

Cultural Representation of Anshun Dixi Opera in the Context of Tunpu Culture

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Abstract

Anshun Dixi, a form of traditional opera, is one of the most dynamic and characteristic representations of *Tunpu* culture in Anshun City, Guizhou Province, China. In order to clarify in what ways things observed in *Anshun Dixi* bring meanings, this article applies Hall's (1997) cultural representation theory to comprehensively explain the cultural symbols in the music, dance, script, costume props, and rituals of *Anshun Dixi*. This study found that, in the unique *Tunpu* cultural context, under the operation of the representation system, the cultural symbols of *Dixi* have been given special meanings. Anshun Dixi redefines *Tunpu* culture by explicating the aspects of the migration history and the military-influenced lifestyle of *Tunpu* people and how worship is practiced in the *Tunpu* community.

Keywords: *Tunpu* culture, *Anshun Dixi*, cultural representation, meaning, symbol

Introduction

There are many ways of cultural transmission, from the smoke and totems in ancient times to the current text and language, the transmission of culture has never stopped. In the course of human history, symbols are the embodiment of culture. In a sense, the creation of culture is the creation of symbols. A sign's primary function is to represent and the reason a sign is created is to convey a specific meaning. Culture is a human behaviour that uses signs and symbols to convey meaning (Zhao, 2017). The ability of signs to carry culture and establish meaning lies in the functions of signs as a representation system. From the perspective of cultural representation, meaning begins to be transmitted after the representation system produces it. The receiver internalizes the meaning and then transmits it to affect a group or community.

The *Tunpu* (屯堡) people are a particular ethnic group. They are not local aboriginals in Anshun City. In the 14th year of *Hongwu* (洪武, *Hongwu* was the year number of Ming Dynasty (1368~1398CE)), to consolidate the southwest border and suppress the southwest minority's rebellion against the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuangzhang (朱元璋, the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty) sent 300, 000 troops to Yunnan and Guizhou provinces. The army gathered around Anshun and built Anshun City. After that, Zhu Yuangzhang forcibly moved the offending officials and businessmen from Jiangxi province, Anhui province, Jiangsu province, and other places to Guizhou to further consolidate the border. In the process of repression, Zhu Yuangzhang found that repression by force alone was not enough, if he wanted to conquer the southwestern region, two methods must be adopted: appeasement and conquest (Shen, 1990a), so he asked many soldiers and their families to live and work with the local people, hoping to achieve emotional harmony and avoid war. Therefore, there are many *Tunpu* villages in Anshun. Names of villages in *Tunpu* often apply a military-related term like *Tun* (屯, a place to store military supplies), *Pu* (堡, fortress), *Guan* (关, pass or checkpoint), *Shao* (哨, military observation position), *Ying* (营, camp), as in Yunshan *Tun* (云山屯, meaning Yunshan village), hence reflecting the military history of the community. The culture formed by the *Tunpu* people in their long-term life is called the *Tunpu* culture, which includes unique clothing, language, architecture, art, belief, folklore, food, etc.

Anshun Dixi (安顺地戏) is a concentrated expression of *Tunpu* art, mainly famous in Pingba, Puding, Zhenning, Changshun County, Guiyang suburbs. Anshun is the most concentrated, so it is often called “*Anshun Dixi*” (Editorial Committee of Chinese Opera, 2000, p.65). *Anshun Dixi* has rich cultural symbols, which show the uniqueness of *Anshun Dixi* in terms of singing styles, dance moves, costume props, scripts and rituals.

The symbol is a crucial subject of cultural studies. Hall's (1997) cultural representation theory is an essential theoretical reference in cultural studies. In this theory, signs are an essential part of the representation system. The constructive approach in representation theory believes that things are meaningless by themselves, and we construct meaning using various representation systems. Hall (1997) believes that there are three ways of representing culture: reflective approach, intentional approach, constructionist approach. Among the three representation methods, Hall emphasized more on the third method. The relation between things, concepts, and signs lies at the heart of meaning. The process that links these three elements together is the representation (Hall, 1997, p. 19). How does *Anshun Dixi* represent a culture, and what does *Anshun Dixi* represent? Based on the third construction method in the cultural representation theory, this article takes the symbols of *Anshun Dixi* as a form of the cultural carrier to explore the cultural representation of *Anshun Dixi*.

Literature Review

Anshun Dixi, an opera genre that was once neglected, became a precious heritage that attracted worldwide attention when it was determined as a “living fossil of opera” in the history of Chinese opera and had significant research values (Shen, 1987). Many experts and scholars had shown interest and published studies on *Anshun Dixi*. Scholarly discussions had mainly focused on the following aspects. 1) The nature of *Anshun Dixi*. Yang (2009) believes that *Anshun Dixi* is a *Nuo* (侗) opera that survives and deve-

lops in an exceptional cultural environment. However, some scholars believe that *Anshun Dixi* belongs to Jun Nuo (军傩) (Ma, 2019). Zhang (2009) believes that *Anshun Dixi* should belong to Nuo Opera and Jun Nuo. 2) The artistic characteristics of *Anshun Dixi*. Wu (2012) has provided unique insights into the gongs and drums of *Anshun Dixi*. Zhang (2009) believes that *Anshun Dixi* derived from another genre called *Yiyangqiang* (弋阳腔). Zhao (2014) mainly studies the singing, lyrics, and the accompaniment of *Dixi*. Chen (2017) conducted a more comprehensive research on the artistic characteristics of *Anshun Dixi* and proposed that *Anshun Dixi* is the result of the introduction of opera into the ceremony. 3) The mask of *Anshun Dixi*. He (2020) mainly researched the artistic characteristics and functions of the mask of *Anshun Dixi*. Ma (2019) analyzed the problems of using the mask elements of Anshun to produce tourism products through field investigation, and proposed some solutions. Liang (2019) used Liuguan village as an example to investigate the artistic characteristics of *Anshun Dixi* masks. Wu (2016) mainly focused on the artistic characteristics and production methods of *Dixi* masks. 4) The transmission and development of *Anshun Dixi*. Some scholars expressed concern about the status quo of *Anshun Dixi*. For example, Huang (2018) mentioned that *Anshun Dixi* is known exclusively by *Tunpu* people even though it had been around for more than 600 years. Wang and Feng (2015) mentioned that *Anshun Dixi* faces the impact of the influx of foreign culture and the cultural bearers are aging. Some proposed an archive-style protection strategy for *Anshun Dixi*. Chen (2015) proposed the use 3D virtual technology to protect the *Anshun Dixi*.

At the same time, many scholars mentioned the importance of the *Anshun Dixi* to *Tunpu* culture. For example, scholars refer to *Dixi* in such as term as *Dixi* is a unique regional cultural phenomenon (Guo, 1997) and has a pivotal position in the hearts of the *Tunpu* people (Huang, 2018). *Dixi* is the most dynamic, distinctive, and humanistic representation of *Tunpu* culture (Wu, 2016). *Dixi* is one of the most typical representatives of *Tunpu* culture (Chen, 2016). Due to the unique history of the formation of the *Anshun Dixi* and its close relationship with the *Tunpu* people, it is often regarded as a symbol of *Tunpu* culture (Chen, 2017). *Anshun Dixi* is an essential part of *Tunpu* culture, and after hundreds of years of transmission, it has gradually become the cultural symbol of the *Tunpu* people (Huang, 2019). *Dixi* is the highlight of *Tunpu* culture and it is the folk art that best represents the thinking and behavior of *Tunpu* people (Yu, Shuai & Liu, 2005).

It can be seen that there is lacking in the literature that looks deeper into the relation between *Anshun Dixi* and the general culture of *Tunpu*. Scrutiny of the musical structure, especially those that apply music transcription, is also rare. Research until now has approached *Anshun Dixi* from the viewpoint of the general culture of *Tunpu* (Shen, 1990a; Gu, 1990) and the viewpoint of stylistic analysis of its performance (Chen 2016, 2017; Wu, 2012). Other literature on *Dixi* is mainly descriptive in nature, usually giving lists of items on a certain aspect of the tradition without in-depth analysis. All literature acknowledges the importance of *Dixi* in representing *Tunpu* culture, but an analytical account on how representation operates has been scarce. This research aims at shading new light on the relationship between *Anshun Dixi* and *Tunpu* culture. Therefore, this article is trying to discuss the following three questions: 1) What are the observable symbols that are applied in the performance of *Anshun Dixi*? 2) What is the meaning being represented through the symbols used in the performance of *Anshun Dixi*? 3) In what ways do things observed in *Anshun Dixi* bring meanings as represen-

tation of *Tunpu* culture? At the same time, the research will provide a case reference for cultural research and Hall's cultural representation theory.

Methodology

This paper is based on ethnomusicological fieldworks applying Hall's cultural representation theory as a scheme for observation. The article first sorts out the various symbols of *Anshun Dixi*, analyzes these symbols, finds out the meaning of each symbol, and then synthesizes the meaning of the symbols to organize the representation system *Anshun Dixi*. In order to find out the symbols of *Anshun Dixi*, the researcher conducted fieldwork during the Spring Festival of 2021 (January 30-February 20, 2021). According to the distribution map of *Anshun Dixi* (see Figure 1), Tianlong village, Jiuxi Village, Fanhua Village, and Guojiatun Village were selected, comprehensively recording the characteristics of *Anshun Dixi* and providing a wealth of symbolic data for this research.



Figure 1. Distribution map of *Anshun Dixi* hand-drawn by Wu Heng based on Shen's (1990b, p.5) distribution map of *Anshun Dixi*.

Symbols of Anshun Dixi

Symbols in music

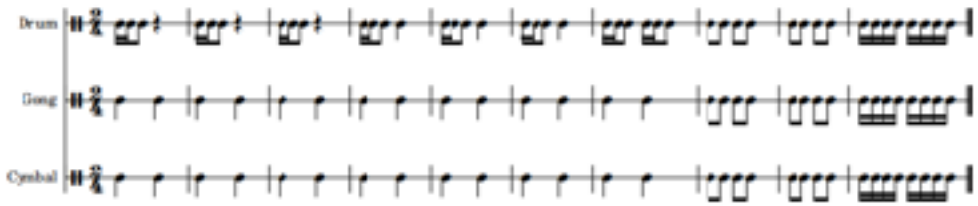
Anshun Dixi is unique in its singing style and musical accompaniment. The *Anshun Dixi* is sung in Anshun local dialect, but the intonation is different from the local *han* (汉) people. *Tunpu* people speak with the *erhuayin* (儿化音, with curling tongues

sounds), which can clearly felt when they sing *Dixi*. The singing style of the *Dixi* is high-pitched and straightforward, and the singing method is quite distinctive, with one lead singer and other actors' accompaniment. The lyrics of the *Dixi* have a structure of upper and lower sentences. When singing a seven-character sentence, one person sings the previous sentence. In the following sentence, the accompaniment actor sings the last three words of the following sentence immediately (see Music example 1). When singing a ten-character sentence, one person sings the previous sentence or the following sentence, and the accompaniment actor immediately sings the last four words of the following sentence. Many performances used only a gong and a Chinese drum for accompaniment, while some had an additional pair of cymbals. The rhythmic patterns of the drum are relatively simple: they utilize eight and sixteenth notes and some dotted rhythm (see Music Example 2 and Example 3), corresponding to the actors' movements. Other musical instruments mainly respond to the movements and play a role in enriching the sound effects.

Excerpts from "san guo yan yi" (三国演义)

The image displays a musical score for excerpts from the Chinese historical novel 'San Guo Yan Yi' (三国演义). The score is written in Western musical notation, featuring a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. It consists of six systems, each with a vocal line (Soprano) and an accompaniment line (Piano). The lyrics are written in Chinese characters below the notes. The first system is labeled 'Lead singer' and 'Lead accompaniment'. The subsequent systems are labeled 'S.1' and 'P.1'. The lyrics for the first system are: 'yifang chu xin xianwan luo juyao chengchen'. The lyrics for the second system are: 'xiu shu wen hu zhong xing douzhuo xi xi'. The lyrics for the third system are: 'huo shi luo shu chen luo chen cheng'. The lyrics for the fourth system are: 'jiu shu wen shu na jiu shu ji shu luo'. The lyrics for the fifth system are: 'sun bu sun lai sheng bu sun sheng bu sun ji bu sheng'. The lyrics for the sixth system are: 'ji bu bu sheng'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Music example 1. Excerpts from *san guo yan yi* (三国演义, Chinese historical novels telling the stories of three countries which is Wei (魏), Shu (蜀), and Wu (吴)) of *Guojiatun Dixi* (Transcribed by Wu Heng).



Music example 2. Instrument Accompaniment of *Chu ma men* (出马门) Movement Routine of *Anshun Dixi* in Fanhua Village, transcribed by Wu Heng

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Drum and Gong. The score is written in a staff with a 2/4 time signature. The Drum part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes. The Gong part has a simpler, more rhythmic pattern with quarter and eighth notes. There is a measure number '24' written above the Drum staff.

Music example 3. Instrument Accompaniment of *Yizitui* (一字腿) Movement Routine of *Anshun Dixi* in Guojiatun village, transcribed by Wu Heng

The use of *erhuayin* is most apparent in the northern regions of China, while certain regions from the South, such as where the Nanjing dialect is spoken, also show an apparent use of *erhuayin*. The use of voice as accompaniment is also a determining feature of another genre called *Yiyangqiang*. The accompaniment of traditional *Yiyangqiang* is only one gong and one Chinese drum. The singing style of *Anshun Dixi* implies its connection with *Yiyangqiang*. *Yiyangqiang* is one of China's ancient operas originating from the Yiyang generation in Jiangxi Province in the early Ming Dynasty. *Yiyangqiang* prevailed during the *Hongwu* period and was probably transmitted to Guizhou when Zhu Yuanzhang sent a corps from Jiangxi to Guizhou. Villagers told several stories about *Tunpu* and *Anshun Dixi*. Chen Xiansong (personal communication, 2021), the national cultural bearer of *Dixi*, said that the ancestors of Tianlong Village were originated from Anhui, Jiangxi, and Nanjing provinces. These ancestors were

composed of four surnames: Zhang, Chen, Shen, and Zheng. *Anshun Dixi* existed a long time ago, and that the entire village would gather and watch *Dixi* during the Spring Festival.

Symbols in the script

The script of *Anshun Dixi* consists of written text but without musical notation. The symbols in scripts refer to the words and theme of the story in the script. According to the preliminary statistic, there are more than 180 units of *Dixi* in Anshun City (Gu, 1990), of which 80% have the same script, and there are 26 operas in total (He, 1980) (see Table 1). The script of *Anshun Dixi* is a narrative rap book. Most are seven-character sentences and ten-character sentences (see Figure 2). The upper and lower sentences adopt rhyming techniques and the content is easy to understand. The text mainly consists of epics of the formal history of nations. Life stories of individuals, as well as love stories, seem beyond the scope of *Anshun Dixi*.

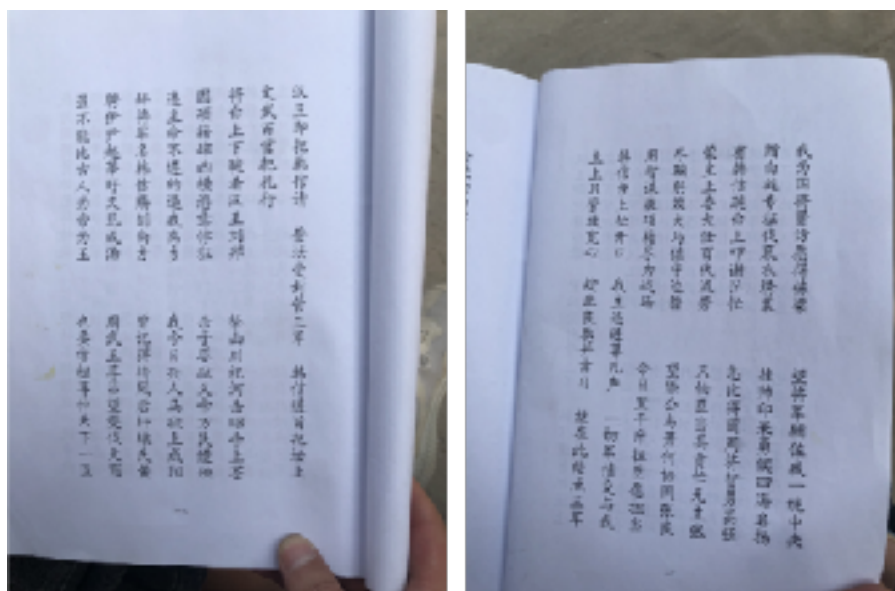


Figure 2. The reorganized scripts of *Anshun Dixi* in Fanhua Village (Photographed by Wu Heng on February 16, 2021)

Table 1

Existing scripts of Anshun Dixi (He, 1980)

Period	Scripts
Shang (商) Dynasty	<i>Feng Shen</i> (封神)
Xizhou (西周) Dynasty	<i>Lie Guo</i> (列国)
Sanguo (三国) Dynasty	<i>San guo</i> (三国)
Tang (唐) Dynasty	<i>Fan Shandong</i> (反山东), <i>Si Ma Zhuo Tang</i> (四马捉唐), <i>Ro tong Sao Bei</i> (罗通扫北), <i>Xue Rengui zheng dong</i> (薛仁贵征东), <i>Xue Dingshan zheng xi</i> (薛丁山征西), <i>Xue Gang fan Tang</i> (薛刚反唐), <i>Fen Zhuang Lou</i> (粉妆楼), <i>Sui tang</i> (隋唐), <i>Huang Chao qi yi</i> (黄巢起义),
Late Tang and Early Song (宋) Dynasty	<i>Er Xia Southern Tang Dynasty</i> (二下南唐), <i>Si Xia nan Tang</i> (四下南唐)
Early Song Dynasty	<i>San Xia He Dong</i> (三下河东), <i>Si Xia He Dong</i> (四下河东), <i>Jing zhong zhuan</i> (精忠传), <i>Wu Hu Ping xi</i> (五虎平西), <i>Er Xia Youzhou</i> (二下幽州), <i>Yang jia jiang</i> (杨家将), <i>Bei song</i> (北宋)
Early Ming (明) Dynasty	<i>Shen Yinglong zheng xi</i> (沈应龙征西), <i>Ying Lie Zhuan</i> (英烈传), (The name of the script is unknown)
Unknown Dynasty	<i>Hei Lei da guan</i> (黑雷打官), <i>Er Zheng Sai Bei</i> (二征赛北)

Epics in *Dixi* reflect the struggle between dynasties across a period of three thousand years. There are filled with praises of generals' spirit of loyalty, filial piety, and righteousness. For the soldiers of *Tunpu*, defending the country is their mission. Although the war has subsided, the stories in the *Dixi* have been passed down. The level of education of the villagers in *Tunpu* Village is not high. However, they are very familiar with the historical stories of dynasty change, and they are familiar with the outstanding achievements of the heroes in history. The *Dixi* performances have brought patriotism to the people of *Tunpu* for generations, reminding their identities and their determination to defend the country.

Symbols in costume props

The symbols in costumes and props are mainly manifested in characteristic costumes, props, and masks. The primary weapons used in the *Dixi* are spear, broadsword, halberds, axes, hammers, swords, etc., all made of wood, which is smaller than real weapons in reality (see Figure 3). The performers wear long gowns and cover their heads with translucent black gauze; however, performers of Fanhua Village use a blue cloth to cover their heads, exposing their eyes and nose (see Figure 4). The mask is not worn on the face but on the forehead. Pheasant tails are inserted on both sides of the mask, a battle skirt around the waist, and some decorations such as purses are tied to the belt. The battle flag behind the actors signifies military command flags. The mili-

tary command flags play the role of giving orders in actual combat. The war flags are inserted in the back when performing *Dixi* gives the actors a sense of bravery.

The mask of *Anshun Dixi* is commonly called *Lianzi* (脸子, face). Masks can be divided according to different roles: these include those of the military generals, veterans, major generals, and female generals. Characters are highlighted by colours, which can be divided into the red mask (loyal and upright), white mask (beautiful and handsome), yellow mask, black mask, pink mask, and green mask (see Figure 5). The eyes of the characters in the *Dixi* masks are large and prominent, and some of the characters' faces are also painted with flowers and plants, and their expressions are hideous, giving people a vicious look. More than four hundred deities are recorded in the *Shanhajjing* (山海经, an ancient book of China, mainly narrating ancient myths and stories, geographical knowledge, etc.), among which human-shaped gods account for 1/4, and non-human-shaped gods account for 3/4 (Huang, 1990). It can be seen from the masks of the *Dixi* that the *Tunpu* people hope to be blessed by gods. Therefore, they use exaggerated techniques to shape the gods in their hearts when portraying the *Dixi* masks.

Masks portray various specific characters in the play; battle skirts, battle flags, weapons, and other equipment vividly reproduced the image of soldiers. When actors put on costumes and masks, they feel like they are the incarnations of gods. Some elder cultural bearers told about some strange occurrence during the performance *Dixi*. Some had issues with their legs as they aged, but when they performed *Dixi*, they felt as if they were healed. They attributed this phenomenon as the blessing of the gods of *Dixi*.



Figure 3. The props of *Anshun Dixi* in Jiuxi Village (Photographed by Wu Heng on February 14, 2021)



Costume of Dixi in Panhua Village

Costume of Dixi in Juxi Village

Costume of Dixi in Juxi Village

Figure 4. The costumes of *Anshun Dixi* (Photographed by Wu Heng in February 2021)

Guan Yu (关羽)

Zhang Fei (张飞)

Zhao Yun (赵云)

Huang Zhong (黄忠)

Figure 5. The Masks of *Anshun Dixi* in *sanguo* (三国) history story in Guojiatun Village (Photographed by Wu Heng on February 16, 2021)

Symbols in dance

In this article, the dance symbols of *Anshun Dixi* include unique performance routines and movements. Unlike professional dancers, the performers' movements are rough, larger in range, and exaggerated. The speed and strength are no longer as if they are acting; they are more like performing martial arts (see Figure 6). Most routines have names, such as Guojiatun *Dixi* routines: *Jiuxiang* (九响), *Diaoqiang* (刁枪), *Daqiang* (打枪), *Ying fengshou* (迎风手), *Yizitui* (一字腿). The main routines used in weapons are *Paoqiang* (抛枪, throwing the spear), *Jiaqiang* (夹枪, holding the spear), *Yaqiang* (压枪, pressing the spear), *Tiaoqiang* (挑枪, picking the spear), *Shuadao* (耍刀, jug-

gling the broadsword), *Jiadao* (架刀, lifting the broadsword), *Jiadao* (夹刀, clamping the broadsword), *Feidao* (飞刀, throwing the broadsword). There is also basic footwork in the display of routines. The footwork mainly includes *Liangbuban* (两步半, two and a half steps), *Xingjunbu* (行军步, marching step), *Canbaibu* (参拜步, worship step), *Nvsuibu* (女碎步, female broken step), *Nandabu* (男大步, male big step) and so on. From the names of these routines and movements, it can be seen that most of the movements in *Anshun Dixi* use weapons, and the main routines and footwork are also closely related to military combat skills. The author guessed that *Tunpu* people initially regarded dancing *Dixi* as one of their methods of exercise and combat. To avoid negligence in combat skills, villagers gathered together to learn martial arts during their leisure time. Aside from using martial arts in the initial mission to suppress local rebels in the Ming dynasty, it had also become a form of recreation and performance. Nevertheless, the violent battle scenes in *Anshun Dixi*'s performances are highly tense in their atmosphere. These unique dance symbols seem to tell the story of the heroic struggle of the *Tunpu* people.



Figure 6. *Dixi* performance in Guojiatun village (Photographed by Wu Heng, taken on February 14, 2021)

Symbols in the rituals

The symbols in the *Anshun Dixi*'s ritual mainly refer to various worship words and worshiped gods. The rituals are accompanied by the performance of *Dixi*, mainly including *Kaixiang* (开箱, opening the box) and *Saochang* (扫场, sweeping the scene). *Kaixiang* is a significant ceremony before the *Dixi* performance. All the masks are placed in a sacred box. When opening the box, no one can touch the mask casually, let alone say inappropriate words or take inappropriate actions. In the fieldwork in Jiuxi Village, I watched the whole process of the *Kaixiang* ritual (see Figure 7). During the *Kaixiang* ritual, an elder Zhu Xingtian recites the opening greetings. The municipal

cultural bearer Zhu Guibao was responsible for lighting the candles. Zhu Guibao lit the candles while Zhu Xingtian recited:

Yi kai tian chang di jiu (一开天长地久, First-opening for long-lasting of heaven and earth);

Er kai di jiu tian chang (二开地久天长, Second-opening for long-lasting of earth and heaven);

San kai san yang kai tai (三开三阳开泰, Third-opening for the coming of good luck);

Si kai si ji fa cai (四开四季发财, Forth-opening for fortune making in all seasons);

Wu kai wu gu feng deng (五开五谷丰登, Fifth-opening for harvest of all crops);

Liu kai liu chu xing wang (六开六畜兴旺, Sixth-opening for poultry health);

Qi kai qi xing gao zhao (七开七星高照, Seventh-opening for longevity, health, luck, wealth, career, culture, and sports);

Ba kai ba fang lai cai (八开八方来财, Eighth-opening for wealth coming from all directions);

Jiu kai jiu chang jiu tian (九开久长久天, Ninth-opening for long-lasting heaven);

Shi kai shi quan shi mei (十开十全十美, Tenth-opening for perfection in everything).



Figure 7. Kaixiang ritual of Jiuxi Village (Photographed by Wu Heng on February 14, 2021)

After the *Kaixiang* ritual, the *Dixi* performance will begin, and the *Saochang* ritual must behold on the day the *Dixi* performance ends (see Figure 8). All the performers dressed in costumes stood on both sides and were presided over by *Dixi* players wearing a monk mask and a *Tudi* (土地, the gods who manage an area) mask. The first two phrases of some half-an-hour-long recitation of *Saochang* in Guojiatun Village on 2021 February 19 were below.

Xin guan fei yan sao chu qu (新冠肺炎扫出去, COVID-19 being swept out),

Pingan jiankan sao jin lai (平安健康扫进来, safely and health being swept in).



Figure 8. The *Saochang* ritual of Guojiatun Village (Photographed by Wu Heng on February 19, 2021)

Tunpu people participate in religious activities with a high frequency. They do not believe in a single religion but have multiple beliefs and worship multiple gods (Wu & Li, 2011). For example, Baotun Village is a typical representative of the *Tunpu* village. The village combines gods, ancestors, and *Tudi* worship through dancing *Dixi* and carrying Wanggong (汪公, real name was Wang Hua (586-649 CE), a minister of the Tang Dynasty, possessed extraordinary military talent and political strategy) to form the belief order of the village (Peng & Zhang, 2011). In the *Dixi* ritual, *Tunpu* people not only worship the gods, but also their ancestors and heroes in history. The significance of these rituals is to pray for good weather, good harvest, peace, and prosperity. It is not easy for *Tunpu* people to survive in a strange place. Perhaps only by relying on worship gods can they give them more comfort.

The Cultural Representation of Anshun *Dixi*

The singing style of *Anshun Dixi* is precisely the same with that of *Yiyangqiang*. The folk songs of other ethnic minority villages in the Anshun area or other local ethnic groups do not have the characteristics of the *Yiyangqiang*; only the *Anshun Dixi* performance is apparent. The singing style is closely related to the soldiers and civilians dispatched to Anshun from Jiangxi, Nanjing, etc. *Erhuayin* also shows that *Tunpu* people are not aboriginal in Anshun. These prove that *Anshun Dixi* resulted from the southern migration of the Ming Dynasty. The singing style, clothing, and intonation of *Anshun Dixi* represent the migration history of the *Tunpu* people.

The theme in the *Dixi* script is all military battle stories of past dynasties. The *Dixi* costumes first used the military uniforms of the Ming Dynasty. Later, the costumes were gradually civilianized, but some elements of the military uniforms were still retained (Gu, 1990). The *Dixi* costumes are simplified military uniforms, and most action routines of *Dixi* are coordinated with weapons and tools. It is intended to show that *An-*

shun Dixi tells historical military events, shows reverence to the *Tunpu* ancestors, and demonstrates the determination to defend the Ming Dynasty. The performance's theme, clothing, weapons and tools, mask, actions, and routines symbols of these images represent the military-influenced lifestyle of *Tunpu* people.

In addition to some performance elements, the rituals of *Anshun Dixi* reflect the beliefs of the *Tunpu* people. The *Kaixiang* and *Saochang* rituals centered on themes of harvest, health, and prosperity, showing *Tunpu* people's yearning for a better life. The worship of the *Tunpu* people is multifaceted, and the *Tunpu* people worship gods and their ancestors and heroes in war. In the final analysis, these rituals are the psychological appeal of the *Tunpu* people. The worship words and worshiped gods of the ritual represent the *Tunpu* people's spirituality in worship.

The process of cultural representation can be understood as: representing something through language, words, and symbols and generating specific cultural meaning and value concepts related to the thing (see Figure 9). The music, dance, script, costume props, rituals of *Anshun Dixi* are "things", *Yiyangqiang*, *Erhuayin*, movement, routines, words and themes in the script, weapons and tools, mask, clothing, worship words and gods are "symbols". Symbols represent these things and finally produce a specific "meaning" that includes spirituality in worship, migration history, and the military-influenced lifestyle of *Tunpu* people.

There is no direct connection between things and meaning. In the representation system, symbols are an essential medium for things and meaning. However, the signs of things can have different meanings in different contexts. Suppose the costumes and props of *Dixi* do not have the particular context of *Tunpu* culture. In that case, likely, people will regard the costumes and props as ordinary opera costumes. However, combined with the context of *Tunpu* culture, these symbols are linked to the identity of *Tunpu* people and give special meaning.

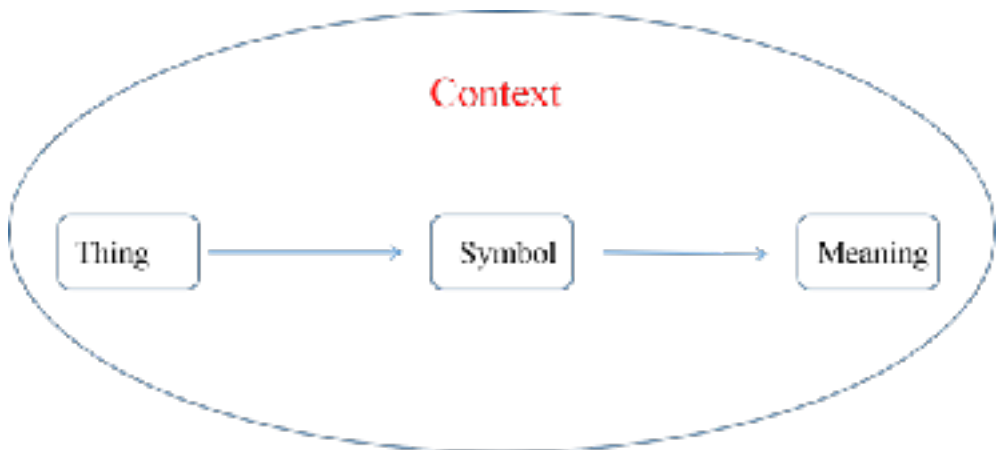


Figure 9: The process of cultural representation

Discussion and conclusion

This study found that *Anshun Dixi* is a comprehensive art form that combines music, dance, historical narratives, and spirituality. Cultural symbols abound in *Anshun Dixi* in its music, dance, script, costumes, and rituals, these include, among others, the use of *Yiyangqiang* and *Erhuayin* in singing, the unique dance movement and routines, the military-style costumes, weapons, masks, story themes, and the text of recitation in rituals. Besides characterizing *Anshun Dixi*, these symbols tell about certain facets of *Tunpu* culture itself. At the same time, a particular context or discourse, that is the discourse of *Tunpu* culture, is the prerequisite for the interpretation of the symbols observed in the performing tradition. The particularity of *Tunpu* culture accords meanings to the symbols of *Anshun Dixi* that is uniquely *Tunpu*. We argue that *Anshun Dixi* redefines *Tunpu* culture by explicating the aspects of the migration history and the military-influenced lifestyle of *Tunpu* people, as well as the way worship is being practiced in the *Tunpu* community.

The data of this study comes from the firsthand experience in observing the tradition of *Dixi* being practiced in the *Tupu* communities. Our application of Hall's theory of cultural representation in this paper remains at a stage of identifying the cultural symbols and the possible meaning associated with them. We believe that by having depicted the many possible links between the things and meaning, or in actual linking the many observable items in a performing tradition to the general culture of the people, is a step further into the insights of *Anshun Dixi*. Further analysis using cultural representation may involve the identification of the subject, one of the key concepts in Hall's theory. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper as current literature about *Anshun Dixi* has not provided sufficient details of the performing tradition in actuality. Further study could examine how the cultural bearers themselves derive meanings from *Anshun Dixi*, and depict with more detail how the four items of context, things, symbols, and meaning operate in sustaining the tradition as a form of intangible cultural heritage.

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