

Nüshu: Scripting Women's Empowerment and Cultural Legacy in Chinese Society

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This paper aims to investigate the empowering role of Nushu for women. Nushu, a unique script centered around women, holds significant importance in reshaping the history of Chinese women. The first section provides an overview of Nushu, underscoring its distinctive characteristics and delving into the socio-cultural contexts crucial for its emergence and evolution. The second section critically examines the profound implications Nushu has for women, connecting it with the wider discourse of feminism. The paper seeks to highlight Nushu's role as a medium for women's empowerment, illustrating how it serves as a tool for women to actively script their own destinies. Through the use of Nushu, women become protagonists in shaping their narratives and asserting their identities. To elucidate these insights, the paper will include specific examples such as articles or songs composed in Nushu, providing a concrete demonstration of the script's cultural and historical significance.

Nushu [1] is an ancient script traditionally used by women in Jiangyong County, Yongzhou City, Hunan Province, China, thus earning its name "Nushu," meaning women's script. The emergence and development of Nushu are closely linked to the education of women in traditional Chinese Confucian culture. The paper explores how Nushu emerged as a language embodying unique feminine beauty within feudal China. The earliest known instance of Nushu dates back to a copper coin from the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom period.

The distinctive feature of Nushu lies in its character shape [2]. The strokes are rounded, smooth, and predominantly small and delicate, aligning with the Confucian concept of women's education that emphasizes the cultivation of female characteristics. This education, while prescribing sensibility and family contribution for women, also allowed space for women's self-development and emotional expression. Nushu functioned not just as a script but also as a means of emotional communication among women, enabling them to express their innermost feelings and share life experiences. For instance, the paper references the article "Practice and Cultural Politics of 'Women's Script'", which discusses how a Nushu user named Bamboo used the script as a form of expression to convey her inner turmoil and critique of the patriarchal society. This use of Nushu illustrates its capacity to forge emotional connections among women and its unique feminine aesthetic.

Moreover, the paper discusses the inextricable link between Nushu and the flexible education of women in traditional Chinese Confucian culture. This form of education served as the foundation for the emergence of Nushu, which, in turn, became a written manifestation of this educational ethos. Nushu [3] extended beyond a mere communication tool, serving as a platform for women's empowerment, facilitating their expression, challenging patriarchal norms, enhancing their self-confidence and esteem, and contributing to the preservation of women's cultural heritage.

Nushu, a script that is passed down only among women, challenges traditional customs and old rites. In feudal society, women were often regarded as appendages of men. They are the product of the strategy of restricting thoughts and lacking independent personality, while the emergence of Nushu is that women can freely express their thoughts and emotions, ideals and pursuits. The appearance of words often represents a new beginning. Just as the invention of the world's first cuneiform script by the Sumerians marked a major turning point in ancient Mesopotamian civilization. As an important tool for transmitting knowledge and information between women, Nushu not only enhances women's social status, but also helps to promote women's liberation and social progress. In terms of cultural resistance, Nushu fights in her own unique way. The existence of Nushu is a favorable resistance to the idea of male superiority and female inferiority in traditional culture, and represents women's insistence and struggle for their own rights. It has important significance for breaking gender discrimination and gender inequality. In general, Nushu challenged the patriarchal system and won more respect and rights for women with her unique way of rich feminine delicate emotions.

Nushu as an ancient writing system, its existence itself is a bridge between history and modern. When Nushu was first broadcast by China Central Television in 1986, it quickly attracted wide attention from the international

community. Scholars from the United States, Japan, France, Canada and other countries have visited China to study Nushu. This also made the influence of Nushu gradually expanded. Over the next twenty-four years, more and more young Chinese people learned about and began to learn Nushu. In 2010, Jiangyong County, the birthplace of Nushu, officially awarded Zhou Huijuan, Pu Lijuan and Hu Xin the title of "successors of Nushu". This further promoted the protection and inheritance of Nushu. On a global scale, the discovery of nushu has also received attention. American linguist Harry Norman praised the female book as an amazing discovery in the world. In addition, many scholars have created a lot of literary works and cultural and creative products with Nushu as the material, which also makes the study of Nushu more popular in Europe and America.

Hailed as the only female writing in the world, Nushu gradually developed its own unique shape and meaning over time. Nushu is not only a kind of writing, but also a cultural phenomenon, reflecting the life status, emotional expression and social relations of female groups. Yang Huanyi, a rural woman from Hunan who could not read modern Chinese characters, took the podium at the World Conference on Women in 1995 and won the respect and recognition of women around the world with her local accent and simple expression. Her story reflects the female users' desire for self-expression and books as a kind of emotional catharsis window function [4]. In addition, He Jinghua is a descendant of Nushu, she learned female songs from her aunt, and expressed her pain for the loss of her son by crying, breathing, singing and writing. In this way, the He Jinghua not only express the miserable fate of the individual, is also seeking a self talk and emotional communication of the outside world, to find the spiritual solace [5]. Nushu is not only a kind of writing, but also a tool for cultural inheritance and emotional expression. When facing the difficulties and challenges of life, users of Nushu can express their emotions, seek comfort, and even change their living conditions through Nushu. In addition, the book is also a sign of a women's independence, it represents the female pursuit for self-expression and self-fulfilling [6].

In general, Nushu is not only a carrier of women's emotions, aspirations and life experiences, but also a symbol of women's independence and bravery. Through specific case studies, we can have a deeper understanding of the specific application and far-reaching significance of Nushu in women's lives.

As a unique cultural heritage, Nushu also reflects the limitations and possibilities of female education in Chinese society. In traditional Chinese society, female education is often severely restricted. Due to gender biases and restrictions in society, women have relatively few opportunities for formal education. Even today, there are many women who are still influenced by this kind of thinking. For example, many women are influenced by the traditional concept of career choice, thinking that women's responsibility and obligation is to take care of their husband and children, so they will choose to engage in relatively easy jobs or even choose to be a housewife. And there are also great limitations in the choice of work. They often think they are not suited to high-tech careers such as science fiction. In this environment, Nushu became a tool for women to find space for self-expression in a restricted educational environment. Many modern women also find themselves in the study of female books. Although the opportunity for women to receive education in traditional society is limited, the existence and development of Nushu provides the possibility for women to explore. Nushu as a unique gender vocabulary, its existence itself is a challenge and breakthrough to female education [7]. Nu shu is not only a language tool, but also a way of cultural inheritance, it helps women in traditional culture find space for self expression.[8] In modern society, the meaning of Nushu has gone beyond mere written records. It has become a cultural heritage and plays an important role in promoting women's education and rights. In the script book, for example, has been listed as a literature heritage, China's hunan province top ten national folk cultural heritage, the guinness book of world records, the national first batch of intangible cultural heritage list. These measures are not only conducive to protecting and inheriting the Nushu culture, but also conducive to improving the status of women in society and promoting the progress of female education. In general, as a unique cultural heritage, Nushu not only reflects the limitations and possibilities of female education in traditional Chinese society, but also promotes the progress and development of female education to a certain extent. Through Nushu, we can see how women find themselves in difficulties and how to find the space of self-expression in traditional culture, which provides us with valuable perspective and inspiration to understand and study female education.

In the digital age, there are many ways to preserve and pass on this unique cultural heritage. First of all, digital archiving is an important means to protect Nushu. Through high-precision scanning and digital technology, Nushu documents, works and other materials can be processed electronically to ensure that they are not affected by time and physical conditions. In addition, online databases or digital libraries can be established so that more people can easily access and learn Nushu. Secondly, the use of modern information technologies, such as mobile applications, interactive websites and social media platforms, can promote the study and use of Nushu. The development of specialized educational software, combined with gamified learning, can attract the younger generation to learn

Nushu, thus achieving cross-generation dissemination. Thirdly, the inheritance of Nushu can also be achieved through art and creative industries. For example, integrating Nushu elements into design, fashion, handicrafts, etc., can not only increase the popularity of Nushu, but also bring new growth points to the local economy. Nushu could play an important role in the global feminist conversation. As a writing system created and used by women, Nushu itself is the embodiment of women's strength and independence. It can become a symbol of women's rights, self-expression and cultural identity around the world. Through international exchange and cooperation programs, Nushu can be introduced to feminists around the world, serving as a bridge for cross-cultural communication and female empowerment. In short, the future development of Nushu requires a combination of traditional preservation and modern innovation, while also actively participating in cultural and feminist dialogue on a global scale to ensure that this unique cultural heritage is effectively passed on and its value in contemporary society.

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