

## *Original Paper*

# Promoting the Inheritance and Development of Miao Culture through the Language Resource Protection Project: A Case Study of "Language Dialect Culture Investigation: Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou"

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### ***Abstract***

*Language is the carrier of culture, and culture relies on language and carries the national memory based on it. Under the impact of the modern multi-ethnic language wave, single-ethnic languages are facing a relatively shrinking usage scenario and urgently need systematic protection. The language resource protection project implemented by the Ministry of Education and the National Language Commission has provided crucial support for the rescue of single ethnic languages. In view of this, this paper takes the "Language Dialect Culture Investigation - Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou" project as a case study, systematically sorts out the current status of the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai, elaborates in detail on the implementation process and technical methods of this Miao language investigation, and comprehensively presents the language collections, data results and cultural records formed by the investigation. Furthermore, a thorough analysis of the practical value of this survey in assisting the protection of the Miao language in Danzhai and promoting the inheritance and innovative development of Miao culture will be conducted, providing referenceable experiences and paths for the language resource protection project to empower the survival of a single ethnic culture.*

### ***Keywords***

*Miao ethnic, group Language and culture, Inheritance and Development*

## **1. Introduction**

China is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country. Different ethnic groups have different language

forms, structural features and phonetic systems. Within the same ethnic group's language, there are different dialects and local languages. Under the great integration of multi-ethnic cultures, the dialects or local languages of various ethnic groups have continuously evolved, developed and spread, forming the diversity of language and culture. The American linguist Edward Sapir noted, "Language is not merely a vehicle for communication; it is deeply intertwined with culture. Indeed, language cannot exist independently of culture, which comprises the sum of socially inherited customs and beliefs that shape the structure of our lives." (Edward Sapir. *Language*, 1921) Language and culture are mutually reinforcing—each supports and enlightens the other. Language is not only a tool for communication but also a primary carrier and an integral component of culture. Every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a nation and is the most important cultural heritage of mankind. Human beings communicate emotions, convey thoughts and express wishes through language, reflecting all other functions and habits that a nation acquires with the qualification of language.

However, in the process of globalization and modernization, language diversity has encountered certain impacts. Among the over 6,000 languages in the world, approximately 96% of the speakers account for only 3% of the total human population. The number of speakers of half of the over 6,000 languages in the world is decreasing. It is estimated that by the end of the 21st century, about 90% of the languages in most parts of the world may be replaced by dominant languages. (Li, 2015) Among the over 130 languages in China, 68 have a population of less than 10,000 speakers, 48 have a population of less than 5,000 speakers, and 25 have a population of less than 1,000 speakers. (Chen, Zhao, Qi et al., 2024) Language is a precious resource. When any language vanishes, the way of thinking, oral culture and folk customs that it relies on will all disappear and can never be restored. Facing the severe situation of the rapid decline of languages, in 2015, the Ministry of Education and the National Language Commission issued a notice to launch the China Language Resources Protection Project, carrying out various tasks centered on the investigation, preservation, display and development and utilization of language resources across the country. More than ten provinces including Chongqing, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guizhou and Guangxi have successively carried out field investigations on Chinese dialects and minority languages in multiple locations. In 2016, the National Language Resources Protection Project was fully launched.

As a settlement of the Miao people, Danzhai in Guizhou Province, with its Miao language, carries a relatively complete cultural memory of the Miao branch in Qiandongnan. It serves as the core link for the inheritance of Miao culture and has also become one of the key objects for protection in the project. Based on this, the author takes the "Language Dialect Culture Investigation - Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou" project as an example to conduct an investigation and record the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai. Then, an analysis is carried out from aspects such as the investigation process, obtained results, and investigation significance. Ultimately, the practical value of this investigation in promoting the implementation of the language resource protection project and the inheritance and innovation of Miao culture is revealed. Provide referenceable experience for the

protection of minority languages and cultures.

## 2. Analysis of the Current Situation of the Miao Language and Culture in Danzhai

The language resources of ethnic minorities in our country are in a severe situation of disappearing day by day. In May 2019, the National Language Commission of the Ministry of Education officially approved the project "Investigation of Language Dialect Culture: Miao Language in Danzhai County, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Guizhou Province" proposed by Professor Wu Zhengbiao from the Southern Minority Languages Research Center of China Three Gorges University, and determined to take the Miao language and culture in Danzhai County, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture as the investigation object. Danzhai is located in the southeast of Guizhou Province, between 107°44' and 108°08' east longitude and 26°05' and 26°26' north latitude. It borders Leishan County to the east, Sandu Shui Autonomous County to the south, Duyun and Mahjong Counties to the west, and Kaili City to the north. The county governs 4 towns (Longquan Town, Xingren Town, Paidiao Town, Yangwu Town), 2 townships (Yahui Township, Nangao Township), and 1 provincial-level economic development zone (Danzhai Jinzhong Economic Development Zone). The county is home to a multi-ethnic community, with 21 ethnic minorities including the Miao, Han, Shui and Buyi, and a total population of 177,000. (Danzhai Yearbook Compilation Committee (Ed.). 2019) There are over 110,000 Miao people in the county. Due to the influence of factors such as branches, migrations, and living areas, the language, culture, and folk customs are rich and diverse. For instance, there are eight types of women's clothing (adult men's clothing is largely the same, with simple upper garments mainly in green, black, and blue evolving into Zhongshan suits, military uniforms, and suits), each with its own style. They belong to traditional clothing with a long history. And there is a significant difference between casual wear and formal wear (Danzhai County Local Chronicles Compilation Committee (Ed.), 2019). The Miao people within the county are classified into eight types based on their language and cultural features as well as geographical location, namely, Bazhai type, Maniao type, Paimo type, Majiang type, Yahui type, Liujiazhai type, Nangao Type and Chaha Type. These eight types of Miao ethnic groups are scattered in various areas within the county according to the characteristics and structure of their language and culture.

After conducting field visits and investigations, it was found that the Miao people of the Bazhai type are mainly distributed in Longquan Town, Yangwu Town, the southern part of Xingren Town and the western part of Paidiao Town. The Miao people of the horse-bird type are mainly distributed in villages such as Ma 'niao, Yegai, Yangxian, Yanggao and Dangzao in Paidiao Town. The Paimo type of Miao people are mainly distributed in the villages of Paimo, Paidao, Wuwan, Jijia in Yangwu Township and Yuanjing, Fangsheng, Songe, Shuangyao, Chaha in Paidiao Town. The Miao people of the Majiang type are mainly distributed in villages such as Chengjiang, Baitou and Xingren in Xingren Town. The Yahui type of Miao people are mainly distributed in the villages of Songlong, Yahui and Shagao in Yahui Township. The Miao people of the Liujiazhai type are mainly distributed in Liujiazhai, Paidiao

Town. The Miao people of the Nangao type are mainly distributed throughout the entire Nangao Township and in the villages to the east and north of Xingren Town. The Miao people of the Chahe type are mainly distributed in villages such as Chahe in Paidiao Town and Wuli and Wuzuo in Xingren Town. Due to the existence of eight types of Miao ethnic groups, there are certain differences in the language and culture of each type (region), but this does not affect People's Daily communication and interaction. The Danzhai Miao language is an important part of the minority languages in China. It belongs to the Miao branch of the Miao-Yao language family within the Sino-Tibetan language family and is distributed in various villages under the jurisdiction of Danzhai County where eight types of Miao people live. The formation and development of this language are treasures of the cultural heritage of the Danzhai Miao people and also the wisdom and crystallization of the social culture of the Danzhai Miao people. The Danzhai Miao language is not only a symbol for identifying the identity of the Miao people in this area, but also an important carrier for the inheritance and development of folk customs, traditional culture, etc., reflecting the diversity and uniqueness of Miao culture. However, each type of Miao language is facing shrinkage or extinction under the impact of dominant languages. The approval and initiation of the "Language Dialect Culture Investigation · Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou" project have played a role in rescuing and protecting the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai.

### **3. The Investigation Process of the Miao Language and Culture in Danzhai**

Facing the danger of shrinking or extinction of minority languages, China's language resources protection project has received attention in ethnic minority areas. In order to rescue and protect the languages and cultures of ethnic minorities, Professor Wu Zhengbiao from the Southern Minority Languages Research Center of China Three Gorges University led Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinluo to Beijing Language and Culture University in April 2019 to attend a training session on the preparatory work for the "Language and Dialect Culture Investigation - Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou" project. During the meeting, experts were invited to provide guidance on various work matters related to the project, including project initiation, pilot investigation, mid-term inspection, pre-acceptance, and project conclusion norms. Additionally, training was conducted on aspects such as survey forms, survey norms, corpus organization, audio-visual processing, attribute annotation, and resource coding systems. In July 2019, the project investigation team held a work deployment meeting on "Language, Culture and Dialect Investigation · Guizhou Danzhai Miao Language" in the fourth-floor conference room of the Danzhai County Bureau of Culture, Sports, Radio, Film and Television. The main leaders and relevant staff members of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Center of the County Bureau of Culture, Sports, Radio, Film and Television attended the meeting. At the meeting, the investigation team discussed aspects such as video and image photography, physical material videography, text material data editing, filling out of the original investigation record card, and safety matters related to the language and cultural investigation. Professor Wu Zhengbiao from the Southern Minority Languages

Research Center of China Three Gorges University, the project leader, made detailed work arrangements. The director of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Center of the Danzhai County Bureau of Culture, Sports, Radio, Film and Television put forward many valuable suggestions on the collection of the intangible cultural heritage database related to the Miao language and culture.

To effectively promote the various tasks of the "Language, Culture and Dialect Investigation · Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou", the investigation team strictly followed the project's normative requirements when collecting language materials in the villages. First, the "Technical Specifications for the Chinese Cultural Dialect Collection Investigation Manual" and the "Chinese Language Resources Investigation Manual - Ethnic Languages" issued by "Yubao.com" are used as reference models for the technical specifications. At the same time, Chinese language and culture collection series books such as "Chinese Language and Culture Collection. Liancheng" and "Chinese Language and Culture Collection. Huaiji" are used as reference models. Second, based on the catalogue of the series of books on Chinese language and Culture, this project is classified into nine major categories and several minor categories: 1. House Construction, 2. Daily Utensils, 3. Clothing, 4. Food, 5. Agricultural and Industrial Arts, 6. Daily Activities, 7. Marriage, Childbirth and Funeral, 8. Festivals, 9. Singing and Recitation Performances. Each member of the investigation team is responsible for one major category. Three people form a group. Among the group members, two need to be proficient in the International Phonetic Alphabet and be able to use photography equipment, and the other one needs to understand the local Miao language, dialect and be familiar with local cultural customs. Thirdly, each group must go to typical Miao villages to take photos and videos and fill in the entry cards. Then, they should categorize the photos and videos and fill in each collected entry into the "Original Record Card for Miao Language Investigation in Danzhai, Guizhou" for classification and archiving. The contents of the original record card include: title, registration of the investigator, registration of the person under investigation, explanation of the entries, unified and standardized speakers, and backup of relevant video and image numbers, etc. After the first corpus collection in July 2019, due to the subsequent impact of the epidemic, the project work could not be further carried out. It was not until mid-July 2020 that Professor Wu Zhengbiao flew from Yichang to Guiyang to join the investigation team and reorganize and improve the previously collected corpus. This work is divided into two major parts: First, sort out the photos and entries collected during the summer vacation of 2019. Fill in the existing entries in the "Electronic Version Required - Corpus Organization - Audio Recording - Words" XLS form of the words section and record them. Sort out the number of existing entries and photos in each major category, ensuring a one-to-one correspondence between the entries and photos. At the same time, explain the corresponding content (entries) of the existing photos. The second step is to coordinate with the speaker to record the text in the XLS form of "electronic version to be submitted - corpus organization - recording - discourse", and review the audio quality, visuals and effects of the recording.

#### 4. Investigation Results on the Language and Culture of the Miao ethnic group in Danzhai

From mid-July to late August 2019, the investigation team conducted on-site investigations and collected materials in villages such as Qingjiang, Boji, Wangjia, Yanying, Paidiao, Paidao, Yahui, Maniao, Songlong and Chahe within Danzhai County. They sorted out over 1,300 entries and placed them respectively in the classification of the entries (excluding prescribed stories, auspicious auspicious words and other content). More than 3,000 photos were collected and over 300 minutes of videos were recorded. Due to the impact of the epidemic, from September 2019 to July 2020, we were unable to further collect language materials at the investigation sites. We only consulted relevant books online and sorted out the previously collected entries, photos, etc. In late July 2020, Professor Wu Zhengbiao once again led the investigation team to the "Language, Culture and Dialect Investigation - Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou" project investigation site to collect and supplement the language materials. Finally, this work was comprehensively classified and organized: I. 260 entries on building construction; II. Daily Utensils 140 entries; III. Clothing 120 Entries; IV. Diet 125 Entries; V. Wu·Nonggong Baiyi 270 entries; VI. Daily Activities 160 entries; VII. 110 Entries for Marriage, Childbearing and Funeral 8. 100 Entries for Festivals. Each category of entries has been filled in the "Electronic Version Required - Corpus Organization - Recording - Words" XLS form of the Words section and the recording has been completed. In the collection and recording of rap performances, over 100 pieces have been recorded in collaboration with the speakers, and all the content has been transcribed with the International Phonetic Alphabet, transliterated and translated directly.

The investigation team's investigation and video recording were conducted using a "language security camera" for both audio and video recording. Post-production noise processing was carried out using the "Audacity" software. Use the "Yubao Annotation" software for transcription. As the investigation team is mainly composed of postgraduate students and has limited contact with cameras, based on the requirements and norms for video recording in the "Technical Specifications for the Investigation Manual of Chinese Cultural Dialect Collections" and the "Investigation Manual of Chinese Language Resources - Ethnic Languages", the investigation team carefully studied the use of video equipment. In the initial video recording technology, for parts of discourse and words, a camera and Audacity software were used for collection. This method required at least two people to operate, that is, one person controlled the Audacity software on the computer and the other controlled the camera. At the same time, they needed to cooperate with the speaker, so the three people had to work in perfect harmony. When the person controlling the Audacity software gives a signal, the speaker should sound it in time, and the person controlling the camera should also press the switch in time to start recording. This recording method requires countless rounds of adjustment to achieve consistent sound and image. If the rhythm control is not consistent, it will lead to asynchronous sound and image. To address the issue of complex recording, the investigation team later adopted the function of the "Language Protection Camera" that can simultaneously capture audio and video, and purchased a dedicated Logitech camera. They fixed the camera and used the external sound card that came with the camera

for recording. Due to the uncontrollability of the recording site and environment, as well as the aging of computer equipment, noise and current sounds may occur during the recording process. After the recording is completed, "Audacity" will be used for processing to meet the requirements of the "Technical Specifications for the Investigation Manual of Chinese Cultural Dialect Collections".

## **5. The Significance of the Investigation into the Language and Culture of the Miao People in Danzhai**

The Miao language of Danzhai is a treasure of the Miao culture in Danzhai. It plays a communicative role within the jurisdiction of Danzhai County and even in the surrounding areas, serving as the most important thinking tool for the Miao people in Danzhai. It records the history and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai and is the home of Miao spiritual culture. Due to the impact of other dominant languages, the language of the Miao people in Danzhai is currently changing at an unprecedented speed, tending to be endangered or facing extinction, and precious language and cultural resources are gradually being lost. Language is an intangible cultural heritage that is non-renewable and extremely precious, and it is a prerequisite for cultural diversity. The project "Language, Culture and Dialect Investigation - Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou" is of certain historical significance for conducting an investigation and recording and organizing the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai.

### *5.1 It is Beneficial to the Inheritance of Miao Culture*

The Miao language is the most important expression symbol of Miao culture and also an important indicator highlighting some cultural differences among different branches or dialects of the Miao people. The language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai is an organic combination of the Miao culture within Danzhai County. It is a religious belief, humanistic art form and philosophical thought system based on the Miao language, and an important part of the entire Miao culture. The project "Language, Culture and Dialect Investigation - Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou" is carried out to investigate and record the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai. This is a protection of the Miao culture in Danzhai, especially the rescue of some intangible cultural elements that are passed down orally, such as folk proverbs, auspicious expressions and folk art forms. Then, through professional analysis, the humanistic value contained therein can be studied. The documentation, organization, rescue and protection of the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai are dynamic and continuous. The investigation team needs to collect language materials and record and preserve the language and culture through the camera as the information source for research. In this way, the traditional culture of the Miao people will be passed down for a long time.

### *5.2 Promote the Development of the Miao Ethnic Cultural Industry*

The Miao ethnic cultural industry is one of the important components of the cultural undertakings of ethnic minorities in China. It encompasses creative cultural and entertainment designs derived from Miao language symbols, such as advertising designs in the Miao script. Clothing made with elements of the Miao language, such as printed materials on Miao culture; Language technologies represented by

artificial intelligence voice services, such as providing customized Miao language versions of map voice navigation services; Language and cultural creative industries aimed at enriching the spiritual life of the Miao people, such as Miao ancient songs, Miao dramas and Miao music, etc. The Miao ethnic cultural industry is an effective development and utilization of the language. It not only generates economic value but also promotes the dissemination of the Miao language and culture. The project "Language, Culture and Dialect Investigation - Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou" was carried out to investigate and record the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai. This is an effective way to develop and utilize the Miao language and culture and promote the development of the Miao cultural industry.

### *5.3 Expand the Scope of Cultural Exchanges among the Miao Ethnic Group*

The Miao people are mainly distributed in provinces such as Guizhou, Chongqing, Hunan, Hubei, Guangxi and Yunnan, as well as in foreign countries and regions like Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. With the implementation of the multi-ethnic integration and the "Belt and Road Initiative", economic exchanges among the Miao people in various provinces and even cross-border Miao people have become frequent. The Miao language has become the basic tool for communication among the Miao people in various provinces and also a tool for cross-border Miao communication. It serves as a bridge for economic and cultural exchanges among the Miao ethnic group. Danzhai is located in the southeast of Guizhou Province, in the transitional zone from the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau to the hilly areas of Guangxi. It serves as a vital transportation hub for the southwest to the south and Lingnan regions, and is also the nearest passage for Guizhou to reach the sea to the south. The Danzhai Miao ethnic group has a large number of branches, and its language and culture have a certain influence on the Miao people in other provinces and even cross-border Miao people. Strengthening the investigation and protection of the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai is conducive to maintaining normal exchanges among various branches of the Miao people, enhancing the cohesion of the Miao people, and expanding the scope of Miao cultural exchanges.

## **6. Conclusions**

The Danzhai Miao language, as a branch with unique regional characteristics in the cultural spectrum of the Miao people, carries the production wisdom, folk traditions and spiritual beliefs accumulated by the local Miao people over generations. This research takes the "Language Dialect Culture Investigation: Miao Language in Danzhai, Guizhou" project as the entry point, systematically sorts out the current survival status of the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai, presents in detail the complete investigation process from field research to data organization, and comprehensively summarizes a series of achievements including the recording of the language and pronunciation system, the construction of the core vocabulary bank, and the collection of folk language materials. Profoundly clarify the practical significance of this investigation for the protection and inheritance of Miao ethnic culture.



This investigation is not only aimed at establishing a systematic "language archive" for the endangered Danzhai Miao language, filling some data gaps in regional Miao language research, but also, through the concrete protection of language resources, building a bridge for Miao culture from "living inheritance" to "sustainable development", and providing practical references for "investigation - record - application" for similar language resource protection projects across the country.

In the future, the protection and research on the language and culture of the Miao people in Danzhai can be expanded in multiple dimensions: Firstly, in terms of research content, digital technology can be combined to build a dynamic database of the Miao language, achieving permanent storage and sharing of language resources; Second, in terms of research approaches, efforts can be made to promote the in-depth integration of the Miao language with education and the cultural tourism industry, fostering the language identity and cultural confidence of the younger generation. Thirdly, in terms of research perspectives, cross-regional comparisons of Miao language cultures can be strengthened to provide theoretical support for the overall protection of ethnic language resources. The protection of language resources is not something that can be achieved overnight. Only through continuous efforts and the joint efforts of multiple parties can the treasures of the Miao language and culture remain vibrant in the course of The Times and inject lasting impetus into the prosperous development of ethnic cultural diversity.

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## Author Biography

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