EXPLORING RITUALISTIC MASKED DANCE FROM PEIRCE'S TRIADIC SEMIOTICS: A CASE STUDY OF THE ZHUANG SHIGONG DANCE

Wanting HUANG[1] and Supavadee POTIWETCHAKUL[1]
1 Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand;
s68563806004@ssru.ac.th (W. H.); supavadee.po@ssru.ac.th (S. P.)

ABSTRACT
Masks, as a unique semiotic carrier in human culture, play multiple roles in ritual and art. This Article aims to analyze the mechanism of semiotic significance generation of Zhuang Shigong Dance masks as a "psychic medium" in traditional rituals and employs Peircean semiotic theory to systematically review relevant literature through documentary analysis. The article finds that traditional Shigong Dance masks, through the triadic relationship of "representamen-object-interpretant", enablehuman-deity communication. The masks' carved willow wood, fixed color system, and deity specific facial features serve as the representamen; they point to corresponding gods and supernatural forces as the object; and the Shigong's performance and the villagers' reverent prayers and offerings constitute the interpretant, collectively completing the semiotic loop. Zhuang Shigong Dance's masks, as a medium for communicating between humans and gods, have also become a cultural symbol of the Shigong dance. This article reveals the internal logic of semiotic significance, offering theoretical insights for the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage.
Keywords: Peircean Triadic Semiotics, Zhuang Shigong Dance Mask, Psychic Medium

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INTRODUCTION

Masks are not simple face coverings but semiotic media imbued with multiple meanings by human beings (Paul S. Wingert, 2025; Lin Wanchen, 2025). Across different cultures worldwide, masks assume diverse functions such as mediating between humans and deities, exorcising evil, and enacting role-playing, with their generation and evolution of semiotic significance reflecting changes in human cognitive patterns and social structures (Pu Leyang, 2018). The Zhuang Shigong Dance is a ritual dance form prevalent in the Red River basin of Guangxi, with Shanglin County as its core distribution area. Its masks, as core ritual instruments for communicating between humans and deities and carrying ethnic memory, possess profound religious significance and symbolic value. In traditional Shigong rituals, the Shigong completes an identity transformation by donning specific masks, shifting from an ordinary person to an incarnation or intermediary of deities, thereby performing religious functions such as sacrifice, exorcism, and blessing-seeking. However, existing research has mostly described the forms and functions of Shigong Dance from folkloric, choreographic, or religious perspectives, with little in-depth analysis of the intrinsic semiotic mechanisms through which masks generate meaning in rituals. To this end, this study introduces Peircean semiotic theory, aiming to apply his triadic framework of "representamen-object-interpretant" to systematically analyze how Zhuang Shigong Dance masks function as a "psychic medium" in traditional rituals, and to reveal the logic of their meaning transformation from material entities to sacred symbols.

Article's Objective

To analyze the mechanism of semiotic significance generation of Zhuang Shigong Dance masks as a "psychic medium" in traditional rituals.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Domestic and international research on ritual masks and the Zhuang Shigong Dance can be divided into three main trajectories:

First, universal mask culture studies. Paul S. Wingert (2025) regards masks as cross cultural symbolic media for human spiritual communication, comparing their functions in primitive tribes, European religious dramas, and Asian folk rituals. Pu Leyang (2018), through etymological analysis of ancient Chinese characters, identifies three functional stages of masks in China sacrifice, punishment, and performance revealing their evolution from religious mediums to symbols of power and theatrical props. Lin Wanchen (2025) explores masks from the perspective of meaning exploration and composite creation, emphasizing their role in self identification. These studies lay a theoretical foundation for the functional typology of masks.

Second, ontological studies of the Zhuang Shigong Dance and its masks. Yang Shuzhe (2003, 2007, 2008), through long term fieldwork, systematically documented the nine masks owned by a Shigong troupe in Xiyan Town, Shanglin County (including the Jade Maiden, Earth God, Earth Goddess, Texing, Tetu, Monkey God, Thunder God, Farmer's Wife, and a mask called "Ghost".), and meticulously distinguished the making and wearing rules of “Bright Manifestations” (paper painted, worn slantingly on the forehead) and “Dark Manifestations” (carved from camphor or willow wood, covering the full face), emphasizing the folk adage “no mask, no Shigong.” Huang Shuoyan (2017) and Yuan Yaqin (2018) further connect masked Shigong performance with Nuo culture and shamanic traditions, highlighting the mask’s attribute as a “psychic medium” for human deity communication. Zhong Ning (2013, 2015) and Zhou Youyi (2018) focus on contemporary evolution, pointing out that in modern stagings, the religious sacredness of masks has gradually diminished while their theatrical aesthetic functions have intensified. The Overseas Chinese Language and Culture Education Online (2008) and Factpedia (2021) observe similar trends, noting that masks have shifted from ritual instruments to performance props. Qin Yanjia (2016), from the perspective of ordination

ceremony chanting scripts, provides a media study of ritual texts, adding important supplementary material to the literature on Shigong rituals.

Third, semiotic studies of ritual implements. Peirce (1998) proposed the triadic sign theory, holding that any sign activity contains three inseparable elements: the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. The representamen is the material carrier of the sign, the object is the entity or concept the sign refers to, and the interpretant is the meaning generated in the interpreter's mind. The three interact dynamically to form a complete sign process. Currently, most semiotic analyses adopt Saussure's dualistic signifier signified model to study Nuo masks, Tibetan opera masks, etc., but there is a lack of systematic research applying Peirce's (1998) triadic theory (representamen object interpretant) to Zhuang ritual masks. Although some scholars have approached Shigong culture from the angle of symbolic signs, no literature has yet taken Shanglin Shigong masks as a case study to fully restore the dynamic sign operation process within complete ritual scenes this constitutes the innovative breakthrough of the present study.

In summary, existing research has produced rich results in fieldwork documentation and religious description, yet there remains a notable gap in the deep semiotic mechanisms, which urgently calls for theoretical exploration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a document method, employing Peirce's triadic semiotic theory (representamen-object-interpretant) supplemented by video observation and interviews as the core analytical framework to systematically investigate the mechanism of semiotic significance generation in Zhuang Shigong Dance masks from Shanglin, Guangxi. Located in the hinterland of the Hongshui River basin. This article systematically collects three categories of documents: local chronicles and intangible cultural heritage archives of Shanglin County, academic monographs and papers on Zhuang Shigong religion and Shigong Dance, and core theoretical works on Peircean semiotics.The video observation observed "Guangxi Ethnic Minority Folk Custom Display: The Mysterious Zhuang Shigong Dance," published on Baidu. The video documents a Shigong Dance performance from Xiangzhou County, Shanglin City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The interviewee of this interview is Mr. Zhou Zongmei, he is a municipal-level representative inheritor of Zhuang Shigong Opera, born in 1960 in Gaoxian Community, Xiangxian Town, Shanglin County. He learned Shigong Dance performance from his father from a young age and has been actively performing and transmitting the tradition for over four decades. All documents are coded according to two themes mask material symbolism and ritual semiotic operation to establish an analytical database for supporting the argumentation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This section presents the core findings in three parts: the universal symbolic meaning and functional evolution of masks; the uniqueness and research trajectories of Zhuang Shigong Dance masks; and the semiotic analysis of masks as a "psychic medium."

1) The Universal Symbolic Meaning and Functional Evolution of Masks

Literature indicates that the symbolic meanings of masks manifest across religious, supernatural, and socio authoritative dimensions. Pu Leyang (2018), through etymological analysis of ancient Chinese characters, identified three stages in the functional evolution of masks sacrifice, punishment, and performance reflecting changes in human cognitive abilities and socio cultural structures. From a functional typological perspective, masks can be categorized into sacrificial masks, exorcistic masks, and performance masks. Qin Yanjia (2016) further noted that in Zhuang Shigong ordination ceremonies and temple fairs, masks

serve as core ritual instruments facilitating the Shigong's identity transformation and communication with deities.

2) The Uniqueness of Zhuang Shigong Dance Masks and Research Trajectories

The uniqueness of Shigong Dance masks is deeply rooted in their local cultural soil. This dance is closely tied to the Zhuang people's rice farming practices, animistic beliefs, and the Shigong religion that blends Daoism and shamanic elements. Previous studies have generally followed two main directions. One focuses on religious meanings and symbolic functions for example, Yang Shuzhe (2008) conducted fieldwork to document in detail the nine masks used by a Shigong troupe, including their shapes, colors, and the distinction between "Bright Manifestations" and "Dark Manifestations," Bright Manifestations refer to flat divine images painted directly on cardboard or bamboo mat pieces (reportedly also on leather) about the size of a human face, usually worn slantingly on the forehead, with the wearer's face either covered by white or dark gauze or left uncovered altogether. Dark Manifestations are mostly carved from camphor wood, willow wood, boxwood, or Chinese parasol wood, similar in size to a human face, approximately 30 cm in length including the crown and 16 cm in width; the front is carved in relief, the back is hollowed out, with holes cut at the eyes and nose for viewing and breathing, and small holes at both ear sides for threading straps to tie, stressing that masks are indispensable in rituals. The other direction looks at contemporary transformations for instance, Zhong Ning (2013) pointed out that as Shigong Dance gradually moves to the stage, the sacredness of masks has diminished, while their performative and aesthetic functions have become more prominent. Together, these studies provide important background and clues for understanding Shigong Dance masks.

The two figures included in this article (Figures 1 and 2) provide visual documentation of the Bright and Dark Manifestation masks discussed throughout the analysis. A detailed explanation of how these images correspond to the triadic semiotic framework is provided below.



Figure 1 Zhuang Shigong Dance Mask Bright Manifestations
Source: https://baike.baidu.com/item/壮族师公戏/3431334

This figure shows a Shigong performer wearing a Bright Manifestation mask during a ritual performance. The mask is a flat, painted image on a hard paper or bamboo mat base, worn slantingly on the forehead. The performer's face is visible below the mask, with a white cloth covering the lower portion of the face and neck. This visual configuration directly corresponds to the representamen: the mask's material form painted paper, slanting placement, partial facial exposure constitutes the tangible carrier of the sign. The mask is brightly colored, with the facial features painted in a stylized, expressive manner. The partial exposure of the performer's face beneath the mask visually reinforces the transitional nature of the Bright Manifestation: it

is worn during the initial phase of the ritual, before the full identity transformation into the deity is complete.

The object of this representamen is the deity depicted on the mask. Based on the mask's visual characteristics bright coloring, non-threatening expression it can be identified as a deity of light, festivity, or blessing. In the context of Shanglin Shigong ritual practice, such masks correspond to deities invoked for joyful occasions and blessing ceremonies. The interpretant is visible in the performer's posture and the ritual setting: the performer's movements, suggesting active participation in the ritual action, while the presence of other performers and audience in the background indicates a collective ritual context. The visual evidence supports the interpretation that Bright Manifestation masks evoke interpretants of joy, blessing, and communal celebration.



Figure 2 Zhuang Shigong Dance Mask Dark Manifestations
Source: https://image.so.com/ai/large/view?end=60&id=96c16d558a7bd8260e090794c15fafa6&q=壮族师公舞面具&tab=all&srcg=imglist_img

This figure presents a contrasting visual configuration. Two performers are shown wearing Dark Manifestation masks. These masks are carved from wood (likely willow or camphor), with full-face coverage that completely conceals the performers' faces. The masks appear to be carved with benign, elderly facial features, they are agricultural deities invoked to descend and bestow blessings for abundant yields and a bountiful harvest, given their kind expressions and the countryside setting. The performers' hands are raised in a gesture of blessing or salutation, and they are dressed in ceremonial robes with blue and white patterns.

The visual correspondence to the triadic framework is again direct. The representamen consists of the carved wooden masks with their distinctive material properties: the solid wood construction, the full-face coverage, the specific facial features (kind eyes, elderly visage). These material properties differ significantly from the Bright Manifestation representamen, and this difference is semiotically consequential. The object of these masks is the agricultural deities invoked for fertility and harvest blessings. The interpretant is visible in the performers' bodily posture the raised hands in a gesture of blessing and in the implied context of a harvest or blessing ritual.

The comparison between Figures 1 and 2 visually demonstrates the semiotic distinction between Bright and Dark Manifestations that Yang Shuzhe (2008) documented in his fieldwork. Bright Manifestations, with their partial facial exposure and painted surfaces, function as transitional representamen that mediate between the human and divine realms. Dark Manifestations, with their full-face coverage and carved wooden construction, function as complete representamen that effect a more thorough identity transformation. The visual evidence thus corroborates the textual analysis and provides concrete illustration of how different representamen configurations activate different objects and generate different interpretants within the Zhuang Shigong Dance ritual system.

3) Semiotic Analysis of Masks as a "Psychic Medium"

According to Peirce's triadic semiotic theory, every sign consists of three elements: representamen, object, and interpretant. Zhuang Shigong Dance masks in traditional rituals perfectly embody this triadic structure. Studies have shown that Representamen: Literature records that traditional masks are hand carved from local willow wood, with colors following a strict symbolic system: red represents yang, festivity, and exorcism; black represents yin, solemnity, and suppression; gold/yellow represents divinity; blue/green symbolizes nature and harvest. In terms of shape, different deities have fixed features, such as the Thunder God with angry eyes and exposed fangs, and the Earth God with kind eyebrows and a smiling expression. Object: The object of a mask is the deity, ancestor, or supernatural power it represents. The Shigong religion integrates animism, ancestor worship, and Meishan Daoism. Each mask corresponds to a specific deity. When the Shigong puts on a mask, the "object" transforms from a prop into the deity itself, possessing referentiality and presence. Interpretant: Literature records that when the Shigong dons a specific mask, his behavior changes significantly his steps become solemn, he performs specific movements while holding ritual instruments, and enters a trance like state. At the same time, devotees kneel, make offerings, and pray. The interpretant establishes the sacredness of the ritual and completes the closed loop of human deity communication. Yang Shuzhe's (2008) records indicate that Bright Manifestation masks have bright colors and exaggerated expressions, representing deities of light and festivity, with interpretants of joy and blessing; Dark Manifestation masks have dark colors and fierce expressions, representing forces of the underworld and suppression, with interpretants of intimidation and exorcism. This distinction reflects the Zhuang cosmological view of binary oppositions.

Table 1 Material Comparison of Traditional Masks and Contemporary Stage Masks

Color	**Meaning**
Red	Yang, joy, and exorcism
Black	Yin, solemnity, and oppression
Gold/Yellow	Divinity and holiness
Blue/Green	Nature and harvest

Source: Huang Wanting

Based on the above content and this table, we can conclude the Zhuang Shigong Dance masks perfectly embody the triadic structure in traditional rituals. In terms of the representamen, the Shigong masks possess a strict symbolic system: different colors carry different meanings, such as red representing yang and festivity, and black representing yin and solemnity. In terms of shape, different deities have fixed features, such as the Thunder God with angry eyes and the Earth God with kind eyebrows and a benign expression. In terms of the object, the object of a mask is the deity it represents, and each mask corresponds to its specific deity. The interpretant corresponds to the meanings embodied by different colors and different deities; for example, for a brightly colored deity representing festivity, the interpretant is joy and blessing.

Based on video observation examined a publicly available recording of Zhuang Shigong Dance from Xiangzhou County, Guangxi. The performers wore masks, Shigong robes or dark garments with red lower skirts, and held ritual instruments such as knives, swords, jianmu, and lingqi, dancing to percussion accompaniment. In the observed sequence, after the Shigong donned a carved wooden Dark Manifestation mask, his bodily comportment changed immediately: his steps shifted to the characteristic "chan" gait, with knees bent and the body swaying in a continuous rhythmic tremor; he raised the jianmu and performed bowing movements toward the offering table. A subsequent mask with different facial features and coloring elicited more vigorous movements forceful stomping, broad sweeping of the lingdao,

and rapid spinning around the altar while the audience shifted from calm reverence to heightened attention and later approached the altar to make offerings. These observed shifts indicate that different representamen configurations activate different objects and interpretants within the ritual.

Mr. Zhou Zongmei, a municipal-level representative inheritor of Zhuang Shigong Dance from Shanglin County, he described the two mask types Bright Manifestations painted on hard paper or bamboo mats and worn slantingly on the forehead, and Dark Manifestations carved from camphor, willow, boxwood, or Chinese parasol wood and covering the full face as well as the fixed color system: red for yang, joy, and exorcism; black for yin, solemnity, and suppression; gold/yellow for divinity; blue/green for nature and harvest. He further explained that each mask corresponds to a specific deity in the Shigong pantheon and that donning the mask effects an identity transformation: "Before I put it on, I am an ordinary person. After I put it on, I feel the god's presence I am the god's vessel." Villagers respond differently according to the deity present, bowing and praying for harvest before the Earth God mask and becoming more alert before the Thunder God mask. Critically, he emphasized that the mask, the dance, and the prayer must work together for the ritual to be complete.

Synthesizing the two sources, the evidence converges on the triadic structure. The carved wood, fixed colors, and deity-specific facial features described in the interview and visible in the video constitute the representamen. The specific deities represented by the masks Earth God, Thunder God, and others constitute the object. The Shigong's trembling gait, raised jianmu, chanting, and the villagers'prostrations and offerings constitute the interpretant. The video shows these elements operating in actual ritual behavior, while the interview confirms the practitioner's reflexive awareness that all three must function together. Both sources thus corroborate the documentary analysis and directly respond to the research objective: the mask's "psychic medium" function is not an inherent property of the object but a dynamic semiotic process in which representamen, object, and interpretant are mutually activated within the ritual. This convergence strengthens the argument that the mask's efficacy depends on the systematic relationship among all three elements of the triad.

(Zhou Zongmei, interview, Date: 03/09/2026)

Summary of this article is to apply Peirce's triadic semiotic theory to reveal the meaning-generating mechanism of Zhuang Shigong Dance masks as a "psychic medium" in traditional rituals. The three sources of evidence literature review, video observation, and inheritor interview follow different paths but converge on a core conclusion: the "psychic medium" function of Shigong Dance masks is not a mysterious property but a semiotic system in which representamen, object, and interpretant operate in concert. The three sources mutually corroborate one another, forming a triangulation of the research question.

First, the literature provides the cultural background and theoretical support for the triadic structure. Fieldwork meticulously documents the materials, forms, and the distinction between "Bright Manifestations" and "Dark Manifestations" of the nine masks owned by a Shigong troupe; these material properties constitute a recognizable representamen. The mask as a "psychic medium" for human-deity communication, pointing to the object level of deities. Account of the functional evolution of masks from sacrifice to performance, along with media analysis of ordination ceremony chanting scripts, supplements the socio-cultural connotations of the interpretant from diachronic and ritual-textual dimensions. Peirce's triadic theory then provides a unified analytical framework, allowing these scattered documentary records to be systematically interpreted within the structure of "representamen-object-interpretant."

Second, the video observation provides direct behavioral evidence for the triadic structure. In the observed Shigong Dance performance from Xiangzhou County, immediately after the Shigong dons a carved wooden Dark Manifestation mask, his steps shift to the "chan" gait, his body sways continuously, and he raises the jianmu and performs bowing rituals. The audience

shifts from calm reverence to heightened attention and approaches the altar to make offerings during the climactic sequence. Different masks elicit different intensities of performance and audience response, indicating that the material and visual configuration of the representamen directly activates the corresponding object and interpretant. The embodied movements documented in the video "ma" being low, the body swaying, the hips twisting, and the knees trembling are precisely the bodily manifestation of the interpretant, fully consistent with the documented physical requirements of Shigong Dance.

Third, the inheritor interview validates the inseparability of the triadic structure from the practitioner's perspective. In the interview, Zhou Zongmei explicitly describes the materials, color rules, and corresponding deities of the masks. He states that after donning a mask, "I am no longer myself I am the god's vessel," the trembling step becomes natural, and villagers react differently to different masks. He emphasizes in particular: "Without the mask, there is no god. Without the dance and the chanting, the mask is nothing. The three must work together—the mask, the dance, and the prayer to make the ritual complete." This statement aligns precisely with Peirce's insistence that the triadic relationship is inseparable, demonstrating that semiotic meaning does not originate from the mask itself but from the coordinated operation of representamen, object, and interpretant within the ritual.

Synthesizing the three sources of evidence, a detailed analytical conclusion can be drawn: the "psychic medium" function of Zhuang Shigong Dance masks is essentially a dynamic semiotic process. The literature provides the cultural rules of mask materials, colors, and the Bright-Dark distinction; the video observation demonstrates how these rules operate in actual ritual behavior; and the interview confirms the practitioners' reflexive awareness of this semiotic process. The three mutually corroborate one another, jointly demonstrating that Shigong Dance masks are able to communicate between humans and deities because willow wood, fixed colors, and deity-specific forms constitute a stable representamen; these representamen point to specific deities as objects in the ritual context; and the Shigong's trembling gait, chanting, and the villagers' prostrations and offerings constitute the embodied and socialized interpretant. The distinction between Bright and Dark Manifestations is precisely a semiotic manifestation of different representamen configurations activating different objects and interpretants. This conclusion not only responds to the research objective of this article but also provides a theoretical basis for the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage: protecting Shigong Dance masks requires not merely preserving their material form but maintaining the complete operation of their triadic semiotic relationships.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

1) Discussion

The core objective of this article is to apply Peirce's triadic semiotic theory to reveal the meaning generating mechanism of Shanglin Zhuang Shigong Dance masks as a "psychic medium" in traditional rituals. Through systematic literature review and semiotic analysis, this study yields the following discussions at the levels of theoretical application, functional distinction, and cultural interpretation.

First, this article verifies the applicability and explanatory power of Peirce's triadic framework in the study of ethnic minority ritual masks. Peirce (1998) posited that any complete sign activity contains three inseparable components representamen, object, and interpretant which interact dynamically to form an endless chain of sign interpretation. Most existing semiotic analyses adopt Saussure's dualistic signifier signified model, whose limitation lies in reducing sign relationships to static correspondences that fail to adequately capture the dynamic process of meaning generation in rituals. By introducing Peirce's triadic structure into the analysis of Shigong Dance masks, this study finds that the carved wood, color system, and facial features of the mask, functioning as the representamen, point to specific deities or supernatural forces

the object in ritual contexts, while the Shigong's trance like performance and the villagers acts of reverence, prayer, and offering constitute the interpretant, together completing the closed loop of human deity communication. This analysis corroborates Peirce's (1998) discourse on the nature of sign activity and also responds to Yang Shuzhe's (2008) field observation that "no mask, no Shigong" the indispensability of masks in rituals lies precisely in their role as the core carrier of the representamen within a complete sign activity. On this basis, this study demonstrates that the Peircean framework can fully restore the operational logic of ritual signs centered on bodily practice and collective emotion, thereby expanding the application of semiotics in ritual studies.

Second, this article further distinguishes the essential difference between the mask as a "psychic medium" and the mask as a "prop" at the functional level. Pu Leyang (2018), through etymological analysis of ancient Chinese characters, summarized mask functions into three stages sacrifice, punishment, and performance revealing the evolutionary trajectory of masks from religious media to symbols of power and theatrical props. In contemporary stage adaptations, Shigong Dance masks have indeed undergone the weakening of sacredness and the enhancement of aesthetic functions as described by Zhong Ning (2013) and Zhou Youyi (2018). However, in traditional ritual contexts, the "psychic medium" function of masks is grounded in stable semiotic rules: willow wood material, a fixed color system (red representing yang and exorcism, black representing yin and solemnity, gold/yellow representing divinity, blue/green representing nature and harvest), and deity specific facial features collectively constitute a recognizable representamen, enabling both the Shigong and villagers to consistently summon and identify specific deities in each ritual. Yang Shuzhe's (2008) distinction between "Bright Manifestations" and "Dark Manifestations" in terms of material and wearing methods further confirms the systematicity of these rules. This finding echoes Pu Leyang's (2018) theory of functional evolution, suggesting that the functional nature of masks depends on whether the semiotic system in which they are embedded maintains a sacred referential relationship, rather than on any inherent attributes of the masks themselves.

Third, this article reinterprets the semiotic distinction between "Bright Manifestations" and "Dark Manifestations," and its findings are highly consistent with Yang Shuzhe's (2008) field records. Yang Shuzhe (2008) documented in detail that Bright Manifestations are painted on paper and worn slantingly on the forehead, while Dark Manifestations are carved from camphor or willow wood and cover the entire face, with systematic differences in both form and wearing method. The semiotic analysis of this study reveals that Bright Manifestation masks, with their bright colors and exaggerated expressions as representamen, point to deities of light and festivity, generating collective emotions of joy, blessing, and protection at the interpretant level; Dark Manifestation masks, with their dark tones and fierce forms as representamen, point to underworld forces and suppressive powers, generating ritual effects of intimidation, exorcism, and salvation. This binary opposition is also supported by Huang Shuoyan's (2017) and Yuan Yaqin's (2018) studies on the connection between Shigong Dance and Nuo culture and shamanic traditions, both of which emphasize the traditional function of masked Shigong performance as a "psychic medium" for human deity communication. The Bright Dark opposition is precisely a semiotic projection of the yin yang binary structure embedded in the traditional Zhuang cosmology, providing a concrete example for understanding the semiotic system of Zhuang rituals.

Furthermore, the methodological analysis of this article demonstrates the unique value of documentary analysis in ritual sign research. The mask forms, colors, and wearing rules meticulously documented by Yang Shuzhe (2008), as well as the textual analysis of ordination ceremony scripts by Qin Yanjia (2016), can all be given new theoretical interpretations within the Peircean framework. This indicates that existing fieldwork findings can generate new academic value through examination from different theoretical perspectives, and that

documentary analysis is not merely passive review but an active process of theoretical construction.

2) Conclusion

Ritual masks form a complete evolutionary logic from sacrificial medium to power symbol and then performance prop, and Shanglin Zhuang Shigong Dance masks belong to typical sacrificial medium masks rooted in Zhuang rice-farming culture, animism and syncretic Shigong religion, with unique binary symbolic classification of Bright and Dark Manifestations different from other ethnic mask systems.Peirce's triadic semiotic framework can fully interpret the psychic medium function of Shigong masks in traditional rituals. Willow wood material, fixed color system and deity-specific facial modeling form the representamen; corresponding gods, ancestors and supernatural powers constitute the object; unified ritual trance behavior of Shigong and villagers' devout sacrificial activities form the interpretant. The three elements interact dynamically to complete the communication channel between human and deity, and the yin yang binary modeling of Bright and Dark masks reflects the Zhuang traditional cosmological outlook.

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