

The Movement System of Zhanjiang “KaoBing” Nuo Dance and its Adaptation on Contemporary Stage Performance

Xie Zhiyu, *Leng Poh Gee

Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia

Email: xiezhiyu199102@163.com

Corresponding Author Email: lengpohgee@fmsp.upsi.edu.my

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i3/26154>

Published Online: 20 August 2025

Abstract

This study examines the movement system of Zhanjiang “KaoBing” Nuo dance, a ritual dance rich in symbolic hand gestures, arm movements, steps and floor patterns that rooted in local spiritual beliefs. Using ethnographic methods, it documents the dance’s traditional structure and explores its creative adaptation for contemporary stage performance. This study aims to analyze the movement process and symbolic meaning behind the “KaoBing” Nuo dance in Zhanjiang, exploring how each gesture and sequence contributes to the ritual’s overall purpose. In addition, it examines how the aesthetic qualities of the dance movements have changed over time, reflecting shifts in cultural values, performance contexts, and artistic expression. The research highlights how essential ritual elements can be artistically transformed while preserving cultural integrity, offering new possibilities for revitalizing intangible heritage in modern contexts.

Keywords: Zhanjiang, Nuo Dance, KaoBing, movement Analysis, Ritual

Introduction

“Nuo”, also known as “ghost opera”, is one of the oldest Han Chinese rituals, featuring performances that involve deity impersonation and ghost expulsion. These performances are intended to drive away evil, ensure peace, and entertain the gods. In Nuo dance, performers wear costumes, carry weapon-like props, and put on sacred masks that symbolize spiritual possession. There is a folk saying: “Without the mask, you are human; with the mask, you are a god”. Nuo dance is the dance part of a Nuo ritual, which also involve various sacrificial ceremonies. Nuo dance that consists of rhythmic movements of arms, hands and feet is always the main highlight of the entire ceremony. Both the rituals and the dance work together to drive away plagues and evil spirits.

Guangdong is one of the regions in China where Nuo dance culture has flourished. The Guangdong Nuo dance includes traditions from cities such as Yangjiang, Maoming, and Zhanjiang, with Zhanjiang being one of the largest repositories of Nuo dance culture in the province. Zhanjiang Nuo dance is a traditional performance that originated as a ritual to

worship the Thunder God, dispel disasters, and pray for peace and divine protection. However, much of Zhanjiang's Nuo dance culture was introduced from Jiangxi and later preserved locally. Despite this shared origin, the form and style of Zhanjiang Nuo dance differ significantly from those in Jiangxi. Historical records suggest that during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), some officials from Jiangxi were relocated to govern the Zhanjiang region, bringing with them Nuo dance traditions. Over time, these traditions took root and evolved within Zhanjiang's unique cultural landscape.

Zhanjiang Nuo dance is practiced across various county-level regions, including Leizhou, Wuchuan, Potou, and Mazhang. The Nuo dance contains a variety of dance forms such as "Zou Qing Jiang" (走清将), "Wu Liu Jiang" (舞六将), "Wu Er Zhen" (舞二真), and "KaoBing" (考兵). While these dance forms differ in style and artistic elements, they share the same historical roots, cultural beliefs, and ritual procedures. Zhanjiang Nuo dance is distinguished by its rich cultural history, complex sacrificial rituals, unique performance styles, and artistic elements, all of which hold profound cultural significance. In 2008, Zhanjiang Nuo dance was inscribed in the second batch of China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage List (China Intangible Cultural Heritage Network, 2008). This study explores the historical background, ritual structure, and performance forms of Zhanjiang's "KaoBing" Nuo dance through in-depth analysis. The "KaoBing" Nuo dance originates from Jiuxian Village in Huguang Town, Mazhang District, Zhanjiang City, a village with centuries of cultural history. Jiuxian Village still preserves traces of ancient architecture and is rich in legends of heroic deeds dating back to the Warring States period (c. 475 – 221 BC).

This dance is particularly unique due to its rich historical significance and precise ritualistic elements, making it a focal point of research within the region's Nuo dance culture. Jiuxian Village's "KaoBing" Nuo dance is renowned for its solemnity, simplicity, and profound cultural symbolism. Unlike certain forms of Nuo dance that have transformed into broader entertainment activities, the "KaoBing" dance retains its essence as a ritual performance, remaining deeply intertwined with the spiritual life of the community.

The dance is performed annually on the 15th day of the first lunar month and the 25th day of the third lunar month, led by the Ritual Master, and cultural Inheritors. The first two days focus on activities involving the entire community, including processions through the village streets. These processions are not merely festive events but are considered essential rituals designed to cleanse the village of unkind forces and prepare for the main sacrificial activities. On the third day, the focus shifts to more solemn ceremonies held in the village temple. These include opening the altar, offering sacrifices to the gods, and performing symbolic rituals such as spreading grains, Nuo dance performances, and turning over a thorn bed. Each action carries profound meaning, symbolizing the community's collective prayers for protection, prosperity, and the elimination of illness and misfortune.

"KaoBing" Nuo dance event starts with a series of traditional rituals. A Taoist priest sets up an altar in front of the temple and makes offerings like candles, incense, paper money (burned for the spirits), and food to the gods. Then the ceremony moves on to a few important steps, such as giving out symbolic orders, showing protective talismans, and gathering everyone involved, including the flag bearers, parade team, drummers, and the Nuo dancers. Things kick off with a formal drill, almost like a small military performance, followed by

worship at the altar. After that, the group goes from house to house in a procession, meant to chase away bad spirits and bring peace and safety to the village.

Problem Statement

The “KaoBing” Nuo dance in Zhanjiang is a unique form of Chinese folk dance that embodies rich historical and cultural significance. Its movements carry profound ritual symbolism and represent specific ceremonial activities. However, through comparative research and literature review, it has been found that academic studies focusing on the movements of “KaoBing” Nuo dance are rare, and there is a lack of detailed documentation of its complete movement system. Existing research primarily emphasizes its historical and cultural aspects, while in-depth analysis of movement structures, vocabulary, and symbolic meanings remains insufficient.

Moreover, the transmission of “KaoBing” Nuo dance movements mainly relies on oral instruction, lacking systematic written or video documentation. Variations among different inheritors may lead to inconsistencies in movement execution, affecting the dance’s overall integrity and standardization.

This study aims to methodically document and analyze the movement system of “KaoBing” Nuo dance, through fieldwork, participant observation, video recording, and movement analysis. Additionally, it will explore the characteristics and symbolic meanings of the dance movements while examining the dance’s role and impact within the community. Ultimately, the research seeks to contribute to the preservation and sustainable development of this valuable intangible cultural heritage in contemporary society.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to analyze the movement process and symbolic meaning behind the “KaoBing” Nuo dance in Zhanjiang, exploring how each gesture and sequence contributes to the ritual’s overall purpose. In addition, it examines how the aesthetic qualities of the dance movements have changed over time, reflecting shifts in cultural values, performance contexts, and artistic expression.

Methodology

This study will use ethnographic qualitative research methods to explore the movement system of the Jiuxian Village “KaoBing” Nuo Dance. The study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the body expression, ritual meaning, and performance structure of the dance through field research. Data collection will be conducted using participant observation, interviews, informal conversations, and other qualitative methods, focusing on recording and analyzing dance movements.

Participant Observation

The researcher obtained permission from the local government to conduct field observations in Jiuxian Village, focusing on the movements in the “KaoBing” Nuo dance rituals and rehearsals. The researcher observed and participated in various rituals and rehearsals, conducted movement analysis, reviewed comparative literature, and visited cultural artifact sites. Throughout the process, the researcher documented gestures, postures, transitions, and steps performed in both ritual and non-ritual settings. Attendance at dance rehearsals

and practice sessions allowed for firsthand experience of movement techniques. Particular attention was given to the significance of each movement within the overall ritual performance. The researcher also analyzed variations in movement across different inheritors and age groups to understand patterns of transmission and possible adaptations. Additionally, masks, costumes, and ritual objects were recorded to assess their influence on movement execution and performance dynamics.

Interviews

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with experts, inheritors, performers and local viewers of the “KaoBing” Nuo dance to investigate the transmission, meaning, and challenges associated with its movements. These interviews provided insights into how the dance movements were traditionally passed down through generations, the symbolic meanings embedded within the choreography, and the physical and technical challenges performers faced when executing traditional movements.

Data Analysis

The researcher will analyze data from multiple sources, including:

1. Movement decomposition: categorizing steps, gestures, and transitions to identify repetitive patterns.
2. Symbolic interpretation: examining the relationship between movement and ritual meaning.
3. Comparative analysis: evaluating movement variation across performers, generations, and contexts.

Results and Discussion

Zheng’s Poetry Book highlights that ancient shamans considered singing and dancing their primary means of worshipping gods and entertaining people (Zhou, 2008, p.59). Over time, sacrificial dance has evolved from its origins in divine worship to becoming a form of entertainment for people. This evolution signifies that dance performances now hold a crucial role in sacrificial rites. For sacrificial dance to be effective, it must possess a certain artistic charm to both captivate the gods and engage the audience. The artistic charm rely to the movement, and the movement of Nuo dance can be analyzed through three key aspects: *hand gestures, arm movements, and steps*.

Hand Gestures

During a Nuo dance performance, the researcher observed that the dancer’s left hand consistently maintained a specific gesture: the thumb clasps the middle and ring fingers, while the index and little fingers remain extended. In Zhanjiang Nuo dance, this gesture is referred to as *Xiang Huo Jue* 香火诀 (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 *Xiang Huo Jue* 香火诀

In the “KaoBing” Nuo dance, the *Xiang Huo Jue* gesture retains its original purpose of exorcising ghosts and diseases, reflecting the shamanic tradition of invoking divine aid to drive away evil spirits and suppress malevolent forces. This religious gesture involves pinching the middle and ring fingers against the thumb while raising and pushing forward the index and little fingers, symbolizing a command from the gods to expel evil.

Accompanied by shouting and dancing, the gesture conveys an overwhelming force and primal energy, embodying the essence of ancient witchcraft and a vibrant, life-affirming presence. Throughout the “KaoBing” Nuo dance performance, the *Xiang Huo Jue* serves as a powerful fusion of Nuo dance and shamanistic practice, blending religious symbolism with artistic expression.

Arms Movement

There are many arms movement in “KaoBing” Nuo dance carries profound symbolic and expressive significance, serving as a vital medium for conveying ritualistic meaning and emotional intensity. The fieldwork has discovered a few arms motif movement as below: -

“Turn wrist”: Left hand forms the *Xiang Huo Jue* gesture, turning the wrist so that the palm and then the back of the hand push forward. This gesture is repeated throughout the Nuo dance performance.

“Slash Arm”: The right hand holds a weapon and slashes forward vigorously. This action symbolizes slaying demons and eliminating malevolent spirits.

“Raise hands high”: The left hand forms the *Xiang Huo Jue* gesture, while the right hand holds a weapon; both hands are raised above the head. This movement conveys summoning divine power and asserting spiritual authority.

“Pose”: The left hand forms the *Xiang Huo Jue* gesture, the right hand raises the weapon high, and the left foot is lifted. This strong, static pose is performed facing the audience, expressing triumph and spiritual strength.

C. Steps

Steps movement in Nuo dance forms the foundation of its ritualistic expression, embodying both physical strength and spiritual intention. These movements reflect deep cultural beliefs and are carefully synchronized with arm gestures and body postures to create a powerful visual and spiritual impact. By examining the diverse stepping techniques and their symbolic

meanings, we gain deeper insight into how Nuo dance communicates protection, purification, and communal harmony.

“Stepping”: With knees bent in horse stance, alternate stepping on each foot, half a beat per movement. This step creates a grounded and powerful base.

“Step forward to expel evil spirits”: The left foot steps forward and returns, followed by the right foot stepping forward one step. Each movement takes one beat, symbolizing advancing to banish evil.

“Squat step”: Feet are placed close together, squat deeply while facing forward. Each squat is performed to one beat, emphasizing heaviness and stability.

“Step back”: The body faces forward while stepping backward quickly, indicating retreat or repositioning to maintain spiritual defence.

“Click step”: The forefoot clicks the ground alternately, with both feet, while facing forward. This sharp, percussive step punctuates the rhythm and builds ritual tension.

“Squat and bounce step”: Knees are bent in horse stance, bouncing rhythmically. Each squat follows a heavy beat, conveying resilience and readiness.

“Jump step”: The left foot steps forward and jumps upward, while the right foot lifts and the body spins in a circle. This dynamic movement showcases agility and symbolizes transformation or spiritual transcendence.

The actions in Nuo dance show the community’s shared wish to drive away evil and live in peace. This main idea of fighting against bad forces is a big part of their beliefs and reflects their strong and unbreakable spirit. It shows how determined and tough the community is when facing problems. The “KaoBing” Nuo dance is not just a cultural performance; it also helps bring people together. The characters in the dance, like the Five Great Generals and the Earth God, represent strong faith and bravery during hard times. Whether they play generals, gods, or exorcists, these figures stand for strong will and courage in overcoming challenges. Overall, it shows how people keep going even when life is tough and their continuous effort to live in harmony with nature so they can survive and carry on.

Performance Structure

The researcher analyzed the structure of the entire “KaoBing” Nuo dance performance by examining the steps, hand movements, and formation integration. The performance is the highlight of the rituals. Before explaining the performance structure, it is important to first describe the indicators used in the floor plan, as the structure relies heavily on floor patterns and spatial arrangements.

Symbol indication

-  General Hong
-  General Mai
-  General Liu
-  General Che
-  General Li
-  Tudi Gong
-  Tudi Po

There are five sections during the performance structure that carries significant meaning.

First Section: "Sending Troops"

In this section, the five generals (General Hong, General Mai, General Liu, General Che and General Li) with the accompaniment of Tudi Gong and Tudi Po (the two elderly deity figures who revered as guardians of the region, and believed to protect the land and ensure the well-being of the local community) prepare for battle, primarily performing movements such as "Stepping" and "Slash Arm". The rhythm of the music lasts for approximately 48 beats, or 30 seconds. The generals line up in a row from the left side of the performance area, advancing toward the center of the stage and positioning themselves facing the back. They raise their weapons and perform the Xiang Huo Jue gesture, radiating confidence and readiness. This section conveys the message that the generals are prepared to combat demons and exorcise evil spirits. Their imposing presence serves to intimidate the demons while acting as a spiritual beacon for the audience (Figure 1.2).

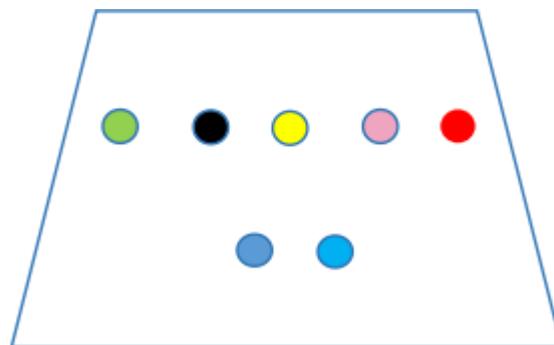


Figure 1.2 The floor pattern of Sending Troop

The Second Section: "Divine Protection Formation"

In this segment, TuDi Gong and TuDi Po make their appearance, performing movements such as "Stepping" and the Xiang Huo Jue gesture. The music rhythm lasts for approximately 48 beats, or 30 seconds. TuDi Gong and TuDi Po assume a posture reminiscent of elderly figures, with slight hunchbacks, using crutches to support their unsteady steps as they slowly move to the front of the stage. They then transition from the front to the back of the performance area (Figure 1.3).

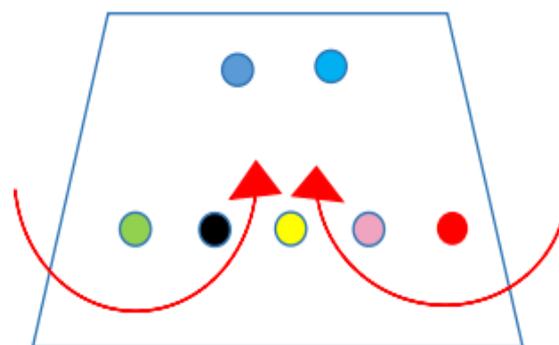


Figure 1.3 Divine Protection Formation

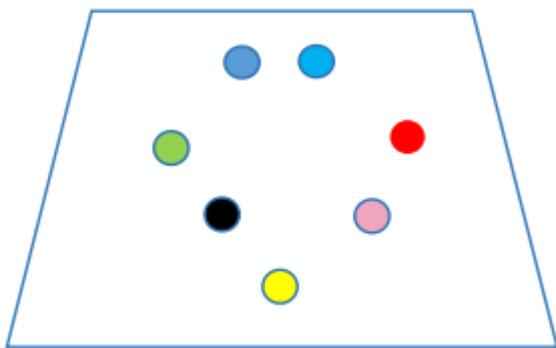
This formation highlights that while the five generals are actively exorcising evil spirits, TuDi Gong and TuDi Po stand guard at the rear. In folk belief, TuDi Gong and TuDi Po play a crucial role. Worship of these deities is widespread in southern China, where they are believed to safeguard the health, safety, and happiness of local residents. During the performance, the presence of TuDi Gong and TuDi Po is akin to having protective "Talismans", instilling a sense

of security, confidence, and courage in the five generals. Their role helps in repelling demons and driving away evil, enhancing the overall protective aura of the performance.

The Third Section: "Slaying Demons and Exorcising Evil Spirits"

In this section, the performance focuses on "Slaying Demons and Exorcising Evil Spirits", incorporating movements such as "Turn Wrist", "Slash Arm", and "Stepping Forward to Expel Evil Spirits". The music rhythm for this part lasts approximately 48 beats, or 30 seconds.

The five generals advance from the back of the stage to engage in the exorcism. Initially, they form a "V" shape, with General Li prominently raising his flag to signify the beginning of the exorcism. The other four generals follow suit, using their weapons to symbolically combat demons and monsters. Subsequently, the formation transitions from the "V" shape (Figures 1.4) to a "Five Directions" arrangement (East, South, West, North, and Middle) (Figures 1.5). During this segment, the performance visually represents the act of slaying demons and exorcising evil through the dynamic changes in movements and formations. The shifting formations and vigorous actions of the generals underscore their role in driving away malevolent forces, enhancing the ritual's dramatic and symbolic impact.



Figures 1.4 "V" shape in the Third Section

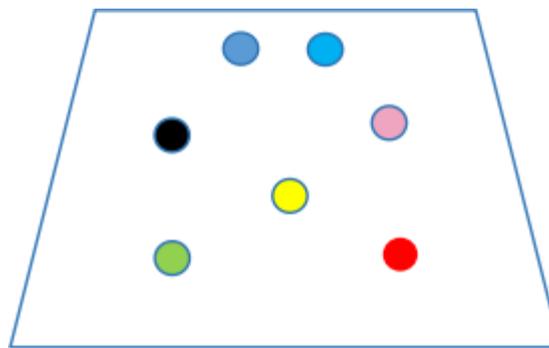
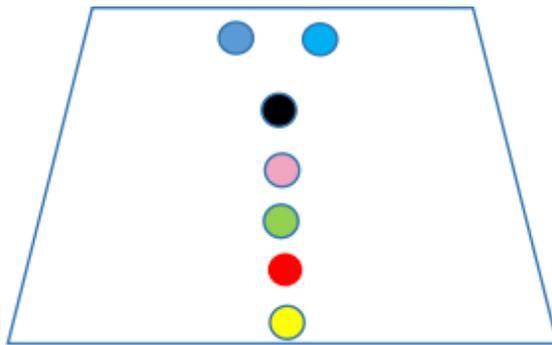


Figure 1.5 Five directions formation

The Fourth Section: "Summoning the Heavenly Soldiers"

In this section, titled "Summoning the Heavenly Soldiers", the performance features movements such as "Click Step", "Slash Arm", "Squat and Bounce Step" and "Jump Step". The music rhythm for this part lasts approximately 112 beats, or 60 seconds.

The formation evolves from a "1" shape (Figures 1.6) to a "Five Direction" formation (Figures 1.7). Initially, the four generals encircle General Li, who is central to the summoning ritual, before returning to the five-square formation (Figures 1.8). The five generals then position themselves in a Five-Square arrangement (East, South, West, North, and Middle) to commence the summoning of heavenly soldiers and generals to subdue demons. They begin the exorcism by gathering and focusing their energies to drive away malevolent forces.



Figures 1.6 "1" Formation

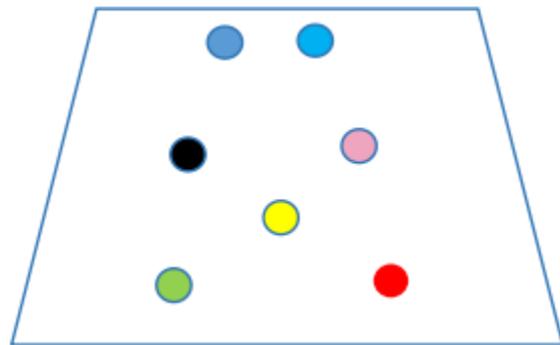


Figure 1.7 "Five directions" formation

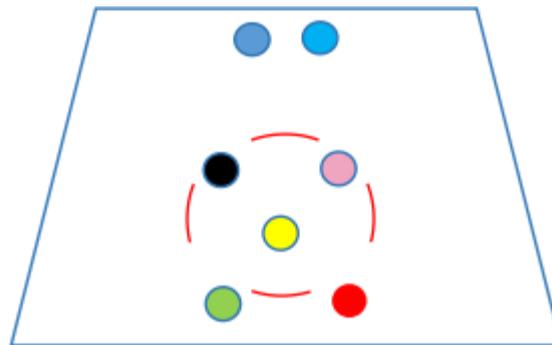


Figure 1.8 Summon heavenly soldiers

This section is the climax of the performance, showcasing the dynamic and intricate body skills and martial prowess of the five generals through various formation changes. The rich, evolving formations highlight the performers' abilities and intensify the dramatic effect of summoning and commanding celestial forces.

The Fifth Section: "Retracting the Troops"

In the final section, "Retracting the Troops" the focus shifts to the successful conclusion of the battle against the demons. The music rhythm spans approximately 136 beats, with the formation transitioning from the "Five directions" formation back to the "V" formation and then finally to the "1" formation within 90 seconds. Then they will move away from the performance space (Figure 1.9). This section represents the victorious outcome of the battle, demonstrating that the demons have been subdued and the community has been safeguarded.

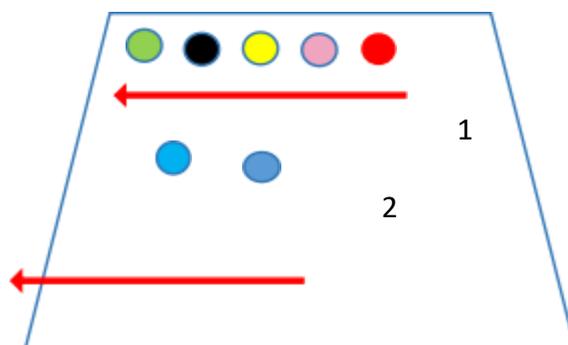


Figure 1.9 "Retracting the Troops"

Changes in the Aesthetic Image of “KaoBing” Nuo Dance Movement

Relating the development of Zhanjiang Nuo dance from the perspective of modern stage performance, there are not many renowned classic works are created inspired by Zhanjiang Nuo dance, and one of the refine performance is “Nuo Feng”. The dance “Nuo Feng 雩风” is a phrased outcome of the 2011 Ministry of Education Humanities and Social Sciences General Project Planning Fund Project, titled “Research on the Developmental Protection of Music and Dance Culture in the Leizhou Peninsula”. The work “Nuo Feng 雩风” won the silver medal in the 3rd Guangdong Lingnan Dance Competition in December 2012. It is an original work co-directed by Pang Dexuan, director of the Zhanjiang Group Art Center, and choreographed by Zhu Peike and Wu Baoping from the Conservatory of Zhanjiang Lingnan Normal University. The work “Nuo Feng 雩风” is based on Leizhou Nuo dance and is a perfect combination of local literature and art and the spirit of the times. They integrated their many years of folklore collection into dance, combined the fieldwork research results on Leizhou music and dance culture with teaching practice, and showed the various customs of Leizhou culture. The dance creation not only retains the virility, rebelliousness and spirituality of Leizhou Nuo dance, but also reflects strong and fresh fashion elements in costume design, mask making, weapon, etc., enhancing the artistry and appreciation of Nuo dance and enhancing the stage Expressiveness and appeal expand the creative space of Leizhou culture.

Zhu (2013) stated that the dance work “Nuo Feng” originates from the Nuo dance, which is rooted in ancient religious beliefs. Through the efforts of artists, it effectively distills the essence of Nuo dance and skillfully utilizes body movements to convey the indomitable spirit of the ancestors. The key is not to simply replicate the original form of Nuo dance but to highlight its most distinctive characteristics and most refined expressions of power through its classic movements and steps. This approach aims to realize the modern and contemporary value of Nuo dance.

In the ritual performance, the movements and formations of “KaoBing” are relatively pure and simple, consisting of fundamental steps, hand gestures, arms movement and formations, which are then synchronized with a basic 4/4 beat percussion to complete the Nuo dance performance. This simplicity stands in sharp contrast to the stage production “Nuo Feng”. By analyzing and appreciating “Nuo Feng”, the researcher reflects on and examines the evolution of Zhanjiang Nuo dance in stage art from an aesthetic perspective, using “Nuo Feng” as a representative example.

The entire dance work is divided into four segments: (1) The Mysterious Nuo Dance Ceremony. (2) Expelling Ghosts and Gods to Ensure Peace. (3) Kneeling to Worship Heaven and Earth, Inviting the Gods to Appear. (4) The “Push Step” Symbolizing the Struggle for Strength.

In the first segment, the dance begins with a scene depicting Nuo dance believers worshiping the gods. Six male actors and three female actors form the “three sticks of incense” pose, while the remaining performers execute kneeling movements. This scene artistically reenacts a sacrificial ritual on stage, creating a mysterious and solemn atmosphere that delivers a powerful visual impact to the audience. Notably, the dance incorporates the classic *Xiang*

Huo Jue gesture from “KaoBing” Nuo dance, along with fundamental movement as “Turn wrist”, “Slash Arm” and “Jump steps”.

In the “KaoBing” Nuo dance performance of Jiuxian Village, tradition dictates that performers make the *Xiang Huo Jue* gesture with their left hand while holding a weapon in their right hand to drive away evil. However, in the staged Nuo dance performance, both hands adopt the *Xiang Huo Jue* gesture. This simple hand movement evolves into expressive upper body movements and multi-directional performances, vividly portraying the three core ritualistic images of Nuo dance: kneel, worship, and pray. In the second segment, the male actors gather at the center of the stage, striking various “godly” poses, while the female actors stand behind them in two orderly rows, forming a “solid, unyielding barrier” like walls of copper and iron. This formation symbolizes the deep reverence of the villagers for the gods and highlights the supreme status of the deities in their hearts. The third and fourth segments mark the climax of the dance, vividly portraying scenes of devout believers kneeling in worship while a male actor leaps and spins at the center of the stage. The kneeling actors, embodying spirit possession, move in waves one after another, creating the impression of an endless crowd of worshipper praying for peace. This grand spectacle captivates the audience’s attention.

Following this, the exorcism steps of “Zou Qing Jiang 走清将” unfold, featuring quick half-crouching, hand-shaking, foot-hooking, arm-swinging, and exorcism straddling movements, all evoking the act of expelling evil and safeguarding the people’s well-being. At a pivotal moment, the actors form a three-slant formation, symbolizing a protective wall, which also takes on the majestic imagery of three mighty dragons.

At the peak of the performance, “push steps” combined with dynamic formation changes illustrate the believers gaining divine power. Finally, as the music reaches its most powerful note, the dance concludes with Nuo dance hand postures, sealing the ritual with a powerful and sacred gesture.

In traditional Zhanjiang Nuo dance performances, the costumes typically consist of long-sleeved tops and long trousers, while the masks are large and feature exaggerated expressions. However, in the stage adaptation of “Nuo Feng”, bold modifications have been made to both costumes and masks to enhance visual appeal. The “Nuo Feng” costumes are specifically designed to suit stage aesthetics. The right sleeve is long, while the left arm is sleeveless, creating a dynamic asymmetry that enhances movement expression. Additionally, all performers wear the same style of costume, eliminating role-based distinctions. Regarding masks, “Nuo Feng” incorporates elements of the Zuo Qing Jiang mask but prioritizes an aesthetic appearance over traditional feature. Instead of exaggerated grimaces, the masks are refined and stylized, with color differentiation used to distinguish characters. This transformation reflects a deliberate artistic choice aimed at aligning Nuo Feng’s visual elements with the modern audience’s aesthetic preferences. And then, the performers of “Nuo Feng” include both male and female dancers. This marks a significant departure from the traditional practice in Zhanjiang Nuo dance, where the art was historically passed down from male to male. In “Nuo Feng”, intricate formation changes play a crucial role in storytelling. The number of actors and their dynamic formations work together to depict grand ritualistic scenes found in traditional Nuo dance ceremonies. These include kneeling

worshippers, three rows forming giant dragons, spirit possession, and the spectacular climax where the entire cast erupts in unified celebration. Through these macro scenes, the performance not only preserves the essence of Nuo dance sacrifices but also adapts them to a modern stage aesthetic.

The researcher used "Nuo Feng" as a case study to analyze the differences between the traditional form of Zhanjiang Nuo dance and its stage adaptation. At the same time, the researcher recognized that stage art is an evolution of traditional art, rather than a mere replication. The stage adaptation extracts core elements from traditional Nuo dance and integrates modern artistic techniques. This transformation incorporates rich formation changes, professional dance techniques, and stage aesthetics, including lighting effects and scene construction. Additionally, the use of modern symphonic music synchronized with the dance plot enhances the performance, creating a captivating visual and auditory experience for the audience.

Nonetheless, the traditional Nuo dance performed in the community is more of a religious ceremony and has strong local advantages and cultural heritage. Stage Nuo dance is an innovative expression of its artistic form, and is more suitable for mass communication and dance art display. In reality, both have their value. Appropriate development and utilization can promote local folk culture, but excessive development and utilization can easily lead to its destruction (Zeng, 2015).

Conclusion

Grounded in the detailed ethnographic investigation and movement analysis of the "KaoBing" Nuo dance in Jiuxian Village, this research makes a dual contribution to theory and context. Theoretically, it fills a significant academic gap by offering the first comprehensive documentation of the dance's movement system, integrating hand gestures, arm movements, steps, and formation structures with their symbolic meanings. This approach not only advances the interdisciplinary dialogue between dance studies, ritual anthropology, and intangible cultural heritage research, but also establishes an analytical framework that can be applied to the study of other ritual dance traditions in China and beyond. Contextually, the study situates the "KaoBing" Nuo dance within its historical, religious, and communal environment, revealing how it functions as both a spiritual safeguard and a cohesive force that unites the community. By comparing the traditional ritual form with its contemporary stage adaptations, the research demonstrates how essential cultural elements can be artistically transformed without compromising authenticity. This insight provides a valuable reference for balancing preservation and innovation in intangible heritage, offering practical guidance for community-based safeguarding strategies in the face of modern societal changes.

Acknowledgments

As the final words are written for this thesis, a flood of gratitude fills my heart. Completing this academic journey would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and kindness of many individuals and communities, to whom I owe my deepest thanks. First and foremost, I wish to express my sincere and profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Leng Poh Gee. From the initial conception of this research to its final revision, Dr. Leng has been a constant source of inspiration and guidance. His rigorous academic attitude, insightful

suggestions, and unwavering patience have shaped every stage of this work. Whenever I encountered obstacles in theoretical analysis or fieldwork design, his meticulous feedback and strategic advice helped me navigate through confusion. Beyond academic guidance, he also taught me the importance of perseverance and critical thinking, lessons that will stay with me throughout my career.

I am deeply grateful to Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Malaysia, for providing me with an excellent academic environment and valuable resources. The university's commitment to fostering research and international exchange has offered me countless opportunities to grow as a scholar. A special note of thanks goes to the villagers and inheritors of Jiuxian Village. Their openness, trust, and willingness to share their stories, traditions, and daily lives were the cornerstone of this research. Without their patience in answering my questions, their generosity in inviting me into their homes, and their passion for preserving local heritage, this thesis would lack the authenticity and depth that fieldwork brings. Their warmth made me feel like a part of their community, and their wisdom has left an indelible mark on my understanding of cultural (heritage inheritance).

I would also like to thank my friends and fellow students at UPSI. Their encouragement, discussions, and shared struggles during late-night study sessions made this journey less lonely. Their diverse perspectives challenged me to think more broadly and refined my research approach. Last but not least, I owe an immeasurable debt to my family. Their unconditional love, understanding, and support especially during the challenging periods of fieldwork and writing gave me the strength to persist. Their belief in me has been my most powerful motivation. This thesis is a product of collective effort, and any shortcomings are solely my own. Once again, thank you all for being part of this journey.

References

- Bu, L. M., Chen, X. Q., & Ma, P. W. (2016). *Research on the historical status and development direction of Nuo dance in Zhanjiang Old County*. *Appreciation of Masterpieces*, 06, 159–165.
- Chen, Z. J. (2017). *Zhanjiang nuo dance culture (1st ed.)*. Guangdong People's Publishing House.
- Fan, M. M. (2019). *Analysis and comparative study of Zhanjiang Nuo dance morphology*. *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, 6, 63–67.
- Hu, G. (2018). *A brief analysis of the body language of Zhanjiang Nuo dance*. *Journal of Changchun Institute of Education*, 7, 57–59.
- Hu, G. (2019). *Body language of Zhanjiang Nuo dance*. *YueHaifeng*, 4, 63–66. doi.org/10.16591/j.cnki.44-1332/i.2019.04.013
- Jiang, Z. W. (2017). *The artistic process and morphological characteristics of Zhanjiang Nuo dance*. *Contemporary Music*, 16, 107–108.
- Jin, N. (2012). *Research on Nuo dance in Western Guangdong from the perspective of artistic morphology*. *Journal of Gansu United University (Natural Science Edition)*, 53, 13–14. doi.org/10.13804/j.cnki.2095-6991.2012.s3.004
- Li, Z. H. (1989). *A brief discussion of Nuo dance*. *Guizhou Social Sciences*, 8, 24–29.
- Lin, W. Q. (2015). *The morphological status and countermeasures of the "long-lost" Nuo dance in Leizhou, Zhanjiang, Guangdong*. *Vocational Technology*, 4, 126–128.
- Lingnan Normal University. (2015). *Nuo Feng [Dance work]*.

- Pang, J. (2014). *A preliminary study on the impression of Zhanjiang Nuo culture*. In Proceedings of the 25th Anniversary of the Founding of the Guangdong Provincial Folk Culture Research Association and the 25th Anniversary of the Shenzhou Folklore Magazine and the Seminar on the Development of Folk Culture (pp. 61–64). Zhanjiang Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center Office.
- Tan, Z. Y., & Xu, X. A. (2024). *Analysis of body language and movements in Zhanjiang Nuo dance*. *Artist*, 6, 7–11. doi.org/CNKI:SUN:YSJA.0.2024-06-001
- Yi, L. Q. (2021). *The dialogue between tradition and modernity: An exploration of the contemporary cultural value of Zhanjiang Nuo dance from the perspective of art anthropology*. *Dance*, 3, 78–83. doi.org/CNKI:SUN:WDWD.0.2021-03-018
- Zeng, H. M. (2015). *The body language and cultural study of Zhanjiang nuo rituals in Guangdong (Doctoral dissertation)*. China Academy of Art.
- Zhu, P. K. (2013). *The inheritance, protection, exploration, and development of Zhanjiang Nuo dance and the aesthetic connotation of the original dance work "Nuo Feng."* *Dance*, 07, 56–57.
- Zhu, P. K. (2014). *The inheritance dilemma and protection strategies of Zhanjiang Nuo Dance*. *Journal of Zhanjiang Normal University*, 05, 169–172.
- Zhu, P. K. (2014). *The witchy charm of Zhanjiang Nuo dance*. *Sound of the Yellow River*, 11, 18–20.
- Zhu, P. K. (2016). *Zhanjiang Nuo dance educational functional value and its practical exploration*. *Journal of Huaihua University*, 36 (6), 126–128. doi.org/10.16074/j.cnki.cn43-1394/z.2016.06.032