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**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION ON THE CULTURE OF
ETHNIC MINORITIES IN YUNNAN: A COMPREHENSIVE
REVIEW**

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Abstract:

Yunnan Province is located on the southwestern border of China and boasts a rich multicultural heritage. In this land full of mystery and vitality, 25 ethnic minorities, including the Yi, Bai, and Dai, have developed their unique languages, scripts, attire, architecture, music, dance, and customs throughout its extensive history (Huang Qinghuai & Guo Zhongping, 2016). Ethnographic observations of Yunnan's ethnic minorities aim to comprehensively understand and reveal various aspects of their history, geography, cultural essence, and interethnic relationships. Ethnographic observation serves as the foundation and methodology of ethnology, systematically collecting, organizing, and analyzing information regarding the traditional cultures, social organizations, and ways of life of Yunnan's ethnic minorities, providing valuable data for future academic research (Ma Jiayang et al., 2010). Ethnographic observation unveils the essence and uniqueness of Yunnan's ethnic minority cultures, promoting understanding and respect for multiculturalism, and fostering cultural exchange and integration among different ethnic groups (Li Mingyi et al., 2018). Ultimately, ethnographic observation is crucial for the preservation and inheritance of Yunnan's ethnic minority cultural heritage, contributing to the protection and dissemination of valuable cultural assets and driving sustainable development of the local economy (Wang Hong, 2020).

Keywords:

Ethnographic Observation, Culture, Ethnic Minorities

Introduction

Yunnan Province is located on the southwestern border of China, between 21°8'N to 29°15'N latitude and 97°31'E to 106°11'E longitude, with a total area of 394,100 square kilometers, accounting for 4.1% of the total land area of the country, ranking eighth nationwide (Li Hua, 2018). It is bordered by Guizhou and Guangxi to the east, Sichuan to the north, Tibet to the northwest, Myanmar to the west, and Laos and Vietnam to the south. Yunnan is one of the provinces with the longest border in China, with multiple border counties bordering neighboring countries. The terrain of Yunnan presents a northwest high and southeast low feature, gradually descending in steps from north to south, characterized by mountainous plateau terrain, with mountainous areas accounting for 88.64% of the total area of the province. Yunnan is traversed by six major river systems, including the Jinsha River, Nanpan River, Red River, Lancang River, Nu River, and Daying River. This geographic feature also influences the climate of Yunnan, exhibiting characteristics of subtropical and tropical monsoon climates, while the northwest of Yunnan belongs to the plateau mountain climate. This mountainous and climatically diverse geographical environment has profound implications for the culture and distribution of ethnic groups in Yunnan (Zhao Kai, 2015). Regarding the migration history and formation reasons of ethnic minorities in Yunnan, several factors are worth exploring. Firstly, due to the scarcity of resources in the north, ancient ethnic groups such as the Yi, Bai, Dai, and others migrated southward in search of fertile land for survival and reproduction. Failing in the competition for survival resources, these ethnic groups chose to migrate to remote areas of Yunnan (Wang Zongfu, 2017). In addition, the cultural exchange and integration between the Han Chinese and ethnic minorities in Yunnan throughout history are also significant (Liu Wenjie, 2019), with in-depth research conducted on the cultural exchange and integration between the Han Chinese and ethnic minorities in Yunnan.

In summary, the geographical environment of Yunnan Province provides the foundation for its rich ethnic culture and historical background. The mountainous and climatically diverse characteristics have nurtured diverse ethnic groups and cultures, while historical migrations and integrations of ethnic groups have further enriched the cultural connotations of Yunnan. These factors together constitute the unique and colorful historical background and geographical environment of Yunnan.

Overview of Ethnic Minorities

Yunnan Province is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in China, home to numerous ethnic groups with unique cultural and historical traditions. Below is an overview of the major ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province, including the Yi, Hani, Dai, Bai, and Tibetan ethnic groups.

Yi Ethnic Group:

Population: According to the "China Statistical Yearbook 2021," the population of the Yi ethnic group in China is approximately 9,830,000.

Distribution: The Yi ethnic group is mainly distributed in the plateaus and coastal hills of Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi provinces. They are mainly concentrated in areas such as Chuxiong, Honghe, Liangshan, Bijie, Liupanshui, and Anshun. Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is the largest Yi settlement area in the country.

Language Characteristics: The Yi ethnic group has its own language, known as the Yi language, which belongs to the Yi branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family within the Sino-Tibetan language family. It has multiple dialects and vernaculars.

Hani Ethnic Group:

Population: According to the "China Statistical Yearbook 2021," the population of the Hani ethnic group in China is approximately 1,733,160.

Distribution: The Hani ethnic group is mainly distributed between the Yuanjiang River and the Lancang River in Yunnan Province, residing in counties such as Honghe, Jiangcheng, Mopanshan, Xinping, and Zhenyuan. They are also found in mountainous areas in northern Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and northern Vietnam.

Language Characteristics: The Hani ethnic group has its own language, known as the Hani language, which also belongs to the Yi branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Modern Hani people use a newly created Latin-based phonetic script.

Dai Ethnic Group:

Population: According to the "China Statistical Yearbook 2021," the population of the Dai ethnic group in China is approximately 13,299,850.

Distribution: The Dai ethnic group mainly resides in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, as well as the Gengma and Menglian autonomous counties in Yunnan Province. They are also scattered in various other counties. The border areas inhabited by the Dai people are adjacent to Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam.

Language Characteristics: The Dai ethnic group has its own language, known as the Dai language (Thai language), which belongs to the Zhuang-Dong language branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family.

Bai Ethnic Group:

Distribution: The Bai ethnic group is mainly distributed in provinces such as Yunnan, Guizhou, and Hunan, with the largest population in Yunnan Province, primarily concentrated in the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture. They are also found in Sichuan Province, Chongqing Municipality, and other areas.

Language Characteristics: The Bai ethnic group has its own language, known as the Bai language, which belongs to the Yi branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family within the Sino-Tibetan language family.

Tibetan Ethnic Group:

Population: According to the "China Statistical Yearbook 2021," the total population of the Tibetan ethnic group is approximately 7,060,731.

Distribution: The Tibetan ethnic group is mainly distributed in the Tibet Autonomous Region, Qinghai Province, and western Sichuan Province. Tibetans are also found in areas such as Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan, as well as Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province.

Language Characteristics: The Tibetan ethnic group has its own language and script, known as the Tibetan language, which belongs to the Tibetan branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family within the Sino-Tibetan language family. It is divided into three main dialects: U-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo.

These ethnic groups play a significant role in the rich culture and history of Yunnan, each possessing unique traditions, customs, and festival activities. Their languages, attire, architecture, arts, and religious beliefs showcase the charm of Yunnan's multiculturalism. At the same time, these ethnic groups have made important contributions to the development of China and the world's multiculturalism.

Cultural Characteristics and Traditional Customs

Analysis of Cultural Characteristics of Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan

The forefront of cultural analysis lies in language, serving as a vital carrier of culture that encapsulates the history and memories of each ethnic group. In Yunnan, ethnic minorities such as the Yi, Hani, Dai, Bai, and Tibetan peoples have preserved their own languages. These languages possess distinct characteristics, with rich vocabularies and unique grammatical structures, forming the foundation of each ethnic group's culture. The diversity of these languages not only enriches Yunnan's linguistic treasure trove but also reflects the unique contributions of each ethnic group to cultural inheritance (Ma Jing, Huang Jianbo, 2009). Language and religious beliefs are closely intertwined, with religious beliefs holding significant importance in the culture of Yunnan's ethnic minorities. The Yi people believe in the animism of all things and ancestor worship, expressing reverence for nature and nostalgia for ancestors through sacrifices and rituals. The Bai people, on the other hand, worship local deities and Buddhism, seeking blessings and protection from deities through temple construction, deity sculpting, and worship. The Tibetan people mainly adhere to Tibetan Buddhism, expressing devout faith through prostrations, prayer wheels, and recitation of scriptures. These religious beliefs not only influence the daily lives and customs of various ethnic groups but also shape their spiritual demeanor and cultural temperament (Zhang Wen, 2015). There exists a close relationship between religious beliefs and traditional festivals, which is another significant manifestation of the culture of Yunnan's ethnic minorities. The Torch Festival of the Yi, the Third Month Street of the Bai, the Water Splashing Festival of the Dai, and the Shoton Festival of the Tibetan people are all important occasions for celebrating harvests and praying for auspiciousness. During these festivals, people dress in elaborate costumes, sing and dance, and participate in various ceremonies and activities, showcasing the unique charm and cultural elegance of each ethnic group. These traditional festivals not only enrich the cultural life of Yunnan but also promote communication and integration among various ethnic groups (Luo Sheng, 2018).

The Traditional Customs, Life Style And Folk Art Characteristics Of Yunnan Minority Nationalities

The traditional customs of Yunnan ethnic minorities have their own characteristics, which reflect their love for life and reverence for nature. The custom of walking marriage of Yi

nationality is unique and mysterious, which shows their open and free concept of marriage and love. The wedding customs and burial customs of Bai nationality reflect their unique understanding of life and death. These traditional customs not only enrich the cultural connotation of Yunnan, but also provide us with an important window to understand the history and culture of various ethnic groups (Li Ming. 2016). In terms of life style, most of the ethnic minorities in Yunnan live in the mountains or mid-levels, and their life style is closely related to the natural environment. The terraced culture of Hani nationality, the mountain farming of Yi nationality and the nomadic life of Tibetan nationality are the embodiment of their wisdom in adapting to the natural environment and utilizing natural resources. These lifestyles not only show the hard work and wisdom of all nationalities, but also reflect their concept of harmonious coexistence with nature (Zhang Wen. 2015). Folk art is another important part of Yunnan minority culture. The cigarette box dance of the Yi nationality, the Sanxian and Jiana of the Bai nationality, the Peacock dance of the Dai nationality and the Thangka of the Tibetan nationality are all treasures in the treasure house of national art. These art forms have their own characteristics, which not only have unique aesthetic value, but also contain rich cultural connotation. They are not only an important way for all ethnic groups to express their feelings and record their lives, but also an important way to inherit and carry forward national culture (Li Ming, 2016).

Social Organization And Social Life

The social organization structure of ethnic minorities is unique and diverse, in which family and tribe as the two core elements have a profound impact on their social life, family structure and education system. As a social group based on blood relationship, family occupies an important position in ethnic minorities, and the close contact and mutual help spirit among family members jointly safeguard the honor and interests of the family. Tribes, on the other hand, are larger social organizations composed of multiple families or communities, which jointly build and maintain the stability and development of ethnic minority societies through inter-tribal cooperation and competition (Hao, X., & Wang, Q. 2018). In terms of social life, ethnic minorities show rich and diverse lifestyles because of their unique geographical environment, cultural traditions and religious beliefs. Whether it is festivals or weddings or funerals, ethnic minorities follow customs and rituals passed down from generation to generation. These activities not only enhance national cohesion, but also enrich the connotation of their social life (Lin, Y., & Zhang, H. 2020). In terms of family structure, ethnic minorities also show the characteristics of diversity. Influenced by traditional beliefs, resource allocation and social customs, polygamy or polyandry may exist in some regions, while in others, monogamy may be more prevalent. In addition, the role division and interaction mode among family members also have their own characteristics, which together constitute the unique features of ethnic minority family structure (Zhang, L., & Li, W. 2019). In terms of education system, the education mode of ethnic minorities not only inherits the traditional modes of oral instruction and mentoring, but also gradually integrates the elements of modern school education. Both traditional education and modern education are committed to inheriting and carrying forward national culture, and cultivating a new generation of talents with national cultural accomplishment and adaptability to modern society (Wu, J., & Liu, Y. 2017).

Cultural Protection And Development

Yunnan, a land full of mystery, has nurtured a rich and diverse minority culture. However, with the acceleration of the modernization process, Yunnan minority culture is facing unprecedented challenges and problems (Ma & Wang, 2019). First of all, the impact of the wave of globalization makes many minority cultures face the danger of assimilation or even

disappearance. With the continuous influx of foreign cultures, some young people gradually weaken their sense of identity with their own national culture, and turn to the pursuit of popular culture, resulting in a fault in the inheritance of traditional national culture. Secondly, factors such as urbanization and industrialization in the process of modernization also have an impact on minority culture. Many traditional handicrafts and farming methods are gradually replaced by modern production methods, making some related national cultures gradually lose their living space (Zhu & Zhang, 2020). In addition, the over-exploitation of tourism has also caused damage to the culture of ethnic minorities. In order to pursue economic benefits, some places have over-exploited tourism resources, resulting in the commercialization and entertainment of national culture, losing its original connotation and meaning. In the face of these challenges and problems, the government and all sectors of society have begun to take a series of measures to protect and develop the culture of Yunnan's ethnic minorities. The government has strengthened the protection and management of ethnic minority cultural heritage by formulating relevant laws and regulations. At the same time, we will increase support for the cultural industry and encourage and support the innovation and development of the cultural industry of ethnic minorities. In addition, the government has actively carried out cultural exchanges and promotion activities to enhance the visibility and influence of ethnic minority cultures. All sectors of society have also taken an active part in the protection and development of minority cultures. Many experts and scholars devote themselves to the in-depth study of the minority culture and excavate its connotation and value. (Li & Luo, 2018) At the same time, some non-governmental organizations and cultural institutions also actively carry out activities such as cultural heritage protection, cultural inheritance and cultural innovation, providing strong support for the inheritance and development of ethnic minority cultures. These measures have had some success. On the one hand, some ethnic cultures on the verge of disappearing have been effectively protected, and their inheritance and development have been guaranteed. On the other hand, ethnic minority cultural industries have also gradually emerged, becoming a new driving force to promote local economic development. However, we should also be soberly aware that the protection and development of minority culture in Yunnan is still a long way to go. It is necessary for the government, all sectors of society and ethnic minorities to work together and form a joint force to promote the inheritance and innovation of ethnic minority cultures and realize their sustainable development (Wang & Zhou, 2017). To sum up, the current minority culture in Yunnan is facing many challenges and problems, but through the joint efforts of the government and all sectors of the society, certain results have been achieved. In the future, we still need to continue to strengthen the protection work, promote the innovative development of minority cultures, and contribute to the construction of a diverse and inclusive cultural landscape.

Future Prospect And Conclusion

With the deepening development of globalization and modernization, Yunnan minority culture is standing at a new starting point full of opportunities and challenges. Looking into its development prospects, we see not only infinite possibilities, but also many potential challenges. From the perspective of development, as the country's attention to ethnic culture continues to improve, Yunnan's minority culture will receive more attention and support. The government will continue to increase input, improve relevant policies and regulations, and provide a strong guarantee for the inheritance and development of ethnic minority cultures. At the same time, with the continuous development of tourism, more and more people will have the opportunity to contact and understand Yunnan's minority culture, which provides a broader space for its inheritance and promotion. However, there are also challenges. On the one hand, the trend of cultural homogenization brought about by globalization may pose a threat to the

uniqueness of Yunnan minority culture. How to absorb the achievements of modern civilization and realize the innovation and development of culture while maintaining the cultural characteristics is an important topic in front of us. On the other hand, with the development of economy and the progress of society, some traditional national cultural elements may gradually lose their original living environment. How to find their living space and development power in the new era is also an urgent problem to be solved.

To sum up, the development prospect of Yunnan minority culture is full of opportunities and challenges. We need to observe and study it with a more open and inclusive mind, protect and inherit it with a scientific attitude and method, and develop and promote it with innovative thinking and practice. Only in this way can we make Yunnan's minority culture glow more brilliant in the tide of globalization.

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