

# Analysis of Minority Cultures from the Perspective of Language and Literature

*Yang Zongji*

Southwest Minzu University, a. School of Chinese Language and Literature; b. Chinese Minority Languages and Literatures (Tibetan Language and Literature), Chengdu 610041

2674303594@qq.com

**Abstract.** This paper analyzes minority cultures from the perspective of language and literature, exploring the cultural connotations and the inheritance and development within minority languages and literature. By examining the intrinsic connections between language and culture, it reveals the cultural concepts and ways of thinking embedded in minority languages. Through the interpretation of minority literary works, it demonstrates their role as cultural carriers and their unique methods of cultural expression. Furthermore, it discusses the importance and strategies of minority language literature in cultural inheritance and development.

**Keywords:** minority, language and literature, cultural analysis, cultural inheritance

## 1. Introduction

As an essential component of China's diverse culture, minority cultures possess rich histories and unique cultural connotations. Language and literature serve as crucial carriers of minority cultures, enabling a deep understanding and transmission of these cultures. This paper aims to analyze the uniqueness and significant value of minority cultures from the perspective of language and literature, and to explore the paths for their transmission and development in modern society.

## 2. The Significance of Studying Minority Languages and Literature

Studying minority languages and literature holds both important theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, language and literature are vital carriers and expressions of ethnic culture. Research on minority languages and literature helps to deeply explore and interpret the connotations of ethnic culture, enrich and develop cultural theory, and provide references for cross-cultural communication and mutual learning among civilizations. Practically, enhancing the study of minority languages and literature contributes to the protection and transmission of minority linguistic and cultural heritage, maintains cultural diversity, promotes cultural exchanges and mutual learning among various ethnic groups, strengthens national unity, and safeguards national integrity. Additionally, leveraging the charm and influence of language and literature can better promote and showcase minority cultures, increase their social recognition and status, and foster economic development and social progress in ethnic regions.

## 3. Analysis of Minority Cultures from a Linguistic Perspective

### 3.1. The Intrinsic Connection Between Language and Culture

There is an intrinsic connection between language and culture. Language is an essential component of ethnic culture, serving as both a carrier and an expression of culture. Conversely, language is profoundly influenced and constrained by culture, encompassing rich cultural connotations at the levels of vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics. As a tool for human activities and interactions, language facilitates the expression, accumulation, and dissemination of cultural concepts and ways of thinking. Therefore, language records and reflects various aspects of a culture, including customs, values, and aesthetic preferences, making it a vital and dynamic expression of culture. By analyzing the characteristics of a language, one can uncover the cultural concepts and ways of thinking of the people who speak it, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of their cultural connotations.

### 3.2. 2. The Cultural Connotations of Minority Languages

#### 3.2.1. *Cultural Concepts Embedded in Words*

Words, as the fundamental units of language, are significant carriers of cultural concepts. For example, the Tibetan word “转经” (circumambulation) refers to the act of walking clockwise around prayer flags, embodying the religious cultural connotations of Buddhism. The Uyghur word “巴扎” (bazaar) refers to a market, reflecting the commercial cultural tradition of a people who love trading. While summarizing the characteristics of objects, words also encapsulate the spiritual pursuits and value orientations of a culture. Analyzing the cultural connotations embedded in words provides insight into the cultural ideas and wisdom accumulated through the practical experiences of a people.

#### 3.2.2. *Thinking Patterns Reflected in Grammar*

Grammatical rules reflect a people’s logical thinking and cognitive style. Due to differences in living environments and historical traditions, different ethnic groups exhibit distinct thinking patterns. For example, Mongolian syntax emphasizes the expression of time and tense, indicating the nomadic people’s high regard for the passage of time. The Buyi language uses a plethora of onomatopoeic words, highlighting their humanistic approach to perceiving the world. The grammatical structure and usage of a language mirror the unique cognitive habits and thinking patterns of a people, showcasing their cultural wisdom. Studying the grammatical phenomena and characteristics of minority languages is highly beneficial for uncovering their cognitive cultural connotations.

### 3.3. The Cultural Value of Minority Languages

Minority languages carry rich cultural connotations and possess significant cultural value. Firstly, every minority language is a treasure of human civilization, documenting unique cultural wisdom and constituting an integral part of the world’s diverse cultures. Secondly, the cultural connotations of minority languages can offer valuable insights and inspirations for addressing contemporary social issues, such as environmental protection and interpersonal relationships. Thirdly, protecting minority languages helps maintain linguistic and cultural diversity, promotes the pluralistic development of world culture, and enhances mutual understanding and respect among different cultures. Lastly, strengthening research on minority languages can enrich and advance the theories in linguistics and cultural studies, fostering academic innovation and cultural transmission.

## 4. Interpretation of Minority Cultures from a Literary Perspective

### 4.1. Cultural Carriers in Minority Literary Works

#### 4.1.1. *Ethnic Spiritual Pursuits*

Minority literary works are significant cultural carriers that reflect the spiritual pursuits of ethnic groups. Throughout their long histories, each ethnic group has developed unique spiritual outlooks and cultural concepts, which are embodied in their literary works, forming the spiritual core of these works. For example, the Uyghur spirit can be summarized as “self-reliance and bravery in battle.” In the famous Uyghur epic poem “Manas,” the poet praises the heroic collective resistance of the Saifuding folk heroes, celebrating the unyielding and fearless spirit of the Uyghur people. The work is imbued with national pride and heroism, reflecting the spirit of self-reliance and determination of the Uyghur people. Similarly, Dai literature is deeply rooted in the unique spiritual pursuits of the Dai people. In the novel “The Son of the Chapei River,” the author vividly portrays Feng Chu, a Dai youth full of patriotism and a fearless pursuit of truth. Despite living in a small fishing village, Feng Chu harbors grand ideals of serving his country, and his unwavering spirit in the face of adversity conveys the “diligence, bravery, and reason” of the Dai people. Hence, whether it is heroic valor or humanistic concern, a love for freedom, or patriotic fervor, minority literary works embody the unique spiritual pursuits of their respective ethnic groups, serving as a significant literary form that showcases the spiritual core of their cultures.

#### 4.1.2. *Life Customs and Traditions*

Minority literary works are also cultural carriers that reflect the customs and traditions of daily life. Due to differences in geographic environments and cultural beliefs, different ethnic groups have developed unique ways of life and festive customs, which are subtly integrated into their literary works. For instance, the Yi people have the “Sani” custom, where parents give a handmade apron to their daughter upon her marriage, symbolizing their blessings for her new family. The Yi writer Ashima vividly portrays this custom in her novel “Sani.” Through the depiction of the bride-to-be Qiuni sewing the Sani apron and the warm scenes of family members helping each other, the novel showcases the simplicity, mutual assistance, and genuine nature of Yi life,

reflecting the Yi family customs <sup>[1]</sup>. The Blang people have a traditional festival called “Sea Worship,” an essential annual event for coastal fishing villages to pray for a bountiful harvest. In the novelist Ali Jüli’s work “The Daughters of Fisherman,” the sea worship ceremony is vividly depicted, with men, women, and children dancing the ancient whale dance, children beating fish-shell drums, and the ritual permeated with the Blang people’s reverence and gratitude towards the sea. The work realistically presents the close relationship between the Blang people and nature, conveying their maritime customs. Korean literature has also depicted many simple, kind, diligent, and hardworking Korean farmers, portraying their love for labor and diligent farming lifestyle. In summary, minority literature emphasizes reflecting the authenticity of life, and the various festive activities, production scenes, and character portrayals interwoven in the works reflect the unique customs and traditions of each ethnic group, becoming a crucial form of cultural carrier for their cultures.

#### 4.1.3. *Values and Beliefs*

Minority literary works deeply reflect the values and belief systems of an ethnic group. Through long-term living practices, different ethnic groups have developed unique value concepts and belief systems. These cultural cores are highly summarized and sublimated in minority literature and art, making them essential forms of cultural transmission. For instance, the Hezhe people follow Bhagavad Buddhism, and their religious rituals and prayers embody a reverence for life and a harmonious coexistence with nature. In the novel “The Path of Rebirth” by the renowned Hezhe writer Gelsang Wangdui, the story of a young monk who falls from grace due to his attachment to worldly benefits truthfully conveys the Buddhist concept of karma, highlighting the value of spiritual transcendence over material desires <sup>[2]</sup>. Through the artistic portrayal of the characters’ fates, the novel reveals the wisdom inherent in Hezhe religious beliefs. The Shui people, in addition to Islam, retain indigenous shamanistic beliefs, which are prominently reflected in the Quran. This work depicts the gods, shamans, and hero figures among the nomadic tribes, emphasizing the Shui people’s reverence for nature and their admiration for bravery and kindness. The various deities and hero figures in the work symbolize the traditional beliefs and virtues of the Shui people, representing their valuable spiritual heritage. Furthermore, works by Hui writers prominently feature the profound influence of Islamic culture on the values and life principles of Muslims. Through the actions and behaviors of the characters, these works promote values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and mutual assistance. In summary, whether it is religious or folk beliefs, value concepts, or life philosophies, all are integrated into the excellent literary works of minority groups, becoming vital forms of cultural transmission.

### 4.2. Cultural Expressions in Minority Literature

#### 4.2.1. *Choice of Themes and Content*

Minority literature often closely ties its themes and content to the unique cultural characteristics of the ethnic group, thus reflecting and preserving their distinct cultural concepts and spiritual outlook. Ethnic historical themes are a significant source of content for minority literature, with many writers depicting the historical vicissitudes and heroic struggles of their people. For example, Yi writer Akeremu’s novel “The Blood Road” describes the Yi people’s brave resistance and struggle for survival under ethnic oppression. The work, with its realistic and objective style, vividly portrays the indomitable fighting spirit of ethnic heroes, highlighting the Yi people’s resilience, self-reliance, and patriotism in their struggle against oppression. Ecological themes also feature prominently in minority literature, reflecting the unique ecological wisdom developed by ethnic groups living in natural environments for generations <sup>[3]</sup>. For instance, the She writer Zheng Guiyou’s novella “Lao San’s Beehive” revolves around the She tradition of beekeeping, meticulously depicting traditional beekeeping techniques and the symbiotic relationship between She villages and nature. The novel is imbued with the She people’s love for nature and their ecological philosophy of harmonious coexistence, conveying valuable ecological cultural concepts. Family life and ethnic customs are also common themes in minority literature. Miao writer Li Lusheng’s “Sameiya” series of novels portrays the daily life and customs of a typical Miao village, intricately depicting various aspects of Miao farming, ancestor worship, and festivals, thus reflecting the Miao people’s simplicity, kindness, and mutual assistance.

#### 4.2.2. *Use of Artistic Forms*

In terms of artistic forms, minority literature also presents a rich diversity, creating multiple genres that showcase the unique charm of ethnic cultures. The Uyghur poet Gulibahar’s poem “The Suppressed Road” uses abundant ethnic imagery and distinct artistic techniques to display the resilience and love of freedom characteristic of the Uyghur people <sup>[4]</sup>. The Buyi poet Ge Renci’s long poem “Remembering Guilin” employs highly lyrical language to praise the grandeur of the Guilin landscape and the unique Buyi culture. These poetic works, whether expressing patriotic feelings or singing about the beauty of the homeland, vividly embody the spiritual sentiments of ethnic cultures. Prose, as a literary form that records and interprets life details, is filled with the simplicity and purity, and love for nature of minority writers. The Lisu writer Aniu’s prose collection “The Height of Life” depicts the scenery of the Yunnan mountains with a unique artistic perspective, incorporating the author’s attachment to the land and longing for rural life. The Tujia writer Zhang Jiajie’s prose collection “My Tujia Town” uses gentle and moving strokes to describe the scenes of

hometown life and folk customs, poetically showcasing the folk culture of the Tujia people. Minority folktales and myths are also widely incorporated into contemporary literary creations. The Zhuang writer Ma Chengyuan's novel "Nu Mountain" blends ancient Zhuang myths and heroic epics, telling the story of the Zhuang people's struggles against foreign invaders. The rich mythological elements infuse the literary work with an exotic flavor.

## 5. Cultural Transmission and Development of Minority Languages and Literature

Language and literature are the most important carriers and expressions of ethnic culture, embodying the spiritual essence of an entire people. With the progress of the times and the tide of multicultural integration, effectively inheriting and developing the cultural connotations and values of minority languages and literature has become a significant issue that requires examination and reflection. Efforts should be intensified to protect minority languages and literature by systematically organizing and publishing corpora of minority languages, compiling extensive language materials, and collecting and documenting historical documents, narrative poems, folk legends, and other outstanding literary works on-site. Establishing comprehensive digital archives is fundamental to preserving the treasure trove of ethnic language and literature. Additionally, it is crucial to place a high priority on protecting intangible cultural heritage by implementing rescue measures for languages and literature on the brink of extinction to prevent irreparable loss of precious linguistic and cultural heritage. Only by effectively safeguarding these elements can we lay a solid foundation for the transmission of linguistic culture [5].

Innovating and developing the forms of expression of minority languages and literature, keeping pace with the times, and ensuring widespread dissemination are also essential. In contemporary society, emerging cultural forms such as online literature and new media films and television are highly dynamic, and minority literature should actively embrace these new forms to attract the younger generation's attention. For instance, creating online novels based on minority myths or adapting them into animations and TV series can be effective. Utilizing short videos and live streaming to vividly showcase ethnic cultural charm is another approach. Simultaneously, it is important to discover and cultivate talents in minority languages and literature, encouraging the creation of excellent works with ethnic characteristics and continuously innovating forms of expression. This will enable minority languages and literature to thrive continuously.

Enhancing the research and education of minority languages and literature is crucial for supporting ethnic cultural transmission. Universities can establish related language and literature programs, offering courses such as Introduction to Uyghur Language and Literature and Miao Literature, to cultivate interdisciplinary talents and provide intellectual support for the development of minority languages and literature. At the primary education level, students should be taught their mother tongue and exposed to excellent literary works to familiarize them with their linguistic and cultural heritage from a young age. Promoting interdisciplinary research is also important, encouraging experts in linguistics, anthropology, folklore, and other disciplines to contribute to the study of minority languages and literature, thereby deeply exploring the cultural connotations embedded in ethnic languages and literature from multiple perspectives.

## 6. Conclusion

By analyzing minority languages and literature, we can better understand the rich connotations and unique values of minority cultures. In the process of globalization and modernization, protecting and inheriting minority languages and literature is crucial for maintaining cultural diversity and promoting social harmony. In the future, we should continue to engage in in-depth research and innovative practices to promote the flourishing development of minority languages and literature.

## References

- [1] Song, Y., & Guo, F. (2015). The translation of minority cultures under the perspective of "cultural translation." *Guizhou Ethnic Studies*, 36(4), 4. DOI: CNKI:SUN.0.2015-04-023.
- [2] Zhu, H. (2011). *A comparative study of Chinese minority literature in Chinese and Chinese American literature in English (1978-2010)* [Doctoral dissertation, Central University for Nationalities].
- [3] Yang, Y. (2018). Heterotopia and the "Western Eye": The spatial representation of Chinese minority images. *Studies of Ethnic Literature*, (5), 10. DOI: CNKI:SUN.0.2018-05-002.
- [4] Li, M. (2011). *Cross-cultural writing: A study of the minority-themed novels by Han Chinese writer Chi Zijian* [Doctoral dissertation, Central University for Nationalities].
- [5] Xiao, J., & Liu, H. (2011). The protection of minority languages in the protection of intangible cultural heritage. *Heilongjiang Ethnic Series*, (4), 140-145.