

The Religious Ethics and Philosophical Thought of Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan: Analysing Their Expression and Transmission Through Indigenous Languages

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Abstract

This study delves into the religious ethics and philosophical thought of ethnic minorities in Yunnan, such as the Naxi, Dai, and Yi peoples, examining the philosophical foundations underlying their religious beliefs. The research explores how these ethical and philosophical concepts are intricately expressed and transmitted through the indigenous languages of these communities. The paper uncovers how language serves as a crucial medium for preserving and communicating these deep-rooted beliefs by analysing the linguistic structures and cultural contexts. The study also highlights the role of language in maintaining the continuity of religious and philosophical traditions, offering insights into the symbiotic relationship between language and thought in preserving cultural identity. Through a multidisciplinary approach, this research contributes to understanding how indigenous languages encapsulate and convey the ethical and philosophical worldviews of Yunnan's ethnic minorities, ensuring their transmission across generations.

Keywords: *Philosophical Teachings, Ethics, Yunnan, Ethnic Minority, Daoism, Chinese Religion*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary religious studies have explored a diverse approach to evaluate societal beliefs, values, and expressions related to human relationships with God. Every society has a unique religion based on their thoughts about the influence of God on man, supposedly associated with a divine status (Xu et al., 2005). This is the case in the Chinese religion, which is characterised by different religions accustomed to each ethnic group. A book by Palmer et al. (2011) delves into the Chinese religious life. Their discovery is themed around Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as the major teachings of Chinese religion. However, a major limitation of defining Chinese religion into these three teachings is based on the fact that only a small population is accustomed to these identities. Therefore, studying Chinese religion based on each community's customs, values, and beliefs is becoming necessary (Boyu, 2012). The approach incorporates a review of each population's ethical and philosophical thoughts. Therefore, scholars interested in Chinese religion have shifted their work to learning about doctrinal and canonical transcendence and narrowing it down to the various religious teachings (Leslie, 1998).

Yunnan region is located in the Southwest of China. Yunnan means south of clouds, with an area known for its diverse ethnic composition. The area has more than 50 ethnic minority groups, each having a different religion (Xu et al., 2005). Most of the religions embrace traditional practices. Yunnan is a key province in China where many religions gather, including Christianity, Catholicism, Taoism, and Islamism (Xu et al., 2005). The differentiation of religious practices in the region, subject to the number of ethnic minority groups, creates a unique inquiry into the ethics and philosophical thoughts of the people (Katz, 2021). The inquiry is also guided by the role of indigenous languages in expressing and transmitting their religious values, systems, and beliefs.

Dai, Yi, and Naxi are among the minority groups in Yunnan that will be covered in this research, which will examine the expression and transmission of their religion through the analysis of their indigenous language (Boyu, 2012). Each of the three ethnic minority groups has shown a consistent approach toward preserving their religious philosophies and ethics amidst the sociocultural changes brought about by globalisation, modernisation, and cultural assimilation (Katz, 2021). Thus, this unique religious positioning provides a rationale for scholars and researchers to learn about the communities' beliefs, systems, and values.

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The Naxi people are located in the Lijiang region. The community follows the Dongba religion, integrating shamanism, animism, and Tibetan Buddhism. The people in the community have a strong connection with nature. The Naxi are popular with the pictographic script, which is useful in religious communication (Ming & Lewis, 2020). The Yi people express their religious systems and beliefs through Daoism, ancestral worship, and animism. The community also relies on a shaman priest to transmit ethical teachings and philosophical knowledge (Xu et al., 2005). The Dai community is associated with Theravada Buddhism, which is connected to the cultural identity of its people. The religious ethics of this community are influenced by Buddhism, especially the teaching of compassion and Karma.

The intertwining between religion and ethnicity in China creates a narrowed research experience to have a deeper understanding of the practices of its people. This includes learning about the rituals, the divine relationship between man and God, the role of nature in religious practices, and the beliefs held by the people (Yang, 2023). Yunnan religion, given its diverse context in terms of ethnic minority groups, therefore necessitates the need to understand the uniqueness of the Chinese religion, which is characterised by a lack of conflicts. This form of solidarity among the people retains the concreteness of observing the traditions of each ethnic group.

Problem Statement

Religion remains an important tool that defines human relations. This is based on the exploration of the systems of beliefs that are believed to govern human relations with divine status. Language is a key choice that defines the expression and transmission of religious beliefs and systems (Yang, 2023). The choice of language differs from one community to the other based on the traditions and cultural values the people uphold. Although there is a collective agreement on using rituals across different religions, the meaning and substance of interaction differ (Ming & Lewis, 2020). This is an important research inquiry to understand how ethnic groups preserve and maintain their religious ethics and philosophical teachings. Yunnan region reflects China's multi-ethnic diversity. Thus, comparing the ethical beliefs and philosophical knowledge of Naxi, Dai, and Yi ethnic minorities will be useful in understanding the use of language in the expression and transmission of the country's religious beliefs (Katz, 2021). China values using its native language to teach its citizens about its cultural heritage. This significantly influences the higher number of ethnic minority groups that still maintain their traditions.

Significance Of the Study

Insights learned from this study will be critical for expanding the knowledge of the ethnic groups in Yunnan. This will serve as a reflection of the Chinese population as well as the traditions of its people. Further, by appreciating this diversity, the Chinese cultural landscape will be mapped globally. This will include the contribution of the Chinese communities to preserving the country's cultural heritage.

Using the ethical and philosophical understanding of the religious activities of Naxi, Yi, and Dai will offer an extensive review of the global systems that govern socioeconomic systems (Barabantseva, 2012). This includes learning about people's efforts to maintain sustainable ecological systems ascribed to human-nature interactions. Further, this study will be important in showing the level of religious resilience and flexibility among the minority ethnic groups in Yunnan (Barabantseva, 2012). The role of indigenous languages and systems will be evaluated amidst the changing social landscapes (Beckman, 2001). Thus, the degree of cultural sensitivity in China will be examined. The insight will, therefore, inform the opportunities and challenges associated with ethnic minority group practices. This will be critical for learning how the Chinese cultural background, unique to each ethnic group, remains a concrete foundation for unity in the country.

This research will also contribute to the growth of religious studies, especially the coverage of ethnic minority groups. The findings will inform the interplay of human existence, ethics, and philosophical knowledge and how they contribute to humanity's growth. The role of indigenous languages in preserving cultural identity will be examined to expand the knowledge of human expression and transmission of religious beliefs. This will be a foundation for learning the importance of language as a cultural expression and transmission medium.

Research Questions

The coexistence of different religions in the Yunnan region is based on the prominence of Indigenous languages. The use of the languages has been relevant, especially in maintaining the community's cultural traditions (Barabantseva, 2012). This includes the use of language in the transmission of people's ethical and philosophical beliefs. The following research questions will be explored in this study:

What are the religious ethics and philosophical thoughts of Naxi, Dai, and Yi ethnic minorities in Yunnan?

How are these ethical and philosophical concepts intricately expressed and transmitted through the indigenous languages of Naxi, Dai, and Yi communities?

How does language serve as a crucial medium for preserving and communicating these deep-rooted beliefs?

What is the role of language in maintaining the continuity of religious and philosophical traditions?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious Ecology Theory

This model is founded on understanding the values, attitudes, and practices related to religion. The model has a specific context in the study of how human beings respond to nature (Clart, 2013). Also, the teaching of this theory is based on the understanding of efforts by humans to respect, protect and appropriately use natural resources (Lu & Sheng, 2024). Such is an interesting viewpoint used across ethnic religions in China to explore man's respect for the divine being. The theory has been used in Chinese religious studies to explore the growth of religions such as Christianity following its introduction in the early 19th century (Lu & Sheng, 2024). The development of Christianity in China was associated with slow growth as influenced by the presence of ethnic minority groups. However, despite the prevalence of the traditional religion, an imbalance in the religious ecology has increased barriers to studying religion in the country (Mackerras, 2013). This includes legally naming only five religions in China by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1982 (Lu & Sheng, 2024). The named religions were Taoism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. However, controversies over these names arose, given that the folk religion was ignored (Scott, 1997).

The neglect of the folk religion was associated with regard for 'feudal superstitions', which were considered to be toxic (Lu & Sheng, 2024). The folk religion was, therefore, a target for repression while allowing the rise of other religions. The ecologist scholars also associated the regression of Buddhism and Taoism due to their direct link with folk religion (Beckman, 2001). The label 'feudal superstition' has occasionally been criticised due to its regressive politics towards the rise of traditional Chinese religion, which has become a key source of identity among the people (Lu & Sheng, 2024). Therefore, using this theory in this study will offer an ecological perspective of studying the environment related to the folk religion. The model will be relevant, especially in learning about the indigenous languages and how they have evolved to inform the expression and transmission of Chinese cultural heritage (Clart, 2013).

Daoism Is the Foundation of Chinese Ethnic Religions

The religious diversity in China reflects the cultural prevalence of Daoist religions that have evolved into other subgroups. Religion aims to enhance local significance by establishing a cultural identity among the people (Miller, 2013). Folk religion, among other ethnic religions, have their ethical and philosophical beliefs founded on Daoism. This includes the provision of ancestry worship and the performance of rituals that have been definitive in the relationship between man and the divine god (Lu & Gao, 2018). Intellectualised religious teachings have been critical to the rise of other religions in China, including Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam (Helle, 2017). Daoism is the oldest religion in China and hence would accurately reflect the diversity of other ethnic groups.

Daoism has been studied objectively to understand the concreteness of Chinese culture and religion and to enhance the learning of creation, ascension, and deluge, as pronounced in Western religions. Daoism is mainly

founded on three principles, which include priests being regarded as persons who follow the Daoists and are from the monastic community (Miller, 2013). Also, Daoism is founded on pursuing a narrow sense exploited through different texts known as Tao Tsang. The texts are instrumental in enhancing the understanding of meditation and ritual. Finally, classical text is common in Daoism, as described by comparing Hebrew Bible analogies and the influence of Homer, an ancient Greek poet (Helle, 2017). This is a significant subject, and Chinese religion is based on using language to help people express their beliefs and values. Also, the transmission of the ethical and philosophical teachings remains paramount in maintaining the Chinese culture (Ashiwa & Wank, 2009). Daoism is the most preferred religion following its influence to bridge between folk religion and Confucianism.

The popularity of Daoism is based on its spontaneous influence on people's emotions compared to other rituals (Lopez, 1996). Also, Daoism is referred to due to its less orientation as vague and its ability to diffuse folk religious traditions. This has led to the increased popularity of Daoism, especially its religious and philosophical teachings, which have become common in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (Miller, 2013). The teachings are founded on the continuity of the relationship between human beings and nature. The worship of ancestors is also another teaching of Daoism, which entails the divine nature of the sovereign being as well as the cult of heaven (Beckman, 2001). Finally, Daoism references the rhythmic flux and transformation of the universe and its connectedness to the reverse of the making of all things to Dao just as they emerged.

A priest regarded as the Daoist religion's ruler is expected to favour the people with good weather conditions (Helle, 2017). This included the provision of a generous harvest while avoiding draught. However, when there was draught and not plenty of harvest, it was assumed that the King did not have a good relationship with heaven (Beckman, 2001). Such is a unique expression of nature to the people about the possible response by God to humans. The principle of blessing passivity remains important in Daoism, particularly with its emphasis on the connection between nature and humans (Ashiwa & Wank, 2009).

Nature and life everlasting life remain a key concept of Daoism, with the belief that certain people would avoid normal death. This is referenced to the lack of knowledge of what happened to Elija and Moses, who are assumed to have gone to heaven through a miracle (Helle, 2017). This is a key foundation within Daoism, whereby the belief that life is everlasting. Other beliefs related to religion are based on the association of the underworld, heaven and the current world, with each having different habitats (Lopez, 1996). The King was considered to be sacred, and thus, his priestly mandates and powers to connect each of the three places. The concept of hell, however, was brought about by the missionaries from India who brought about Buddhism.

The evolution of Daoism to accommodate other religions is explicitly defined through the change of beliefs. For instance, while life everlasting was associated with the mighty, certain dietary and ritual rules would be used to bypass death (Helle, 2017). This would help the individual bypass physical death and ascend into heaven. Also, through the intervention of a devoted Daoist, it was possible to deliver even the dead persons from their clan from the shadows of death and help them ascend to heaven (Helle, 2017). This formed a major source of transition, especially where the strict definition of the might with heaven was expanded. As a result, the evolution of ethnic religion became a common thing, with each of the ethnic minority groups developing their own philosophical and ethical languages to form cultural-religious identities (Kleeman, 2002).

The concept of holy personages is considered important in this evolution, given the relationship of human interaction with nature (Kleeman, 2002). For instance, women getting pregnant was associated with the Daoist cosmos, whereby a woman was assumed to get pregnant not by her body alone but also through the intervention of nature (Helle, 2017). It was assumed that a woman was overshadowed by a cloud of red colour, leading to her inner response of getting pregnant and giving birth to a hero whose presence in the world was to create a new order (Kleeman, 2002). This would also happen when a woman swallows a rice corn (Lopez, 1996). These are unique beliefs related to the interpretation of nature guided by Dao's teachings about the continuity of life.

Naxi Ethnic Group

The Naxi community is founded on the Dongba religion, which forms the foundation of their ethical and philosophical teaching. The religion is based on integrating shamanism, animism and Tibetan Buddhism (Tapp,

1986). The worship of ancestors and the divine connection with nature are explored within the religion. This is guided by the belief that spirits possess nature, which may be experienced through rivers, mountains, or even animals (Yu, 2020). Such is an important belief founded on Daoism, whereby daily ethics and life teaching are founded on the connection that nature builds with humans. The concept of dualism further reinforces this relationship through the exploration of the relationship that exists between man and nature. The Naxi community expresses this through its creation story, a mythological narrative describing the union of a divine woman and a human hunter who descended from the sky (Yang, 2012).

Further, the ethical teachings among the Naxi are based on using good actions to create harmony while avoiding conflict is prioritised (Wellens, 2009). Thus, their religion emphasises establishing a working relationship that connects humans, nature, and their ancestors (McKhann, 2010). Unethical behaviour is believed to be a source of misfortune and may lead to problems for the community, not only the individual.

Language is an important tool among the Naxi people. This is referenced with the Dongba script, which illustrates a pictographic writing style. The style was common for religious activities, and the script had more than 1400 characters to help portray the diversity of Naxi religion, history, philosophy, and customs (McKhann, 2010). Thus, the scripts were used as a repository for ethical teachings. The dongba was regarded as the priest-shaman figure with a greater role in the religious lives of the Naxi people (Tapp, 1986). Dongba was regarded as wise and served as an intermediary that connected humans to the spirit world. This was realised through conduction of funerals, interpretation of omens, and performance of rituals (McKhann, 2010). Also, the Dongba served to interpret scriptures from the religious language. This was important for transmitting knowledge across generations (Wellens, 2009). A key philosophical teaching among the Naxi people is respect for a natural world where the people do not exploit its resources. Thus, preserving the ecology was important in the community. The Jade Dragon Snow Mountain is considered one of the sacred places among the Naxi people, and it amplifies their relationship with nature (Yang, 2012). Respect for elders was also a key practice among the Naxi people, which was a critical reflection of ancestral worship (Yu, 2020). This is based on the belief that the dead would influence the lives of the deceased. Thus, it was important for rituals and sacrifices to be conducted for a balanced existence of man (Yang, 2012). The teachings from Tibetan Buddhism are critical in the Naxi religion, specifically through the concept of Karma (Tapp, 1986). The concept of the soul is believed to be critical in expressing a unique syncretic system whereby each individual is regarded to have three souls. The three souls are based on their location after death, with one being reincarnated, the second one being retained in the body, and the last going to the afterlife (Yu, 2020). The interplay of the natural world and the realm of spirit is explored in this relationship, especially with the desire to retain the cosmic order of the Naxi community (Yang, 2012).

Dai Ethnic Group

The Dai people have religious teachings based on Theravada Buddhism, whose beliefs are founded on traditional animism (Lai, 2003). The spiritual activities of the community are performed in temples known as Wat. The young men from the Dai community are expected to serve as monks to reinforce their religious teachings (Yongxian, 2013). Also, the practice is considered a key factor towards the right of passage. This practice plays a major role in enhancing the people's cultural identity since the young men, after serving as monks, are also highly regarded in their families (Lai, 2003).

Karma teachings are also profound in the Dai community, especially with individual actions on earth influencing their life, and thus, there is a fundamental call for people to behave ethically. The emphasis on metta, which is regarded as living-kindness, is also a key foundation of the philosophical teachings in the community. This includes teaching compassion, termed karuna, which is important in encouraging people to show empathy and kindness towards one another (Zhao & Long, 2020). The concept is also linked to the relationship between man and nature, and thus, the use of a conservative approach towards the way people treat nature (Dai, 2016). The Dai ethical principles are also founded around the four nobles' truths and the eightfold path, which have been critical in reinforcing cultural identity (Dai, 2016). The eightfold path is characterised by the rightfulness of understanding, speech, intention, livelihood, mindfulness, action, effort, and concentration (Yongxian,

2013). The need for the Dai people to detach themselves from excess possession of material things is guided by the concept of impermanence, referred to as *anicca* (Zhao & Long, 2020). This is a teaching that has been embraced to control the attitudes that people have regarding adversity in life. Thus, people are encouraged to remain resilient and understand the transient nature of life.

The respect for nature is attributed to the belief that nature has spirit, and hence, sustainable practices that respect the ecosystem must be upheld (McCarthy, 2004). Animist beliefs reinforce this. Water is a significant resource in the community that is ceremoniously used during the Water splashing festival (Dai, 2016). The ceremony has religious significance as a sign of purity, emphasising washing away misfortunes that have occurred within the year (McCarthy, 2004). As a result, the ceremony is attributed to purification and renewal. A stronger connection between land and the natural environment is created through the view of rivers, mountains and trees as places where spirits live. This explains why the lush tropical region of Xishuangbanna is highly respected due to its richness of fauna and flora, which have had a greater influence on the transmission of Dai ethics and cosmology (McCarthy, 2004).

Dai language and script have critical reference to the recording of religious texts. This is a basis upon which traditional knowledge is passed on to generations (McCarthy, 2004). The practice, therefore, plays a critical role in enhancing philosophical and ethical teachings in a religious context (Dai, 2016). The concept of time is also significant in the Dai community, and it is expressed through the concept of rebirth. The Buddhist concept of the cyclical nature of the universe also informs this philosophical belief; thus, people are sensitive to communicating about histories by connecting the past, present and future (McCarthy, 2004).

Yi Ethnic Group

The religious activities of the Yi community are based on the interplay of animism, Daoism, and ancestral worship (Yuan & Hongxia, 2021). Each of these concepts plays an important role in the definition of the community's religious, philosophical and ethical teaching. The belief in multiple spirits and souls is common in the tradition, with men having four souls and women three (Hao & Chantamala, 2022). The souls are defined by their fate after death, with one soul remaining with the body, another going after life and the last one reincarcerated. Thus, the natural world is connected to the spiritual role to enhance man's existence. The belief that spirits manifest in the world's natural form, such as rivers, forests, and mountains, is also common (Ting & Sundararajan, 2017). This critical factor has led to increased respect for nature through effective resource management. Thus, any action disturbing the spirits' harmony is avoided. A shaman-priest figure is also present in the community, serving as an intermediary role that connects humans to the spirit world. The shaman-priest is known as the *bimo*, who plays a significant role in healing, interpreting omens, conducting rituals, and transmitting the cultural knowledge and heritage of the community (Hao & Chantamala, 2022). Also, they serve a critical role as the keepers of the Yi script, which has religious teachings and historical records about the community. A key lesson from the community is the need to preserve the harmony of the people by creating a strong relationship between man and God (Ting & Sundararajan, 2017). The clan system is considered an influential social system that enhances unity in the community.

Ancestral worship is a significant practice in the community and defines the ethical teachings of the Yi people (Harrell, 1990). This is guided by the belief that the dead influence the living, and thus, utmost respect must be accorded to them to avoid misfortunes. The people, therefore, engage in rituals and religious practices that appease the ancestors to get favour from them (Yuan & Hongxia, 2021). This has become a practice whose relevance in creating intergenerational bonds and solidarity is realised. Therefore, respect for the elders has become a major practice related to the preservation of cultural heritage among the Yi people (Harrell et al., 1989). Daoist thoughts are paramount in the Yi teachings, given their relevance in learning about the cosmology of the community. This is based on the appreciation that the world consists of complementary yet opposing forces crucial to keeping a balanced existence (Yuan & Hongxia, 2021). Thus, the people are encouraged to pursue a balanced life. Epic poetry is a major foundation of the ethical and philosophical teachings among the Yi people. For instance, the 'Book of Origin' represents a mythological reflection of the Yi people by outlining the key teachings of the community (Yuan & Hongxia, 2021). This is, therefore, an instrumental source of Yi's history and philosophical worldviews of what the community believes in (Harrell, 1990). Moral retribution and

justice remain important concepts in the Yi community following their relevance in enhancing spiritual beliefs (Harrell, 1990). This is founded on the belief that unethical actions would result in misfortune and, thus, the desire that people must aim to avoid misconduct (Yuan & Hongxia, 2021). However, ethical behaviour is rewarded through prosperity and blessings, forming an influential ethical system to guide the Yi people.

The differentiation of free will and fate is a major concept among the Yi people, who believe personal responsibility plays a critical role in an individual's success. The calendar of the Yi people integrates the lunar and solar elements in the definition of time. Therefore, the concept of time is important in the community to guide the people into identifying change, traditions and history (Yuan & Hongxia, 2021). The Yi script forms an important factor in the role of indigenous language in promoting religious practices and the transmission of ethical and philosophical teachings. This explains why the script has been maintained for years to enhance the continuity of Chinese cultural heritage.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilises a multidisciplinary approach to analyse the religious ethics and philosophical thoughts of ethnic minorities in Yunnan and their expression and transmission through indigenous languages. To achieve the goal of this study, a systematic review was conducted using past studies on the subject. Articles with Chinese authorship have been used with the aim of optimising the accuracy of the study's background. Books, scholarly articles, and other affiliated sources were utilised to complete the study. The reliance on secondary sources is informed by the diversity of the subject, whereby getting accurate information through interviews may be limited due to issues of memory loss and cultural assimilation. Therefore, a focus on written works that cover the subject would capture accurate history and narratives of the ethnic minority groups in Yunnan and how they related to the exploration of indigenous language use in religious practices.

The analysis of the information gained from the research is presented thematically. This includes a theoretical review of religious ecology theory to explain how different environments shape people's activities, thoughts, and practices within a community. The choice of this theory is based on the preference of the theory by Chinese scholars who explore the evolution of religion in the country. This is mainly guided by the provision that religion in China has evolved from Daoism to folk religion, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, among others. Thus, the theory was helpful in understanding the evolution of the minority ethnic religion in the Yunnan region.

The study was also completed by reviewing the literature on specific practices among individual ethnic groups. This section is founded on a thorough review of Daoism as the foundation of Chinese religion to explain the dynamic practices in the three ethnic groups. Each of the three ethnic groups has been covered in religious practices, the use of language, and philosophical and ethical practices (Leslie, 1998). The aim was to learn about the expression and transmission of the community's knowledge and teachings to promote a unique cultural heritage. The role of indigenous knowledge has been covered extensively.

DISCUSSION

The evolution of Chinese ethnic religion among minority groups remains a key concept explored through learning different religious practices. Yi, Naxi and Diao communities have expressed a unique expression of their cultural heritage by establishing a set of beliefs and teachings that relate to the harmony of the people (Rossabi, 2004). This study identifies the belief in the relationship between nature and humans as a common theme. This includes the fact that nature possesses spirits; thus, preserving trees, mountains, and rivers, among other resources, has become a common practice (Mackerras, 2013). There is a greater harmony established among the ethnic minority groups, especially with the use of sustainable practices that would appease the spirits. Death is a key factor in the three communities, specifically with the destination of the souls (Ming & Lewis, 2020). The soul's fate explains this after death: one is reincarcerated, the other remains in the body, and the other goes to the afterlife (Leslie, 1998). Rites are also an important practice that enhances religious practices, with priests destined to perform this sacred role (Rossabi, 2004). Also, the priest has a common role as an intermediary connecting human beings to the spirit realm. Ancestral worship is also a key factor across the three ethnic groups (Behr, 2010). This important aspect has promoted respect for the elders and made sacrifices

and rituals to appease them for a favour.

Cultural assimilation is considered a critical phase of the evolution and rise of different ethnic minority groups in China. Yunnan, being the face of the province with many ethnic groups, has demonstrated the reliance on Chinese cultural heritage as the foundation of the religion in the country (Ming & Lewis, 2020). This informs us why there are similarities in the worship practices embraced in Yi, Dai and Naxi communities. Also, Buddhist teachings, such as the influence of Karma, have been reiterated to inform the ethical and philosophical teachings of the country. Such a critical tapestry informs unity in religious practices among diverse Chinese ethnic groups (Behr, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Chinese religion remains an important tool in developing and preserving the country's strong cultural heritage. This is based on the uniformity of the religious practices examined in the Yunnan region. The use of indigenous language has been appraised to enhance the continuity of Daoism religion, which is the foundation of the Chinese religion. The commitment of the country's ethnic groups to preserve the cultural heritage and maintain the identity of the Chinese. Although the study focused on three out of more than fifty ethnic minority groups, its influence on Chinese religious studies is worth noting. This informs future research, which should emphasise covering other groups to understand how their religious, ethical and philosophical teachings contribute to the preservation of Chinese heritage. Also, future research should explore the role of modernity and Western religion in the cultural assimilation of the traditional practices of the Chinese religion. This will be a critical inquiry that will help researchers understand the cultural erosion of Chinese conventional religion against the preservation of the said traditions.

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