. Taboos not only constrain people’s thinking and behavior, but also provide individuals with moral guidance and behavioral framework.

In the first month of the lunar calendar every year from the seventh to the first month of the fifteenth period, China’s Anhui Province, Chizhou City, Guichi District, many villages have to organize grand Nuo Opera ritual performance activities. These activities not only have a variety of Nuo ritual procedures, there are also many ritual Nuo dances that have been passed down for a long time, as well as opera programs with storylines. In the process of ritual performance there are a large number of taboos. Regarding the maintenance of Nuo’s sacred attributes, these taboos have strengthened the role of Nuo Opera activities and have added a lot of sacred cultural colors to them.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the complex relationship between taboos in Nuo Opera ritual performances and cultural literacy education. On the one hand, the taboo cases in Chizhou Nuo Opera rituals are

sorted out, and then the cultural literacy education function of taboos is analyzed. Making full use of the positive factors in taboo culture improves cultural literacy. This study aims to clarify the respect for folk traditional culture and cultivate a deep sense of cultural identity and cultural confidence. The findings of this research will contribute to understanding the cultural significance of taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances and their potential as a tool for cultural literacy education, thereby making a meaningful contributions to the dialogue between cultural sustainability and educational transformation.

Objective and Research Questions

The objective of this study was to investigate and analyze the taboos and cultural literacy education in Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances. The following research questions related to the research objectives were considered:

1. What are the taboos in the Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances?
2. How do the taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances contribute to cultural literacy education?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Taboos and the Cultural Significance of Taboos

Taboo is a cultural phenomenon for which there are many interpretations. The *Sociology-Anthropology-New Dictionary* defines it as: "Taboos refer to restrictions and prohibitions on specific objects, persons or behaviors linked to primitive religious concepts. It is prevalent among primitive peoples. Primitive people believe that offending certain things or performing certain behaviors gives rise to various taboos" (Huang & Luo et al., 2003, p. 82). Taboos are concepts that denote the relationship of things and form part of the normative and symbolic system of each particular cultural boundary. From a functional point of view, taboo has a symbolic function. It draws the line between the individual or society and its surroundings. Taboo is a kind of behavioral norm, which aims to restrain or regulate people's words and deeds. To a certain extent, taboo has the function of "law" (Dong, 2008). Taboos have rich cultural connotations in the traditional culture of all ethnic groups, and are characterized by ethnicity, region, religion and universality (Dong, 2008). In religion, taboo is a special form. It is a kind of psychological and customary belief, and at the same time, taboo is also a common folklore phenomenon among all nationalities in the world. It draws a bottom line that cannot be touched, and has a strong binding force on people's thinking and behavior. Taboos for a variety of sacred things are marked with sacred symbols, in order to maintain their sacred attributes (Meng, 2008). Taboos, whether from the heart or from external forces, are a kind of behavioral norm designed to constrain people's words and deeds (Jin, 2002, p. 19).

Therefore, this study believes that taboos refer to rules related to religion and certain concepts, which prohibit certain words and deeds at a specific time, place, or object. Taboo exists in the daily production and life of all ethnic groups. For example, during the Chinese New Year, it is forbidden to say words related to death such as "it's over" and "it's no use", which is considered to be an ominous sign. On the first day of the New Year, people do not take out the garbage in order to gather wealth and do not wash their hair or take a bath to avoid washing away good luck. When offering sacrifices to ancestors, people are forbidden to laugh and play to show respect for their ancestors. At the same time, the Daur people are afraid of people entering the house with horse whips, bows and arrows, swords and guns, because doing so is not civilized and unsafe. The Monba people are forbidden to plough on April 15 and June 4. On these days, they refrain from killing and ploughing, believing that violating the rules may offend the gods and cause disasters, such as hail (Zhao, 2005).

Taboos are beneficial in many situations (Frazer, 1988, p. 20). The taboo system linked to the concept of the sacred, in the early social life of mankind, had a significant role in stabilizing the social order, in establishing the protection of private property from theft and inviolability, in the sanctity of marriage, and in the protection of and respect for human life (Lv, 2006, p. 5). According to the literature review, this study believes that the cultural significance of taboos is mainly reflected in three aspects.

First, Taboos are closely related to beliefs. On the one hand, taboos are based on beliefs and supported by collective consciousness within a certain range; on the other hand, taboos constantly reinforce individual and collective beliefs and become a code of conduct with binding effect within a certain range (Meng, 2008). The binding nature of religious taboos and their mandatory sanctions require a specific religious atmosphere and, in particular, a strong conviction by the person concerned (the individual or even the group as a whole). This is one of the most important basic features of religious taboos, which is based on and presupposes the belief in gods and spirits, mystical sympathetic beliefs, and pious reverence for the supernatural world. If the foundation of religious belief is left, religious taboo is like a deflated balloon paralyzed on the ground (Jin, 2002, p. 23). It can be seen that the basis for the existence of taboos lies in religious beliefs.

Second, Taboo originates from the concept of the sacred. Sigmund Freud believes that taboo contains two meanings, on one hand, it is sublime and sacred. Because it is sublime and sacred, it is inviolable; on the other hand, it is mysterious, dangerous, prohibited, and impure. Since it is mysterious, of course it is revered (Sigmund Freud, 1986, p. 31). There is no doubt that religious ceremonies are sacred. Sacred concepts and sacred things are necessarily accompanied by corresponding taboo regulations. The concept of taboo is the essential provision of the sacred concept, and with the sacred concept there must be a corresponding taboo provision. If there are no taboos, sacred things must be no different from ordinary mundane things and cannot be called sacred (Lv, 2004). That is, the more taboos an activity contains, the closer the activity is to the sacred, and the fewer taboos it contains, the closer the activity is to the secular.

Third, Taboos have a strong binding force and social integration. All inauspicious words, deeds and things that are not conducive to sanctity or authority are among the taboos. Most of the taboos in the rituals are institutionalized, ritualized, and show what should be taboo in the form of cumbersome regulations. The head of the community (chief) or the representative of the divine power (sorcerer) "has the right to declare anything taboo" (Frazer, 1998, p. 185). Once a taboo is formed, it has an irresistible binding force similar to "law". To offend or transgress is to violate a taboo. The consequences of violating a taboo are accidental death, accidental injury, and misfortune, etc. (Meng, 2008).

Regarding the taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera rituals, Meng (2008) believes that there are many taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera rituals. These taboos have a strong binding force on people's thinking and behavior, and play a very important role in maintaining its sacred attributes. He (2012) emphasized that the taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera are based on the worship and fear of gods and the prohibition and avoidance of ghosts and plagues. These taboos have a mandatory and reinforcing effect on maintaining the sacred attributes of Nuo.

Educational Pedagogy and Cultural Literacy

In recent years, the cultural value of Chizhou Nuo Opera has attracted much attention, and the educational significance

of Chizhou Nuo Opera has been increasingly recognized as valuable tools for promoting cultural literacy and sustainable development. Chizhou Nuo culture has many functions such as cultural education, artistic literacy and cultural storage (Meng, 2011, pp. 364-367). Chizhou Nuo Opera has an important position and educational significance in the current local textbooks in China (Luo, 2016). Chizhou Nuo Opera has the value of fitness, aesthetics and cultural functions in contemporary society (Tang, 2024). As an important part of China's excellent traditional culture, Chizhou Nuo Opera has rich cultural, artistic, and spiritual values (Zha, 2024).

Therefore, this study believes that from the perspective of cultural studies and education, taboos, as social norms and cultural phenomena, contain rich cultural and educational significance. For Chizhou Nuo Opera, the cultural significance of taboos lies in that taboos preserve the cultural identity of Nuo Opera and strengthen the sacredness and mystery of the ritual. Its educational significance lies in that taboos are an important tool to promote cultural literacy, and taboos provide individuals with moral guidance and behavioral frameworks. Therefore, incorporating them into curriculum education or social management education can cultivate traditional cultural literacy, which will enable people to understand and respect folk traditional culture, and thus enhance cultural identity.

The literature review emphasizes the multifaceted nature of taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances, covering both the cultural and educational significance of taboos. By drawing on cultural significance and educational pedagogy, this review lays the foundation for studying the role of taboos in cultural literacy education in Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Selection of the Research Area

This study covers the core area of Nuo Opera circulation located in Guichi District, Chizhou City, Anhui Province, China (Figure 1), focusing on more than a dozen clans in Yuanxi, Liu Street, Yao Street, and Mei Street. Guichi District was selected due to its unique geographical location, rich historical heritage, and deep cultural significance. Guichi is not only one of the birthplace of China's ancient Nuo Opera, but also the core area of Nuo Opera performances. Historically, Guichi was "no Nuo not village" place. Also due to the deep cultural heritage of Nuo, Guichi District is known as "the hometown of Nuo culture in China". Therefore, Guichi is an ideal location for research and data collection, as shown in Table 1.

Population and Sample

The researchers conducted Nuo opera follow-up field surveys in rural areas of Guichi District, Chizhou City from February 2 to February 6, 2023 and from February 16 to 24, 2024. Both time periods were during the Spring Festival, which is also the time of the year when Nuo Opera is centrally performed. The first focused on the Chizhou Cultural

Center, Mei Street Township Nuo cultural exhibition center and Liu Street Village, Yuanxi Village, Mountain Lake Village, Maotan Village and other places of Nuo Opera scene. The second focused on the Nuo Opera scene in Yao Street Village, Meijie Village, Puzhuang Village and other places.

A sampling method was used to select three different groups of individuals as respondents for the fieldwork. These groups consisted of key respondents, relevant respondents, and general respondents, representing a variety of perspectives related to Nuo Culture and taboos. Sample populations included cultural experts, Nuo Opera union presidents, intangible culture bearers, Nuo Opera actors, and local residents. As shown in Table 2.

Research Tools and Steps

Various research tools and steps were used to collect data. These tools include documentary materials, observation, and interview methods. Each with different purposes to explore the taboos in Nuo opera ritual performances and the value of cultural literacy education, as shown in Table 3.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Chizhou Nuo Opera Ritual Performance

This study used a combination of research tools such as literature and observation to reveal the process and form of Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances. Chizhou Nuo Opera is an ancient local opera, known as the "living fossil of opera". Qing Dynasty "Xinghua Village Annals" records that Chizhou Nuo Opera originated in the Tang Dynasty on the Prince Zhaoming's sacrificial activities (Lang, 1685). Nuo Opera flourished in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Chizhou Nuo Opera is a kind of "sacrificial circle" within the scope of activities, to the clan as the organizational structure, relying on "oral teaching" way of inheritance, generations of inheritance. Due to its rich cultural connotations, it was listed in the Chinese National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2006.

Chizhou people said Nuo Opera for "wailing drama", "Dixi" and so on, commonly known as "Nuo Opera" (He & Wang, 2000, p.7). Nuo Opera performance venue to ancestral halls, temples as a specific ritual space. Song and dance rituals, costumes and artifacts as the actual carrier. The main forms of performance are Nuo rituals, Nuo dance and Nuo Opera. The whole process to accompany the music of the drums and gongs. Nuo Opera actors are village people, and only by men playing both male and female roles, and dress according to role requirements. Performance has a fixed program, but the performance can be free to play. In recent years, under the maintenance of the "local elite", the ritual program and singing, dialogue, performance movements have been inherited and developed. Year after year in the ritual performances, Nuo Opera as a collective performance of the village community performance of the social action of the village collective common compliance and value recognition.

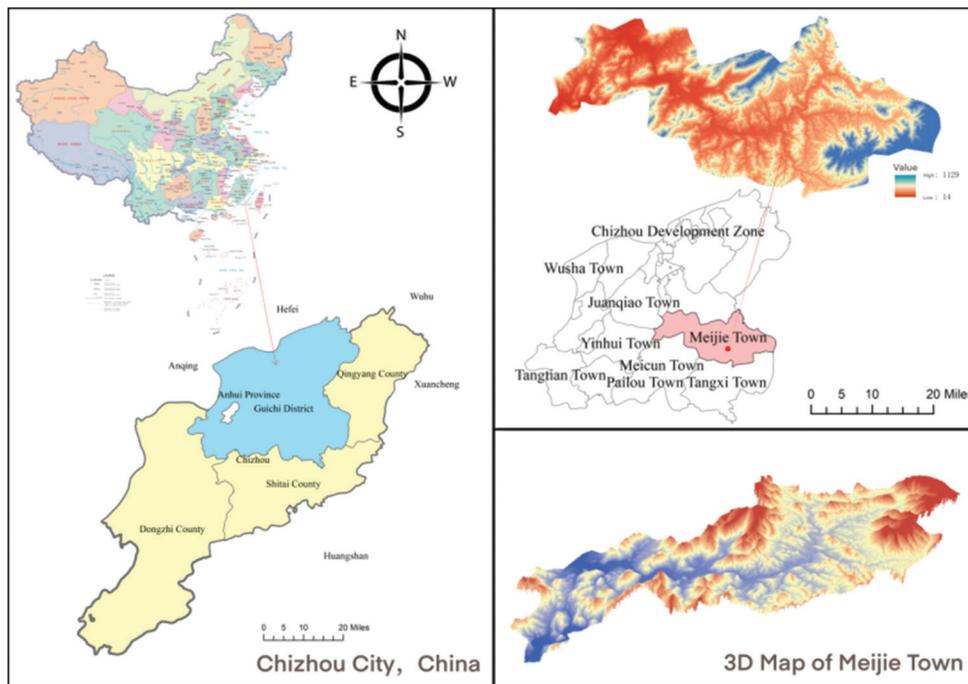


Figure 1. Distribution map of chizhou nuo opera
 Source: The researchers based on https://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2017-07/28/content_5043915.htm,
<https://www.geodata.cn/myspace/drawing of data resources>

Table 1. Selection of research area

Criteria	Description
Physical Space	Guichi District is located in the southern mountainous area of Anhui Province, between longitude 117°06'-117°50'E and latitude 30°15'-30°48'N, with a total area of 2,516 square kilometers. Guichi District has a total of 11 streets and 9 townships with a household population of 670,000 (Guichi District People’s Government Website, May 6, 2024).
Religious Belief	Guichi is characterized by steep terrain, closed transportation, and relatively poor material and living conditions. Since ancient times, witchcraft has been prevalent, and the ancestors worshiped totems, nature, ancestors, and superstitious ghosts and gods. The population in the settlements has less interaction with the outside world. People live in a fixed area for years to carry out repetitive agricultural labor. The annual Nuo Opera performance is an important ceremony. Through the ceremony to drive away ghosts and evil spirits, avoid disasters and good luck.
Nuo Opera Performance	Chizhou Nuo Opera is a collective ritual of clan ancestor worship, and to clan as a unit. During the Spring Festival every year, almost every clan with a big surname performs Nuo Opera. According to the researchers in February 2023 field study found that there are currently 17 clans in Guichi District, 34 natural villages alive and intact Nuo Opera activities to preserve the ancient and mysterious.
Resource Utilization	The Guichi Cultural Center and the Meijie Town Nuo Culture Exhibition Center provided archival materials, and the Nuo Opera performance site provided field research resources to help conduct comprehensive research and analysis.
Inheritors	There is one national-level inheritor and two provincial-level inheritors, providing information for textual research.

The field investigation of this study found that the ritual performance is mainly around Nuo masks, divided into Asking for God, entertainment God, Seeing the God Off three stages. Ritual performance process to comply with strict taboos.

First, Asking for God. Also called “Greeting the God Who Descends from the Frame”. In other words, the night before the performance, the masks are “stolen” from the shrines in the ancestral halls (it is forbidden to disturb the spirits of the ancestors), wiped clean, and placed in a good position to be used during the performance of the play. In the

minds of the villagers, “mask” is “Nuo God” symbol. This program opened the annual Nuo Opera activities, marking the official start of the activities. The time, form and process of the ceremony varies from clan to clan. At the same time, the clans also have to carry out the “Lifting the Holy” ceremony (Figure 2), that is, before singing Nuo Opera, the village people need to go to the “sacrificial altar” sacrifice and dance Nuo, as a way to welcome the gods to come.

Second, Entertaining God. This stage is Nuo Opera artists wearing masks to perform Nuo dance and Nuo Opera



Figure 2. “Lifting the Holy” Ceremony
Source: Linsen li (February, 2023)

Table 2. Population and sample

Category	Description	Size
Key Informants	Organization of Nuo Opera performances of the clan Nuo Opera union Presidents. National and provincial Chizhou Nuo Opera inheritors. Research Chizhou Nuo Opera cultural experts.	6
Relevant Informants	Actors and staff involved in Nuo Opera performances, representing the perspective of Nuo Opera performances with personal experience.	10
General Informants	Cultural center staff, and local residents represent the knowledge and understanding of the taboo culture in Nuo Opera performances.	10

repertoire. Repertoire performances throughout the whole process of the ceremony. Performers are convinced that after the “descending” ceremony mask has been attached to the gods. The repertoire performance is the voice of the gods. The inheritors of Nuo Opera said that Nuo performances are not affected by the audience’s likes and dislikes, and will proceed normally even if there are no audiences at all (2023, interview).

The performance of Nuo dance repertoire is mainly “Dancing Umbrella Money” (Figure 3), “Dance of Reunion”, “Dancing with Rolling Light”, “Beating Red Birds”, “The Big Dipper”, “Dancing with Ancient Money”, “The Circle Dance”, and other items. Performers need to wear masks when performing Nuo dance. Because of the different roles, their masks in different forms. Nuo dance action simple and plain, usually accompanied by gongs and drums, and only dance without singing. Nuo dance of the clan dance, the order of performance, the number of performers, dance movements, dance style, performance props and other aspects are different. They have their own characteristics, showing the diversity of features. Even if the same dance, the village of each family performance form there are differences. However, they have retained the primitive simplicity, mysterious and peculiar, rough and bold unique style. Nuo dance performance demeanor into and out of the scene scheduling square symmetry, accompaniment, singing standardized.

Nuo Opera performances are mainly “Meng Jiangnu”, “Liu Wenlong”, “Zhang Wenxian”, “Hua Guansuo” and so on. Among them, “Meng Jiangnu” and “Liu Wenlong” two plays popular wide, but also various clans have to perform the play. These plays mainly express human sorrow, secular feelings. Nuo Opera has singing and dialog, but also a complete storyline. Drums and gongs are used to perform only accompanied by vocals to help the voice. Singing mainly high and Nuo cavity two categories.

Table 3. Research tools and steps

Research tools	Description
Documentation	Utilized literature as basic research tools, collect and analyze documentary materials related to taboos and Chizhou Nuo Opera, including monographs, papers, local chronicles, and Nuo Opera scripts. Analyzed the form, taboos and cultural significance of Chizhou Nuo Opera, and supplemented it based on the research literature of domestic and foreign scholars.
Observations	Participatory and non-participatory observation methods were used. Focused on observing the process of performing Nuo Opera rituals, the language and behavior of the performers. Data were collected and observed, and finally analyzed and summarized.
Interviews	A semi-structured interview method was used to design specific interview outlines for different interviewees, including Nuo Opera inheritors, cultural experts, and villagers. Targeted questions were asked to understand the taboo forms and contents in Nuo Opera performances. Recordings were made and comprehensive analysis and summary were conducted. The aim was to ensure that this study collected key information on ritual taboos, while also leaving space for interviewees to share their personal experiences and insights. Regular contact was also maintained with the interviewees during the interview process by means of phone calls and emails to supplement and confirm information or to address questions that may have arisen. This ongoing communication helped to build trusting relationships and ensure the completeness and accuracy of the information.
Data analysis	The data analysis of this study adopts a comprehensive qualitative method. The data synthesis is based on the research framework, namely the taboos of Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performance and its role in cultural literacy education. The field survey data, including audio and video recordings of observations and interviews, are carefully studied. The research results are presented in the form of descriptive analysis. In order to protect the identity of the interviewees, the comments of the interviewees are anonymized in this paper.



Figure 3. Nuo dance “Dancing Umbrella Money”

Source: Linsen li (February, 2023)

Third, seeing the god off. The villagers believe that if the previously invited gods are not sent away, they will cause trouble and bring harm to the village (2023, interview). Therefore, out of fear of the gods and ghosts, the seeing the god off ceremony is performed after the last performance on the fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar calendar to send the god back to the “sacrificial altar” and to prevent the god from remaining on earth and bringing disaster. During the ceremony, the “five-colored umbrellas” that the god is attached to are torn up or burned so that the god has no place to stay. After seeing the god off, the masks need to be wiped clean and placed in a certain order in the mask box, which is still placed in the ancestral hall, and the entire Nuo opera ceremony is over.

In short, the ceremony constitutes the main elements of the villagers’ belief in the gods, but also constitutes the Nuo Opera as a cultural phenomenon generated by the integrated environment. As a “grass-roots society” of the basic factors, it and cultural space, clan society to build a cultural position. It allows this local culture to continue in a certain time and space, the formation of tradition, and becoming a respected cultural symbol with the passage of time.

Taboo Content and Forms of Expression

This study used a combination of research tools such as literature, observation and interviews to discover the taboo content and forms of expression in the ritual performance of Chizhou Nuo Opera. The content described by the interviewees was reflected in the text. Taboo in folklore is an agreed-upon prohibition of sacred or unclean things. It is a passive avoidance method to achieve self-suppression in all aspects, so as to achieve the ultimate goal of cognitive wishes. Taboos are based on the belief in the concept of gods and witchcraft, with a clear character of faith (He, 2012). And it is preserved as a cultural tradition in the vernacular society.

Chizhou Nuo Opera is a cultural performance that carries specific religious and regional clan functions, showing strong order norms and taboos in the ceremony. Because of the special geographical environment of Chizhou, these taboo customs in both content and form have maintained the original simplicity and sacredness. Field works found that the taboos are mainly manifested in four aspects: language taboos, behavioral taboos, gender taboos and space-time taboos.

First, the taboos of language. 1) Not to speak unfavorably. Language taboos out of people believe that language has a special “call” power, once said will really realize (Jin, 2002, p. 45). Therefore, during the Nuo Opera activities, people in the sacred object, sacred places, and sacred time are prohibited to say dirty irreverent, blasphemous words or unlucky words. Villagers believe that Nuo God can hear what they say, so it will be fulfilled. Consequently, speaking in an auspicious manner will help you avoid upsetting the gods. Dangli Yao village of the old man surname Wu said that in the past, there was a villager who expressed suspicions about “Nuo God” and said that “Nuo may not be spiritual”. As a result, He stumbled and fell on the place, which caused his lip to swell severely. This is Nuo God gave him a lesson to make a fool of him on the spot (2023, interview). 2) Actors wearing masks are not allowed to speak. In the minds of the villagers, the “mask” is the concrete carrier of the “Nuo God” and the material carrier of the villagers’ spiritual beliefs. The mask is the representative of the “Nuo God” (He, 2012). Villagers believe that after the actor put on the mask, equivalent to being possessed by the gods, is the identity of God on behalf of the supernatural magic power, and the identity of God in speaking, doing things, if inadvertently uttered inauspicious words, will cause adverse consequences (2023, interview). Therefore, after the actor puts on the Nuo mask, he is forbidden to speak, and no one else is allowed to talk to the actor wearing the Nuo mask. 3) During the performance of rituals, the actors must speak fluently. This taboo is mainly reflected in individual ceremonies such as “Asking the Village God”. If an actor playing the role of the Village God does not speak fluently or is unable to answer questions from the Head of the Year about the harvest, population, smallpox, education, etc., it is a sign that the year is not going well in this area (2023, interview).

Second, the taboos of behavior. 1) Nuo Opera performers’ behavioral taboos. For villagers to participate in Nuo Opera performances, in order to participate in the performance of Nuo Opera must be bathed, dressed, worship, get rid of body filth. In some villages, before holding Nuo Opera activities, married actors and actresses have to separate for half a month or three days, not have sex, and keep their bodies clean and not touch dirty things. At the same time, it is forbidden to destroy, defile or disrespect the mask, and the stored Nuo mask cannot be taken out at will. Every time a Nuo mask is taken out, it must be “cleaned” clean. The basin and towel for scrubbing must be newly bought. After scrubbing, each Nuo mask is placed in the prescribed order. Each Nuo god has its own position and cannot be placed incorrectly. The researchers found during the investigation, Chizhou Nuo villages still circulate about the desecration of masks and suffered the wrath of God’s legend.

Villagers in Dangli Yao said that during the “Cultural Revolution”, a 22-year-old man burned the Nuo Opera masks in the village, and as a result, the man died at a young age, suffering from a strange disease, and died in great pain, wailing for several days and nights, and finally vomiting blood and died (2023, interview). In the villagers’ perceptions, there is an inevitable causal relationship between the man’s unnatural death and the destruction of the mask. 2)

The taboo of honoring the gods. Etiquette cannot be sloppy or show slight disrespect when it comes to the worship of other gods. Actors wear masks during Nuo Opera performances as a sign of homage to Nuo God. They reverence the mask before wearing it. Nuo Opera performance is also regarded as “descending gods”. So in the performance, each of the main roles are believers burning incense, burning paper, firecrackers. If the Jade Emperor, Goddess of Mercy, Guan Gong, Bao Zheng and other prominent figures for the first time, the firecrackers more enthusiastic.

Third, gender taboos. In Nuo Opera activities, there are many restrictions on women. Performers are all men, women are not allowed to participate and female roles in the opera must also be played by men. In addition to performers, others are not allowed to touch the mask, especially women. To prevent women from touching the masks, women are not allowed to get too close to the performers. Women during their physiological period are also prohibited from participating in the rituals. During the fieldwork, locals going by the surname Cao revealed that, historically, women were prohibited from entering the backstage area to handle the masks and mask boxes, as well as from crossing the center of the temple to attend Nuo Opera. If they didn't, the gods would condemn them and summon all terrible luck (2023, interview). Women are not permitted to touch the masks, according to villager Liu. A girl from the community once touched the “child mask” out of curiosity and remarked, “It looks good”. Coincidentally, the girl was in her menstrual period. The “child” was furious and berated her for being dirty. She said some horrible things that evening, got a high fever, and passed just a few days later (2023, interview).

It can be seen that gender taboos reinforce the sense of “female impurity”. In feudal society, women were regarded as the source of all evil, a symbol of corruption and evil (He, 2012). Therefore, all the big clans had strict clan rules. And these clan rules are recorded in the genealogy and required to be followed by future generations. In recent years, although the taboos have become less strict and the clans no longer interfere with whether or not women can honor tributes. However, women are still not allowed to participate in repertoire performances due to the constraints of traditional attitudes. Gender norms dictate that men are assigned a specific role in ceremonial events because they are seen as superior to women in traditional societies. The traditional society as a whole, in turn, grants institutional and spiritual legitimacy to this unique task.

Fourth, the taboos of time and space. 1) Sacred time taboo. Chizhou Nuo Opera activities are fixed between the seventh and fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar calendar. Performances of Nuo Opera must take place during this specified time and cannot be rescheduled. Otherwise, unlucky things will happen or life-threatening. Such as the villagers surname Cao said, Gaoxi Cao village traditional Nuo Opera activities days is the first month of the thirteenth to the first month of the fifteenth. Due to take care of people working outside, once changed the date held earlier. But in the event, the person responsible for the discharge of firecrackers to his face to blow up, facial disfigurement. Since

then, no one has dared to talk about the date change (2023, interview). 2) Sacred space taboo. Village is the geophysical space field of Chizhou Nuo Opera performance. The ancestral halls, sacrificial altar, Qingshan Temple are the specific space “to present the scene”, in a closed special physical space to complete the ritual activities. People through the Nuo Opera ceremony, praying for the gifts of the gods, the purpose is to improve their own living conditions. The ritual in strict accordance with certain procedures in the sacred space, No matter whether it is Nuo Opera organizers or participants, onlookers, cannot violate this sacred space. Nuo Opera performance of specific venues such as ancestral halls, before the ritual activities to clean up, to avoid blasphemy against the gods and their ancestors. In the fieldwork, the researchers found that before the ceremony, the ancestral hall was cleaned up, divided into specific functional areas, the activities required by the objects placed in an orderly manner. During the “Asking for God” ritual, specialized staff sprayed the space with white vinegar and used incense to remove filth. In this specific space, gods are everywhere, and whether participants or spectators, the religious experience is undoubtedly strong.

This study found that the taboos are diverse in Chizhou Nuo Opera rituals, including language taboos, behavioral taboos, gender taboos and time and Space taboos. In terms of language, it is forbidden to speak after putting on the mask; in terms of behavior, it is forbidden to make disrespectful actions to the Nuo gods; in terms of gender, women are forbidden to dance Nuo, etc.; in terms of time, the ritual must be held within the specified time, etc. From the setting of various taboos, all of them are taboos against various gods, reflecting the presence” of gods everywhere. These taboos strengthen the Nuo Opera ceremony sacred attributes.

At the same time, the research found that these taboos are related to Nuo masks. It is precisely because the villagers call Nuo masks “Nuo gods” and “Bodhisattva” that they have “sacred anxiety”, showing a “Nuo God” reverence. As a kind of emotional interweaving, it weaves together fear, confidence, anxiety, and expectation. As a ritual attitude, “reverence” has become the main factor in the ritual composition and has evolved into a series of prohibitions and dogmas, becoming a part of the ritual behavior.

Taboos and Cultural Literacy Education

This study analyzed the cultural literacy educational value of taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera rituals through literature and data tools. Taboos are part of human culture, with characteristics such as relative stability and continuity. In the long historical process, Chizhou Nuo Opera has formed taboos with its own cultural characteristics, playing an educational role in cultural literacy. From the point of view of Nuo Opera itself, the setting of taboos lies in maintaining the sanctity of the ritual. From the point of view of cultural literacy education, taboo setting is to regulate human social behavior. Various taboos as a cultural phenomenon that exists in the ritual performance, and the members of the ceremony must comply with the provisions of this culture. Violation of the taboos will offend the gods and incur punishment.

Therefore, this study believes that the taboo norms in the Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances are consistent with the cultural literacy education in the context of modern social education, reflecting the basic requirements of modern social management education for cultural literacy. It plays a diversified educational function in cultural literacy, which is mainly reflected in the following aspects.

First, etiquette cultural literacy education. Etiquette is an important symbol of the progress of civilization in human society. As a culture gradually formed and accumulated in the historical development of mankind, etiquette has always restrained and regulated people's behaviors in different periods and fields. In improving human literacy promote social harmony, civilization and prosperity play an important role. The taboos on worship etiquette and people's behavior in the Chizhou Nuo Opera ceremony include not being disrespectful to the gods and not damaging the Nuo masks, etc. Its educational value lies in cultivating people's self-discipline will and ability. In social life, should always pay attention to their own words and behavior, pay attention to the cultivation and enhancement of cultural cultivation. Respect for elders, respect for the elderly, respect for others, and establish harmonious interpersonal relationships. These are the most basic social ethical and moral norms, as well as the basic etiquette and cultural literacy for dealing with people.

Second, shame cultural literacy education. Shame is an important educational idea of Chinese pre-Qin Confucianism. It emphasizes the sense of honor and shame in social life and advocates the spirit of collectivism and the concept of group. To protect the interests of the group as honor, to selfishness as shame (Jing, 2023). Chizhou Nuo Opera performance is a collective activity of the village, only each participating subject jointly abide by the taboos to ensure the smooth progress of the ceremony. Therefore, the various taboos in the ceremony focus on educating the public in their daily lives to enhance their personal cultural and moral cultivation, promote the spirit of collectivism, safeguard the interests of the group, and shape a self-disciplined personality with "shame in one's conduct". Speak civilized words, do civilized things. Strictly restrain oneself with a sense of shame, thus forming a noble moral character and realizing a higher level of ideal moral realm.

Third, professional cultural literacy education. For example, during the ceremony, the actor playing the role of the "land god" is required to speak fluently when answering questions. The purpose of this is to require actors to be familiar with the script and to have good acting skills. The educational value embodied lies in educating the public to have a solid professional foundation, vocational skills in their work. By practicing diligently in practice, one can enhance one's professional ability and level. Meanwhile, the taboo on time and space reflects the requirement of education on the literacy of time and space concepts. In order to complete the task on time, one must be able to use time and space cognitively strong. Utilizing time and space in a scientific and effective manner to plan ahead, make decisions, and finish tasks on schedule, establish noble professional ethics and professional literacy.

Fourth, health cultural literacy education. The taboo on "uncleanliness" of the body and place in the ceremony is consistent with the requirements of modern public health. To a certain extent, it restricts people's bad behavior. Maintaining public health, encouraging people to adopt healthy behaviors, and raising public health awareness all benefit society. It can be seen that the educational function of taboos in rituals has the same important value as the requirements of school education and social education.

Fifth, Knowledge cultural literacy education. The taboos in the Chizhou Nuo Opera rituals are a cultural concept formed by local villagers in the history and folk beliefs and habits. Regardless of the content or form of the taboos, they contain rich historical, artistic and local cultural knowledge. In the ritual performance, we can learn these taboo cultural knowledge and customs, accumulate humanities knowledge, and then form a correct understanding of this traditional folk culture, discover the charm of traditional culture, understand, tolerate and respect this culture, establish more sufficient cultural confidence, and improve cultural literacy.

Sixth, civilization cultural literacy education. Taboos are a normative means, a negative behavioral norms. In the performance of Chizhou Nuo Opera, taboos run through the whole process and become a part of the ceremony. Taboos are defined as dangerous and forbidden behaviors, and the existence of taboos are also a kind of self-restraint, people know the consequences of violating taboos, so they will stay away from taboos and avoid contact with them. Therefore, in a sense, educating the people to establish good civilized literacy. The pious villagers always keep strict taboos. They are self-disciplined and self-loving, lest they offend the gods. For example, they stop talking after putting on a mask, in order to protect themselves and the villagers from saying unlucky words and being punished for violating the taboo. The villagers are convinced of this causal relationship in the examples cited above of punishment for destroying and desecrating masks. It is precisely because of this religious belief that taboos play a protective role, creating spiritual and psychological warnings to villagers and constraining their social behavior. Although some taboos do not have consequences when they are violated, they do not take a chance on violating them, and therefore, taboos become a norm that every citizen consciously observes.

At the same time, Ernst Cassirer believes that: "The system of taboos is the only system of social constraints and obligations that man has yet discovered. It is the cornerstone of the entire social order" (Cassirer, 1985, p. 138). Taboos play an important role in the formation and maintenance of the psychological quality and identity of a clan or even a nation in general (Zhao, 2005, pp. 55-58). For example, Nuo Opera ceremony is prohibited to say unlucky and do not respect the words of the gods. This prohibition is conducive to the order between man and man, man and society to be maintained, playing a united and civilized social integration effect. Taboos in the ceremony are like "laws" regulating people's speech and behavior. These taboos inculcate a code of conduct in line with the aesthetic concepts of the social group, educating the public self-restraint, so as not to be

punished. Therefore, Chizhou Nuo Opera ceremony in the taboo can maintain the social order of the village, standardize the villagers' daily life, but also to improve people's civilized literacy. At the same time, it as a specific social group within the members of the mutual identity of the significant signs, played other cultural styles difficult to replace the role.

In summary, the taboos set in the Chizhou Nuo opera rituals have built a complete set of norms and behavioral codes for local residents. These codes have been collectively recognized by the village and have become an external force that transcends individual behavior. They have been internalized into their psychological social norms and become the standard for judging people's behavior. They play a subtle role in educating people in cultural literacy, and are of great significance for people to form a good social atmosphere, improve cultural cultivation, and accelerate the socialization process of individuals.

DISCUSSION

There are currently only two studies on the topic of taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera, namely *Taboo: Symbolic Representation of Sacred Attributes - A Study of the Taboo Phenomenon in the Ceremonial Music and Dance of Nuo Ceremony in Dangli Yao, Guichi, Anhui Province* (Meng, 2008) and *Veneration and Prohibition - A Study of Taboo Phenomena in the Jumping of Nuo by the Clan in Guichi, Anhui Province* (He, 2012). The research content of this paper supplements this topic.

First, the research results discovered the taboo content and forms of expression in the Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances. The study found that in the ceremonial process of Asking for god, Entertaining god, and seeing the god off, there are many taboos containing language, behavior, gender, and time and space. These taboos are connected to Nuo masks, which are clearly associated with beliefs in god worship and ancestor worship. Taboos control language and conduct while preserving the hallowed and antiquated quality of ceremonies. This perspective supports the views of Meng (2008) and He (2012). Simultaneously, it validates Jin's (2002) characterization of the fundamental attributes and purposes of taboos: taboos are behavioral rules that limit people's actions and speech, and religious taboos stem from religious convictions.

Secondly, the research results reveal the diversified functions of taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera in cultural literacy education. This is a new discovery in the research content of this article and also a striking case study. Undoubtedly, the taboos in the Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances have a positive role in cultural literacy education, but there are also some negative factors in the rituals. These negative factors affect the social life of the local people, bind their thinking and social change, and also hinder the function of taboo cultural literacy education. This study believes that these negative factors are mainly:

1. The taboos in the ritual reflect discrimination and disrespect for women. Women are seen as filthy, especially while they are menstruating, and they are not allowed to handle the props or take part in Nuo Opera

performances. These ideological notions nonetheless function negatively even if they are a part of our civilized society. This taboo to a large extent so that women, especially women during physiological period suffered serious physical and psychological harm.

2. The taboos in the ritual intensify people's inner fear, aggravating people's mental burden. For villagers living in a village with a strong taboo atmosphere, the sacredness and mystery of the taboos affect their psychological activities at any time. In the long run, it will hinder their innovation and creativity and restrict the development of Nuo Opera and village society.

This study concludes that the taboos and symbolic meanings in the Nuo Opera rituals are artificially set and given. In modern civilized society, when people's beliefs have changed to give new meaning to the taboo symbols, taboos can also be lifted. The lifting of taboos needs to consult with the people's society and the national community. On the one hand, focus on cultural literacy education. Society, government, schools, and relevant cultural sectors should adopt specific education and training programs. Examples include different levels of schooling, intangible cultural heritage education, and the promotion of scientific knowledge. Improve the educational and cultural level and scientific literacy of local people in formal and non-formal education. Strengthen the scientific knowledge of taboo culture and establishment. On the other hand, taboo transformation. To accomplish the sustainable growth of Nuo culture, eradicate the bad causes brought about by the negative influence, promote traditional cultural innovation, and achieve sustainable development of traditional folk culture. But as we modernize, we have to be cautious about how the shift in taboo culture is handled. Breaking taboos needs a certain ideological and belief foundation; the evolution of taboo mechanisms and measures should be further investigated.

CONCLUSION

This study is the first to explore the relationship between taboos and cultural literacy education. The results show the importance of taboos in Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performances in cultural literacy education.

The research methods employed in this study, including observation and interviews, allowed for an in-depth exploration of the taboo content and cultural literacy education function in the Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performance. The observation method provided firsthand information, while the interviews with key informants enriched the understanding of taboo content and the value of cultural literacy education. The qualitative data analysis enabled a comprehensive examination of the research questions.

The research results showed that Chizhou Nuo Opera ritual performance in the taboo is formed in the long-term historical precipitation of a habit and spiritual power. It is a village people individual and even the whole group of faith and cultural identity. Such cultural traditional ideas are passed down through the clan society from generation to generation, restricting people's ways of thinking and acting, as well as the village's social operations.

The study further showed that taboos preserve the cultural identity of Chizhou Nuo Opera, and taboos are an important tool to promote cultural literacy. Taboos play a positive role in cultural literacy education such as etiquette, shame, occupation, health, knowledge, and civilization.

In summary, this study achieved its research objectives through multi-dimensional exploration that included an analysis of ritual processes, taboo content, and literacy education significance. The significance of the study goes beyond academic discussions. It resonates with broader societal needs for education and literacy education. Understanding the role of taboos in cultural literacy education can enrich academic discussions and provide practical insights for policy makers, educators, cultural advocates, and Nuo Opera inheritors. The findings are expected to bridge the gap between traditional culture and modern education. Moving forward, the positive role of traditional folk culture in cultural literacy education should be fully utilized and integrated into the school curriculum education and the broader scope of social management education to achieve the purpose of educational inheritance and sustainability.

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