

# THE UNIQUENESS OF YINGGE MASKS AND REGIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DIVERSE MASK CULTURES

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## ABSTRACT

This research aims to compare Chaozhou Yingge masks with masks from other regions, examining their uniqueness in terms of cultural background, design elements, and symbolic significance. As an important cultural symbol, masks not only play a key role in theater and rituals but also reflect the social structures and religious beliefs of each region. Through an in-depth analysis of Yingge masks, Chinese opera masks, Indian Kathakali masks, Japanese Noh masks, Italian Venetian masks, African tribal masks, and Thai Khon masks, this study summarizes the historical evolution and cultural implications of various types of masks. The research adopts a combined method of literature review and case analysis to systematically categorize the design characteristics of different masks, such as shape, color, and patterns, and explores the cultural meanings and functions they embody. The findings reveal that Yingge masks in traditional theater not only hold aesthetic value but also carry rich local cultural and social histories. This study contributes to a better understanding of Chaozhou culture and its intangible cultural heritage, supporting the preservation and development of Yingge masks in modern culture. Future research could further explore the application of these masks in contemporary art and design, providing new ideas for the development of the cultural and creative industries.

**Keywords:** Yingge Mask, Mask Culture, Comparative Study, Cultural Significance, Intangible Cultural Heritag

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## INTRODUCTION

Chaozhou Yingge dance is one of the major traditional dances of the Han Chinese and serves as an important vehicle for cultural transmission in the Chaozhou region. Adapted from the heroic stories in one of China's four great classical novels, *\*Water Margin\**, it is a form of celebration used by Chaozhou people for ritual offerings, exorcisms, and festive performances. It has been included in the first batch of intangible cultural heritage for protection and is popular in Shantou, Jieyang, and Shanwei cities, as well as in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Chinatown in Thailand. Research on Chaozhou Yingge dance holds significant value for promoting the transmission of Chinese culture and practical artistic applications. With the changes of modern society and the impact of globalization, Yingge dance faces challenges in its transmission and development as a traditional cultural form.

Yingge masks, as an essential component of Yingge dance, are the soul of performance. Their unique designs encapsulate rich cultural connotations and historical significance, reflecting the local community's religious beliefs, folk customs, and aesthetic concepts. This paper aims to explore the unique status of Chaozhou Yingge masks in culture and art through a comparative study with masks from other regions, as well as their value and impact in contemporary society. This research will provide important theoretical support for understanding the diversity of local culture and its transformations in the context of globalization.

### Research Objectives

- 1) To explore the local cultural characteristics and symbolic significance of Yingge masks.
- 2) To analyze the similarities and differences between Yingge masks and masks from other cultures.
- 3) To examine the roles and meanings of Chaozhou Yingge masks in traditional theater and religious rituals.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### Domestic Research Review

Yingge Dance, as an important cultural heritage of the Chaoshan region, has attracted significant attention from domestic scholars in recent years. The primary focus of domestic research has been on the historical origins, cultural significance, mask design, and the preservation and transmission of Yingge Dance as an intangible cultural heritage.

Numerous studies have explored various aspects of Yingge Dance, including its origins, transmission and development, dance forms, sports research, application of Yingge elements, cultural functions, and semiotic analysis. For instance, Wei Fei (1990) discussed the relationship between Yingge Dance and Nuo rituals in "The Variant Forms of Nuo Culture in Chaoshan," providing valuable insights into the historical context of Yingge Dance masks. Liu Xiaochun (2015) in *Research on Chinese Mask Culture* conducted an in-depth exploration of the origins and development of Chinese mask culture. Through the study of historical documents and folklore from the Chaoshan region, scholars have gradually revealed the historical roots of Yingge Dance and its unique status in Chaoshan culture. Yang Zhiping (2018) pointed out in his article "The Cultural Inheritance and Innovation of Chaoshan Yingge Dance" that Yingge Dance is not just a traditional performance form but also a manifestation of the collective memory of the Chaoshan people regarding their historical culture. Additionally, some studies have focused on the changes in Yingge Dance over different historical periods and its role in local society. The Chaozhou Archives provide a wealth of historical documents on Yingge Dance, offering researchers rich primary sources. These archival materials, including old photographs and records, contribute to a deeper understanding of the history and culture of Yingge Dance.

Research specifically focusing on Yingge masks is limited, but studies such as *Liang Shan's Collection, Analysis, and Application of Puning Yingge Elements in Guangdong\** and *Wu*

Xuanting's Comparative Study of Chaoshan Yingge and Shandong Yangge, have conducted a relatively superficial analysis of the origins, characteristics, and functions of Yingge masks. The design of Yingge Dance masks has been a key area of domestic research. The colors, patterns, and materials of the masks are imbued with rich cultural symbolism, and scholars have used semiotic methods to interpret these elements, revealing the complexities of cultural transmission in Yingge Dance. Liu Xiaochun's semiotic analysis of Chinese masks provides a theoretical foundation for the graphic semiotics study of Yingge Dance masks.

Scholars generally agree that Yingge Dance is not only a traditional folk performance but also a significant symbol of cultural identity for the Chaoshan people. Turner (1986) in *The Anthropology of Performance* analyzed the cultural significance of folk performing arts from an anthropological perspective, offering theoretical support for understanding the social functions of Yingge Dance. Zhao Yong (2021) in his conference paper *\*The Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Urban Cultural Identity* further explored the role of intangible cultural heritage in urban cultural identity, highlighting the unique value of Yingge Dance in enhancing local cultural identity. Xiang Shuting has examined the cultural functions of Yingge Dance from a cultural anthropology perspective. Zhou Jianhua (2017) analyzed the unique styles of Yingge Dance in music, dance, and mask design in his work *\*An Analysis of the Artistic Characteristics of Chaoshan Yingge Dance*. He pointed out that Yingge Dance's music is characterized by strong rhythms, its dance movements are vigorous and bold, and the mask designs incorporate traditional Chaoshan craftsmanship, reflecting a deep cultural heritage.

### **International Research Review**

Compared to domestic studies, international research on Yingge Dance is relatively limited. However, with the growing global awareness of cultural heritage preservation, international scholars have gradually begun to pay attention to this unique folk performance art.

Yingge Dance, as a regional cultural heritage, has increasingly attracted the attention of international scholars. Graham and Howard (2008), in their edited volume *\*The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity\**, explored the relationship between heritage and identity, analyzing the role of folk dances in constructing local cultural identities. By comparing the cultural heritage preservation strategies of different regions, scholars have further elaborated on the cultural significance of Yingge Dance in the context of globalization. Victor Turner (1986) conducted an in-depth study of traditional performing arts in *\*The Anthropology of Performance*. He emphasized the symbolic significance of performances in social and cultural contexts, arguing that performances are not just forms of entertainment but also symbols of cultural transmission. Turner's theories provide academic support for understanding the role of Yingge Dance in cultural rituals. Although *\*The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity\** does not directly address Yingge Dance, its discussion of cultural heritage as a symbol of identity is highly relevant for understanding the role of Yingge Dance in Chaoshan culture.

Furthermore, UNESCO's *\*Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage\** (2003) established a global framework for protecting intangible cultural heritage, which provides a theoretical foundation for the preservation of Yingge Dance. Jessica C. Teague (2019) explored the international mechanisms for protecting intangible cultural heritage in her research, analyzing the cooperation and challenges faced by different countries in cultural heritage protection. Her research is significant for understanding Yingge Dance's position within the international cultural protection system. Additionally, recent scholars like Linda K. Richter (2020) have discussed the relationship between cultural tourism and intangible cultural heritage in their papers, arguing that cultural tourism can be an effective way to promote the protection and transmission of intangible cultural heritage like Yingge Dance. This offers a new perspective on the dissemination and development of Yingge Dance in modern society.

In summary, domestic and international scholars have enriched our understanding of Chaoshan Yingge Dance through various research angles. Domestic research has focused more on the historical and cultural background and its preservation, while international research has examined Yingge Dance from broader perspectives, including cultural heritage preservation and cultural identity. By integrating these studies, the cultural connotations and social significance of Yingge Dance have been more comprehensively revealed, providing theoretical support for its transmission and development in modern society. Future research could further integrate international experiences with local practices to promote the global dissemination and diverse development of Yingge Dance.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a diversified methodology, combining qualitative and quantitative research to ensure comprehensiveness and scientific rigor. The specific research methods include:



1) Literature Review: By reviewing domestic and international literature on Yingge dance and its masks, this study organizes existing research findings, identifies research gaps, and establishes a theoretical foundation.






2) Comparative Analysis: Representative masks from other regions (such as Japanese Noh masks, Indian Kathakali masks, and Italian Venetian masks) are selected for comparison with Yingge masks, analyzing differences and similarities in design features, cultural significance, and social background.

3) Questionnaire survey: Design a questionnaire to investigate the cognition and attitudes of tourists, villagers, and relevant cultural managers towards the Yingge facial makeup, and obtain quantitative data to support research conclusions.

4) Expert interviews: Conduct semi-structured interviews with industry experts and scholars to explore in depth the inheritance and innovation of mask culture, and collect their insights and suggestions.

**Table 1** Yingge Masks and Masks from Other Regions

Masks	Name of Masks	Details
Chaozhou - Shantou Yingge Masks	Yingge Mask	
Traditional Chinese Opera Masks	Peking Opera Mask	

Masks	Name of Masks	Details
Indian Kathakali Masks	Kathakali Mask	
Japanese Noh Masks	Noh Mask	
Venetian Masks	Venetian Masks	
African Masks	African Masks	
Thai Khon Masks	Khon Masks	

**Table 2** Analysis of the differences between Yingge masks and masks from other regions

<b>Comparison Dimension</b>	<b>Historical Background</b>	<b>Usage Scenarios</b>	<b>Design Characteristics</b>	<b>Symbolic Meaning</b>	<b>Cultural Connotation</b>
Yingge Dance Masks	Originated from Nuo dance, key in spiritual transformation during festivals.	Mainly used in festival activities and religious ceremonies.	Exaggerated design, bright colors.	Symbolizes bravery and justice.	Reflects local culture and historical memory of Chaoshan area.
Chinese Traditional Opera Masks	Developed from theatrical masks, widely used in traditional Chinese opera.	Used in stage performances to express character and fate.	Expresses character and fate through colors and patterns.	Reflects character traits and moral judgment.	Showcases the richness and diversity of traditional Chinese culture.
Japanese Noh Masks	Originated from Tang Dynasty's popular Sanraku.	Used in stage performances, expressing complex emotions through subtle mask changes.	Subtle mask design, expressing complex emotions and psychological states.	Expresses inner world and emotions.	Deeply influenced by Japanese religion and culture.
Indian Kathakali Masks	Used in religious and stage performances, depicting divinity and humanity.	Used in religious and stage performances.	Colors and patterns have religious and cultural significance.	Colors and patterns have specific symbolic meanings.	Showcases the uniqueness of Indian culture.
Italian Venetian Masks	Originated from medieval Venetian carnival.	Used in carnivals and masquerades.	Exquisite design, symbolizing mystery and freedom.	Symbolizes hypocrisy, freedom, and equality.	Reflects medieval European views on freedom and equality.
African Masks	Originated from traditional religious and ritual ceremonies.	Used in religious and stage performances.	Exaggerated facial features and shapes.	Masks carry unique African primal beliefs and communal symbols.	Important medium for conveying information, wishes, knowledge exchange, cultural transmission.
Thai Khon Masks	Kong Drama originated from religious rituals in India.	Important religious ceremonies and festivals in temples and royal courts.	Bizarre in form, with a wide variety of shapes and colors.	Often used to express religious beliefs and moral teachings.	It displays moral concepts such as loyalty, bravery, and wisdom.

### Research Instrument

The study aims to identify key differences and explore the adaptability potential of Yingge mask design between traditional aesthetics and contemporary global markets.

1) Population and sample selection: The research subjects of this study include a wide range of mask artists, cultural experts, and design professionals familiar with traditional mask forms from different cultures. According to Cochran's (1977) sample size calculation, this study

selected 400 participants from a larger population to ensure a confidence level of over 95%. The participants include frontline artists, designers, and scholars engaged in cultural mask related work in China and internationally. Purposeful and convenient sampling techniques were employed, specifically targeting individuals involved in traditional or modern mask design, to gain in-depth insights related to Yingge mask design.

2) Questionnaire Design: The questionnaire is divided into four parts:

2.1) Demographic information: including age, gender, professional background, mask design experience, and cultural affiliation.

2.2) Cultural Cognition and Acceptance of Design Elements (CPDA): aims to understand the participants' acceptance of traditional Yingge mask design features and mask features from other regions. This section uses a 1-5 level Likert scale, where 1 represents 'strongly disagree' and 5 represents 'strongly agree'.

2.3) Global Market Adaptability (AGMN): Examining the adaptability of Yingge Facebook elements to global audiences, with a focus on the acceptance of specific design modifications. This section also uses the Likert scale, as shown in Table (2).

2.4) Aesthetic and Functional Value Perception (PAFV): Focus on participants' views on the aesthetic and practical characteristics of Yingge opera mask design and masks from other regions. The problem evaluated opinions on elements such as color schemes, material selection, and symbol patterns.

Tool validation: Prior to conducting the investigation, project objective consistency (IOC) testing and reliability analysis were completed using Cronbach alpha. The IOC score of the questionnaire is 0.87, and the Cronbach alpha score is 0.875, both indicating sufficient reliability and effectiveness of the tool (Polit & Beck, 2006; Hair et al., 2012).

3) Data collection and analysis: The questionnaire is distributed to Facebook design professionals, cultural experts, and scholars in related fields, including participants from China and internationally. Summarize data using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. In addition, structural equation modeling (SEM) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are used to evaluate the goodness of fit of the model. The key indicators include factor loading (FL), composite reliability (CR), average variance extraction (AVE), correlation matrix, and square root of AVE to ensure the effectiveness of the construction. When necessary, correction index adjustments were made to improve the fit of the model (Tabachnick et al., 2007; Knekta et al., 2019).

**Table 3** Likert Scale

Score	Meaning
1	Strongly disagrees
2	Disagree
3	Generally
4	Agree
5	Strongly agree

### Investigation content

The following are specific questions used to evaluate participants' opinions:

1) Cultural value cognition

- I believe that Yingge makeup has significant cultural value.

- I believe that masks from other regions also have significant cultural value.

2) Comparison of design features

- I think the design features of Yingge masks are significantly different from masks in other regions.

- I am satisfied with the design features of Yingge's facial makeup.

- I am satisfied with the design features of masks in other regions.

### 3) Market adaptability

- I think Yingge Facebook has good adaptability in the market.

- I think Yingge Facebook needs further innovation to adapt to the market.

- I think masks from other regions are more competitive in the market.

### 4) Personal sense of participation

- I am interested in the inheritance and development of Yingge makeup.

- I am willing to participate in activities or learning related to Yingge Facebook.

## Rating Method

Participants can rate each question based on their own feelings, with 1 indicating 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicating 'strongly agree'. The final score can be used to analyze the overall attitudes and differences of participants towards each variable.

This scale design can help researchers quantify participants' attitudes and opinions, providing a foundation for subsequent data analysis.

## Reliability and effectiveness

Prior to conducting the questionnaire survey, Item Objective Consensus (IOC) testing and reliability analysis are key steps in ensuring the effectiveness of the research tool. The following is a detailed description of these two verification processes.

### 1) Project Objective Consistency (IOC) Testing

1.1) Definition and Purpose: Project Objective Consistency (IOC) testing is an important method for evaluating the consistency between each item in a questionnaire and the overall research objectives. It helps researchers ensure that each question designed can effectively measure the research objectives and reflect the data required for the study.

1.2) Testing Process: In this study, each item of the questionnaire was first submitted to five experts for evaluation, who have rich experience and knowledge in the fields of Yingge face painting and cultural heritage. Each expert will rate each question based on the following criteria:

- 1 point: This question is inconsistent with the research objectives.

- 0 points: This question is somewhat consistent with the research objectives.

- 2 points: This question is very consistent with the research objectives.

1.3) Result analysis: Calculate the IOC value for each question based on the expert's rating results. The formula for calculating IOC value is:

$$\text{IOC} = \frac{\text{The total sum of expert consensus ratings}}{\text{Number of experts}}$$

In this study, the total IOC score of the questionnaire was 0.87, indicating that each item of the questionnaire has good effectiveness in measuring the research objectives. According to general standards, an IOC value greater than 0.7 is generally considered acceptable, which further confirms the validity of the questionnaire design.

### 2) Reliability analysis (Cronbach Alpha)

2.1) Definition and Purpose: Reliability analysis aims to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire, that is, whether each question measures the same construct. Cronbach alpha is a commonly used metric for evaluating internal consistency, with values ranging from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating better internal consistency.

2.2) Analysis Process: When conducting reliability analysis, the questionnaire data is input into statistical software to calculate the Cronbach alpha values for each question. In this study, the Cronbach alpha value was 0.875, indicating good internal consistency of the questionnaire.

2.3) Result Analysis: Generally speaking, the interpretation criteria for Cronbach alpha values are:



- 0.9 and above: Excellent reliability
- 0.8 to 0.9: Good reliability
- 0.7 to 0.8: Acceptable reliability
- 0.6 to 0.7: Suspicious reliability
- Below 0.6: Unreliable

Due to the Cronbach alpha value of 0.875 in this study, it indicates that the questionnaire has good reliability in measuring participants' perceptions of Yingge masks and masks from other regions.

### 3) Conclusion

In summary, the questionnaire tool used in this study has been fully validated through project goal consistency (IOC) testing and Cronbach alpha reliability analysis. These analysis results provide a reliable foundation for subsequent data collection and analysis, ensuring the validity and credibility of the research findings.

#### 3.1) Basic information of participants and research variables

In this study, a total of 400 participants completed the questionnaire survey. Among them, female participants accounted for the majority, with a total of 240 people (60.0%), while male participants were 160 people (40.0%). In terms of age distribution, the participants were mainly concentrated between the ages of 21-30, with a total of 180 people (48.0%), followed by 31-40 years old, with a total of 150 people (40.0%), and 41-50 years old, with a total of 60 people (10.0%). The number of participants aged 50-60 and above was the smallest, with a total of 10 people (2.0%).

In terms of educational level, the highest number of participants obtained a bachelor's degree, totaling 345 (86.3%), while those with a master's degree or below were 35 (8.8%) and 20 (5.0%), respectively. In addition, the research results also showed that 4 participants (1.0%) obtained higher master's degrees.

Regarding marital status, nearly two-thirds of the participants were married, totaling 276 people (69.0%), while the rest were single (95 people, 23.8%) and divorced (29 people, 7.3%). In terms of income, the majority of participants have a monthly income between 2500-3500 RMB, with a total of 160 people (40.0%). Secondly, there were 142 participants (35.5%) with incomes ranging from 1500 to 2500 RMB, while 56 participants (14.0%) had monthly incomes below 1500 RMB. 42 participants (10.5%) had an income exceeding 3500 RMB.

#### 3.2) Descriptive statistics of variables

This study also analyzed participants' views on the design characteristics, cultural values, and market adaptability of Yingge masks and masks from other regions. The satisfaction and acceptance levels of each variable were evaluated using the Likert scale (1-5 points). The following are the statistical results of each major variable:

Cultural Value Perception: The average score is 4.4, indicating that participants have a high recognition of the cultural value of Yingge masks and masks from other regions.

Comparison of design features: The average satisfaction score of participants with the design features of masks is 4.2, indicating that they have a good understanding and acceptance of the differences in mask design in different regions.

Market adaptability: The average score for recognition of market adaptability is 4.0, indicating that participants believe that Yingge Facebook still needs further innovation and adjustment in the global market.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that participants hold a positive attitude towards the cultural, design, and market adaptability of Yingge Facebook. Although participants generally believe that Yingge Face Mask has important cultural value, in the context of globalization, there is

still a need to strengthen comparison and innovation with masks from other regions. This provides important reference for future research and practical design practices.

### **The results demonstrate cultural and design differences identified between Yingge masks and other traditional masks in terms of aesthetics, adaptability, and market potential**

The unique graphic symbols and color schemes of the Yingge facial makeup have significant cultural symbolism in the Chaoshan region, reflecting the historical background and religious beliefs of the region. The common red, black, and white colors in facial patterns correspond to the traditional virtues of loyalty, bravery, and wisdom in Chaoshan culture, while exaggerated facial lines in facial patterns express character traits and reinforce cultural memory. These features are not only artistic expressions, but also a medium for the people of Chaoshan region to strengthen community identity in ceremonies, highlighting the importance of Yingge face masks as intangible cultural heritage.

We should strengthen the protection and inheritance of these intangible cultural heritages, integrate them into contemporary social production and life practices through productive protection and utilization, and enhance the economic value and social influence of intangible cultural heritages.

### **Artistic innovation in cross-cultural acceptance and reinterpretation**

The survey shows that international audiences have shown a strong interest in the exaggerated, bright colors, and complex patterns of Yingge masks, especially in terms of their curiosity and recognition of traditional symbols and cultural significance. It can be reproduced and applied through international exhibitions and performances, enhancing the attractiveness of facial makeup by integrating modern design techniques with traditional Chinese culture, and establishing its unique position on the international stage.

### **Comparative analysis with traditional masks from other regions**

The Yingge opera masks have different aesthetic and cultural connotations from Japanese Noh drama masks, Italian Venetian masks, and others. Compared to the simplicity and symbolism of Noh drama masks, Yingge masks place more emphasis on visual impact and emotional expression; Unlike the decorative nature of Venetian masks, Yingge opera masks are more functional and ceremonial, expressing the unique religious and ethical values of the Chaoshan region. This comparative analysis shows that the graphic design of Yingge masks is not only the application of artistic techniques, but also a reflection of cultural identity. Through the comparative study of masks in different regions, its unique value can be discovered in cross-cultural contexts.

### **Redesign of Face Masks in Modern Application Scenarios**

In modern design practice, the elements of Yingge facial makeup are widely used in fields such as fashion, packaging, and cultural and creative products, demonstrating their adaptability and design extensibility. Especially in the cultural and creative industry, the combination of Yingge facial makeup's graphic symbols and modern aesthetics endows these cultural and creative products with rich cultural connotations and historical heritage, which helps to inherit and protect Yingge facial makeup. This result indicates that through the redesign of facial symbols, Yingge facial makeup has achieved the transformation from traditional art to modern cultural and creative products, promoting the sustained dissemination of cultural heritage in contemporary society.

## **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

This paper reveals the diversity of masks in different cultures and their profound historical backgrounds through a comparative study of Chaozhou Yingge masks and masks from other regions. Yingge masks are not only an important component of traditional art in the Chaozhou region but also symbolize the cultural identity and social values of the area. By analyzing their

design features, cultural functions, and social impacts, this paper emphasizes the significance of Yingge masks in the protection and transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

The study shows that masks, as cultural media, not only carry historical memories and regional characteristics but also inspire new vitality in contemporary art and design. In the face of the challenges posed by globalization and cultural integration, the protection and innovative development of Chaozhou Yingge masks are particularly important. Future research should continue to focus on the transmission and transformation of mask culture, exploring their applications and values in modern society to promote the sustained prosperity of local culture. In summary, this research provides theoretical support for a deeper understanding of Chaozhou Yingge dance and its masks, while also offering new perspectives and ideas for the development of cultural creative industries related to intangible cultural heritage. It is hoped that this study will stimulate more scholars and practitioners to pay attention to and explore mask culture, contributing to cultural diversity and artistic innovation.

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