

The Core Role of the Salar Language in the Cultural Transmission of the Salar Ethnic Group — An Analysis Based on In-Depth Interviews

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ABSTRACT: Under the impact of globalization and modernization, the Salar language is facing a severe endangerment crisis, and its core role in cultural transmission has not yet been systematically elucidated. This study employs case analysis and in-depth interview to comprehensively examine the role of the Salar language in carrying and transmitting Salar cultural heritage. It further explores the impact of language endangerment on cultural continuity and proposes corresponding preservation strategies. The findings indicate that the Salar language plays a central role in intergenerational cultural transmission within families, the localization of religious practices, the symbolic encoding of dietary culture, and the preservation of oral traditions. Its endangerment has led to a decline in mother tongue proficiency among younger generations, disruptions in the chain of cultural transmission, and a weakening of ethnic identity. This study proposes a three-dimensional collaborative framework of “family–school–community,” emphasizing the family as the primary domain of language transmission, schools as institutions for integrating “language-culture” dual-track education, and communities as spaces for activating public usage of the language. It argues that safeguarding the Salar language is essential for sustaining the cultural genes of the Salar ethnic group and is of great significance for maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity.

KEYWORDS - Cultural transmission, language endangerment, preservation strategies, Salar culture, Salar language

I. INTRODUCTION

As one of China’s ethnic groups with relatively small populations, the Salar ethnic group is primarily concentrated in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County of Qinghai Province and its surrounding areas. Their language, Salar, serves as a core marker distinguishing the Salar ethnic group from other ethnic communities (Hu, 2014). The Salar language embodies the historical memory of the Salar people’s migration from Central Asia, as well as their religious beliefs, traditional knowledge, and artistic expressions (Hu, 2023). However, under the influence of globalization and modernization, the domains in which Salar is used have been rapidly shrinking. At the same time, younger generations have experienced a marked decline in mother-tongue proficiency, placing the language in an increasingly endangered state (Liu & Luo, 2017). Existing studies have examined key issues such as Salar ethnic identity, language use, cultural transmission, and interethnic interaction. Nevertheless, the central role of the Salar language in the transmission of Salar culture has not yet been systematically investigated.

Drawing on literature review and case analysis, this study aims to systematically examine the role of the Salar language as a carrier of Salar culture across multiple domains, explore the impact of language endangerment on cultural transmission, and propose targeted preservation strategies. The study seeks to provide both theoretical insights and practical support for the preservation and transmission of Salar culture. From a broader perspective, language serves as a living carrier of culture. Safeguarding the Salar language is therefore essential to the continuity of the cultural heritage of the Salar ethnic group. It is also of great significance for maintaining the linguistic and cultural diversity of China and the wider world, while offering valuable implications for the preservation of other endangered languages.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As a distinctive ethnic minority in northwestern China, the Salar ethnic group possesses a long and rich cultural history and has attracted considerable scholarly attention in disciplines such as ethnology, linguistics, and sociology. In recent years, an increasing body of research has focused on key issues including Salar ethnic identity, language use, cultural transmission, and interethnic interaction, providing valuable insights into the historical development and social transformation of the Salar community.

2.1 Construction of Ethnic Identity and the Harmony of Dual Identity

The construction of ethnic identity has become a major topic in Salar studies. Hu (2014) argues that Salar ethnic identity was formed through the process of ethnic integration following the group's eastward migration during the Yuan Dynasty. Islam, settlement patterns, and the Salar language have all played crucial roles in shaping this identity. The Salar people demonstrate a strong sense of identification with their own culture while maintaining an inclusive attitude toward intercultural communication. This cultural identity reflects the psychological foundation of ethnic identity. As an important carrier of culture, the Salar language evokes strong emotional attachment among its speakers. However, because of its endangered status, community members generally express pessimism about its future, revealing the complexity of ethnic identity in relation to language maintenance (Tuo & Ma, 2021). This identity-building process, rooted in historical memory and embodied in cultural symbols, has been further explored by Fang and Zhong (2024). Taking the cultural symbol of the "Camel Spring" as a case study, they demonstrate that the camel serves both as evidence of the Salar people's ancestral origins and as an emotional bond linking past and present. It preserves the collective memory of ancestral migration while reinforcing the shared consciousness of integration into the Chinese nation and harmonious coexistence with neighboring ethnic groups. Consequently, this cultural symbol functions as an important medium for preserving ethnic continuity and transmitting the spiritual heritage of the Salar people.

2.2 Current Status and Trends of Salar Language Use

The vitality of the Salar language has attracted increasing scholarly concern. Zhao (2016) argues that Salar has already entered an endangered stage. As the proportion of bilingual speakers continues to increase, the absence of effective language planning and intervention may accelerate language shift and further threaten the future of Salar. Cao's (2016) survey of primary and secondary school students in Hualong County provides additional evidence that proficiency in Salar declines progressively with advancing educational levels, largely because Mandarin Chinese dominates formal classroom instruction. Long-term multilingual contact has also shaped the linguistic development of Salar. Chinese loanwords account for approximately 40% of its vocabulary, while its word order has gradually shifted from Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) toward Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) (She, 2015). Continuous contact with Arabic, Mongolian, and Tibetan has further influenced its phonology, lexicon, and grammar. For example, Salar has incorporated numerous Arabic religious terms and adopted certain grammatical structures from Mongolian, changes that have substantially reshaped both its linguistic structure and communicative functions (Ma, 2024). These linguistic changes reflect the complex language attitudes of the Salar community. On the one hand, community members generally recognize the cultural value of their heritage language. On the other hand, most also acknowledge the greater instrumental value of Mandarin Chinese (Tuo & Ma, 2021). Such attitudes vary across different social groups. Men use Putonghua in public settings more frequently than women, largely because of their greater participation in socioeconomic activities. In addition, age and occupation influence language attitudes: individuals over the age of forty place greater emphasis on the

transmission of Salar than younger generations, while farmers generally demonstrate stronger emotional attachment to their mother tongue than public-sector employees (Zhou, 2021).

2.3 Challenges to Cultural Transmission and Preservation Strategies

The transmission of Salar culture is facing significant challenges in the context of modernization. Ma (2015) points out that important cultural symbols, including traditional embroidery and the “Camel Play” wedding performance, have experienced substantial decline. Furthermore, fewer than ten practitioners remain capable of transmitting Salar oral literature, placing this intangible cultural heritage at serious risk of disappearance (Li, 2018). The underlying cause of this crisis lies in the disruption of traditional intergenerational transmission. Modernization has weakened family- and community-based mechanisms through which cultural rituals and traditional skills were once maintained, while the lack of systematic documentation has left many traditional practices on the verge of extinction (Fang & Zhong, 2024). In response to these challenges, scholars and practitioners have explored a variety of preservation strategies. These include digital documentation of cultural resources, such as Salar-language film translation and the establishment of cultural databases, as well as the integration of Salar culture into educational programs (Ma, 2024). Meanwhile, emerging media platforms, particularly short-video applications, have become important channels through which younger generations participate in cultural preservation. These platforms transform static preservation into dynamic dissemination, enhancing both the vitality and visibility of Salar culture and contributing to a multidimensional preservation network that integrates documentation, transmission, and public dissemination (Ma, 2016).

2.4 Historical and Contemporary Interethnic Interaction

Throughout their history, the Salar people have developed a multicultural and symbiotic cultural ecology through sustained interaction with neighboring ethnic groups and related communities across national borders. Interaction between the Salar and Tibetans has been characterized by both economic complementarity and cultural exchange. Economically, the two groups have developed stable reciprocal relationships based on differences in local resources. Culturally, the Salar have adopted Tibetan food traditions such as “youjiaotuan”, while Tibetans have incorporated Salar embroidery techniques into their own cultural practices. In the religious sphere, mutual respect has enabled each community to maintain its own beliefs without interference (Zhou, 2021). The Salar also share historical and linguistic connections with the Turkmen people. Both groups trace their origins to the ancient Salur tribe, share approximately 70% similarity in core vocabulary, and preserve collective memories of camel-centered migration traditions. In recent years, academic exchanges and other forms of international cooperation have contributed to rebuilding cultural ties between the two groups, providing valuable empirical evidence for studies of Salar origins and cross-cultural interaction (Ma, 2015).

Although substantial progress has been made in Salar studies, the central role of the Salar language in the transmission of Salar culture has not yet been systematically examined. To address this research gap, the present study employs literature review and case analysis to investigate the following research questions:

1. What distinctive and fundamental roles does the Salar language play in the transmission of Salar culture, and how are these roles manifested in different cultural domains?
2. What are the specific and long-term impacts of language endangerment on the transmission of Salar culture, and how can effective preservation strategies be developed to mitigate these impacts and ensure the sustainable transmission of Salar cultural heritage?

III. METHODOLOGY

To gain an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms through which the Salar language facilitates cultural transmission, this study conducted an in-depth interview with a 29-year-old male member of the Salar ethnic group from Qingshui Township, Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Haidong City, Qinghai Province. The participant was selected according to the following criteria.

First, the participant has lived for an extended period in the core settlement area of the Salar ethnic group, where approximately 65% of the local population is Salar. He has therefore been immersed in the Salar cultural and linguistic environment since childhood. Within the family, Salar has been the primary language used in everyday communication, meals, festival gatherings, and other domestic activities. In terms of religious life, the

participant has regularly taken part in Islamic festivals, including Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, and is familiar with religious sermons delivered by imams in the Salar language. These experiences have enabled him to develop a comprehensive understanding of the central role of Salar in localizing religious teachings and transmitting religious traditions.

The participant is employed as an English teacher at a local secondary school and holds a bachelor's degree. His dual social identity makes him a particularly suitable informant for this study. As an educator, he uses Mandarin Chinese as his primary working language and is closely engaged with the mainstream educational system and contemporary culture. As a member of the Salar ethnic group, however, he continues to identify strongly with his ethnic culture, actively uses Salar when communicating with older family members, and regularly participates in family- and community-based cultural activities. This dual identity enables him both to observe objectively the challenges faced by Salar in the context of modern education and to experience firsthand the language's role in maintaining ethnic cultural identity.

A semi-structured interview protocol was employed. The interview focused on several key themes, including intergenerational language transmission within the family, language practices in religious activities and traditional festivals, the role of language in preserving historical memory, the unique cultural meanings embedded in the Salar language, and the current state of language transmission. The interview was designed to explore the specific mechanisms through which the Salar language contributes to the transmission of Salar culture through a micro-level case study. The interview lasted approximately 90–120 minutes and was conducted in Mandarin Chinese. All responses were transcribed in Mandarin, while key expressions in Salar were annotated using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Through a thick description of this individual case, the study seeks to reveal the central role of the Salar language in the transmission of Salar culture and to examine the cultural implications of its endangerment.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Construction of Ethnic Identity and the Harmony of Dual Identity

4.1.1 The Salar Language in Family and Childhood Socialization

The interview data indicate that, within the family domain, the Salar language facilitates the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage through everyday linguistic practices. The participant stated explicitly: *"When I was a child, Salar was the main language used at home. My parents and grandparents all spoke Salar, and they were highly proficient in it."* Such proficiency is reflected not only in speakers' linguistic competence but also in the pervasive use of Salar across a wide range of family activities. As the participant explained, *"We used Salar in everyday conversations, during meals, at festival gatherings, and when educating children."* From a sociolinguistic perspective, the preferential use of a particular language within the family represents a form of cultural socialization. Through the frequent use of Salar, older generations gradually internalize mother-tongue use as a habitual practice for younger family members, thereby transmitting the implicit norm that speaking Salar is an essential component of being a member of the Salar ethnic group.

This process of cultural socialization is characterized by strong intergenerational guidance. According to the participant, *"We learned Salar through the guidance of elders during childhood, and we also acquired it naturally through daily communication."* Such guidance does not involve explicit grammatical instruction. Rather, it is embedded in everyday contexts, including forms of address and behavioral reminders, through which cultural etiquette is incorporated into language practice. Consequently, younger generations acquire not only the language itself but also the behavioral norms and cultural values associated with Salar society.

Changes in the linguistic environment throughout an individual's development further reflect the influence of broader social structures on language choice. The participant recalled that *"before entering school, my neighbors and childhood friends mainly spoke Salar. After I started school, however, both classroom instruction and communication with classmates gradually shifted from Salar to Mandarin Chinese."* This transition essentially reflects the interaction between linguistic capital acquired within the family and that promoted by the formal education system. As a modern educational institution, schools designate Mandarin Chinese as the official language of instruction in accordance with national language policy, whereas Salar is

largely confined to the private sphere. This functional division has had a direct impact on patterns of language use. At present, the participant estimates that approximately 60% of his daily communication is conducted in Salar and 40% in Mandarin Chinese, while emphasizing that he “*always takes the initiative to speak Salar when communicating with older family members.*” These figures illustrate the domain-specific contraction of Salar. The language continues to dominate family interactions, particularly those involving older generations, but has gradually yielded to Mandarin Chinese in public domains such as schools and workplaces.

4.1.2 The Salar Language in Religious Practice

The Salar people adhere to Islam, which constitutes not only their religious belief system but also a fundamental component of their cultural identity. Within religious practice, language functions both as a medium for interpreting sacred doctrines and as a vehicle for transmitting moral values. The interview data suggest that, through the incorporation of religious vocabulary and participation in ritual practices, the Salar language serves as an important bridge connecting the sacred and the secular.

Salar contains a substantial number of religious terms derived from Arabic and Persian. These lexical items are not merely linguistic borrowings; rather, they have undergone processes of localization and have become integral components of Salar religious culture. The participant listed several representative examples, including Allah (God), Muhammad (the Prophet), Imani (faith), Hanafi (the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence), and Adhan (the Islamic call to prayer). Sacred religious vocabulary extends beyond the boundaries of formal religious settings and becomes integrated into everyday moral judgment. The Salar language thus functions as the key medium through which this transformation is realized.

Religious rituals constitute one of the most important domains in which the cultural functions of the Salar language are manifested. The participant explained that “*I participate in Islamic religious activities, such as Eid al-Fitr. During these occasions, the imam delivers sermons in the Salar language.*” As religious authorities, imams play a crucial role in the dissemination of Islamic teachings, and their language choice directly influences the accessibility of religious knowledge. Delivering sermons in Salar reduces linguistic barriers by drawing upon speakers’ mother tongue, enabling abstract religious concepts, such as the Five Pillars of Islam and the importance of charitable deeds, to be understood as practical guidelines for everyday life.

This process becomes particularly evident during religious festivals. According to the participant, “*Family members and neighbors exchange greetings in Salar, such as the greeting ‘Salaam,’ and elders recount the legends associated with the festivals, including the origin of Eid al-Adha, in the Salar language.*” He further emphasized that “*when these stories are told in Salar, they are understood more accurately and are easier to comprehend.*” The greeting Salaam is not merely a polite expression; it also conveys the religious blessing that Allah may grant peace to others. This profound spiritual and emotional significance cannot be fully conveyed through translation into Chinese.

4.1.3 The Salar Language in Culinary Culture

Food is not merely a means of satisfying physiological needs but also an important carrier of cultural values. The naming of traditional foods in the Salar language constitutes a symbolic encoding of the Salar culinary tradition. The participant provided detailed explanations of the Salar names for two representative foods, hand-grabbed mutton and youxiang (fried bread):

“*Hand-grabbed mutton, in Salar, it is called gari, which literally refers to ‘mutton eaten by hand.’ The term reflects the traditional way in which the Salar people consume mutton. It is closely associated with the nomadic and migratory history of the Salar people. During the early period of migration, dietary practices were simple and pragmatic. Hand-grabbed mutton served not only as a source of nutrition but also as a signature dish prepared for festivals and the reception of guests, symbolizing hospitality and prosperity.*”

“*Youxiang, in Salar, it is called sæjdə, a term derived from the Arabic word سعيد (meaning ‘happiness’ or ‘auspiciousness’). It specifically refers to this traditional fried bread and embodies the meanings of blessing, sharing, and sacredness. Its preparation follows principles of ritual cleanliness: animal fat is avoided, while*

vegetable oil is commonly used for frying. After preparation, it must be shared with relatives, friends, and neighbors rather than consumed alone, reflecting the values of collective celebration and mutual assistance.”

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the names *gəri* and *səjdə* function as the signifiers, whereas the associated history of migration, religious norms, and social etiquette constitute the signified. By establishing this inseparable relationship between linguistic forms and cultural meanings, the Salar language transforms food practices into performances of cultural values. When people eat *gəri*, they are not merely consuming food but also reenacting the practical wisdom that enabled their ancestors to survive migration. Likewise, sharing *səjdə* represents the enactment of Islamic ethics of mutual assistance as well as the Salar community’s emphasis on collective solidarity and social reciprocity.

4.1.4 The Salar Language as a Vehicle of Oral History

The Salar people possess relatively limited written historical records, and their collective memory has therefore been transmitted primarily through oral tradition. Consequently, the Salar language functions as a living repository of history. The migration legends and folk narratives recounted during the interview vividly demonstrate how language records historical experiences and shapes ethnic identity.

Among these narratives, the legend of the Salar ancestors’ migration from Central Asia constitutes the core of the community’s historical memory. The participant recounted the story as follows:

“The Salar ancestors were tribal leaders in the Samarkand region of Central Asia. After suffering persecution by the local ruler, more than 170 households eastward, accompanied by a white camel carrying the Quran and soil and water from their homeland. Eventually, they arrived in present-day Xunhua, Qinghai, where the camel was transformed into a stone peak and the homeland’s soil merged with the local earth. Interpreting this as a divine sign, they decided to settle there.”

Within this narrative, the Salar language performs three interrelated cultural functions. First, place names serve as cultural anchors. In Salar, Samarkand represents not merely a geographical location but also a symbolic homeland, and its distinctive pronunciation reinforces the collective memory of the community’s ancestral roots. Second, key objects including the white camel, the Quran, and the homeland’s soil and water are endowed with sacred significance through linguistic representation. The episode in which the camel is transformed into a stone peak further constructs the settlement site as a divinely chosen homeland, thereby legitimizing the community’s permanent settlement through a sacred narrative. Third, the repeated use of verbs such as “lead,” “migrate,” and “settle” highlights the leadership of the ancestors and the solidarity of the migrating community, thereby constructing the symbolic foundation of Salar ethnic identity.

More importantly, this legend has been transmitted primarily through oral narration in the Salar language, and its essential content continues to be preserved predominantly in Salar, even though some Chinese lexical items have gradually entered the narrative. Such linguistic continuity safeguards the core elements of historical memory from erosion, allowing the migration story to function as the community’s master narrative. Regardless of historical change, the shared identity that “we are descendants of the migrants” continues to be reinforced through storytelling in the Salar language.

In addition to migration legends, Salar folk tales function as concise yet powerful vehicles for transmitting the community’s moral values. The participant referred to The Guardian of the White Camel (白骆驼的守护) as a representative example:

“Throughout the journey, everyone remained united around the white camel. The young people, being physically stronger, took turns leading the camel and exploring the route ahead. The elders relied on their experience to determine directions and distribute food, while the children sang songs to relieve everyone’s exhaustion. It was this spirit of unity that enabled them to overcome countless hardships and ultimately find a place to settle.”

From the perspective of cultural anthropology, this division of labor vividly embodies the collectivist values of the Salar community. Through differentiated descriptions of social roles — for example, emphasizing the strength of young people, the wisdom of elders, and the uplifting power of children’s songs — the Salar language transforms the ethical principles of cooperation, mutual assistance, and shared responsibility into

concrete and memorable narratives. Compared with abstract moral instruction, this narrative mode of transmission is more readily accepted, particularly by children, for whom these linguistic symbols gradually become internalized as behavioral norms.

The participant further observed that many culturally specific meanings would be lost if these stories were narrated in Mandarin Chinese. For example, the Salar expression describing the spiritual nature of the white camel conveys not only the idea of intelligence but also profound reverence for the camel as a sacred messenger because it carried the Quran during the ancestral migration. The corresponding Chinese expression, although denoting spirituality, cannot fully capture the intricate combination of religious belief and ethnic sentiment embedded in the original Salar term.

From a linguistic perspective, language structure shapes patterns of thought. The lexical system of the Salar language constructs a distinctive cognitive framework that integrates the sacred and the secular, and it is precisely this conceptual framework that underpins the uniqueness of Salar culture.

4.2 The Impact of Salar Language Endangerment on the Transmission of Salar Culture

Although the Salar language plays a central role in the transmission of Salar culture, the interview data clearly reveal the challenges currently confronting its intergenerational transmission. These challenges extend beyond a simple decline in the frequency of language use. More fundamentally, they pose a risk of cultural discontinuity and may trigger a broader crisis in cultural inheritance.

4.2.1 Declining Language Proficiency Among Younger Generations

The participant explicitly stated that *“young Salar people today use the Salar language less frequently than previous generations.”* He attributed this trend primarily to *“children’s exposure to multimedia, which encourages them to imitate the language used in digital media, as well as the influence of school education and the new ways of thinking brought back by university students returning to their hometowns.”*

This observation reflects the combined impact of multiple forces associated with modernization on language transmission. First, the linguistic homogenization brought about by mass media has reinforced the dominance of Mandarin Chinese. Since television, the Internet, and other forms of digital media primarily operate in Mandarin, children become familiar with Mandarin at an early age, thereby reducing opportunities for acquiring Salar naturally. Second, the promotion of the national standard language through formal education further marginalizes Salar. As discussed above, Mandarin serves as the exclusive language of instruction in schools, while Salar remains absent from the formal education system, weakening its linguistic capital and perceived social value. Finally, changing intergenerational attitudes also contribute to language shift. The participant’s reference to the *“new ways of thinking”* introduced by university students returning home suggests that some young people associate Mandarin with modernization and social mobility, whereas Salar may be perceived as old-fashioned or lacking prestige, leading to its deliberate avoidance.

This decline is directly reflected in the fragmentation of linguistic competence. According to the participant, *“most young people today cannot produce a complete sentence entirely in Salar; they usually mix it with Mandarin,”* and their overall command of the language has become increasingly Sinicized. From the perspective of language endangerment, Salar has entered an endangered stage. Although the language has not yet disappeared, the semi-proficient competence exhibited by younger speakers indicates that its linguistic integrity is gradually being eroded. Such fragmentation inevitably results in an incomplete transmission of the cultural meanings embedded in the language.

4.2.2 Risks of Disruption in the Chain of Cultural Transmission

At its core, language endangerment represents the erosion of cultural heritage. The participant expressed concern that *“as the number of Salar speakers continues to decline, vocabulary and expressions closely associated with traditional culture are gradually disappearing.”* In his view, this process will directly affect cultural memory, ethnic identity, and the sense of belonging.

More specifically, the loss of Salar vocabulary is likely to obscure the collective historical memory of the Salar people. The disappearance of words describing migration, traditional tools, and historical ways of life may leave younger generations with only fragmented impressions of their past, preventing them from constructing a coherent narrative of their ethnic history and consequently weakening their sense of ethnic identity.

The participant further emphasized that the Salar language is essential to ethnic identity, stating that “*if people cannot speak Salar, it will inevitably affect their understanding of their ethnic culture.*” Fundamentally, this reflects a gradual loosening of identity attachment. When individuals are no longer able to connect with their cultural traditions through their mother tongue, their sense of belonging as members of the Salar ethnic group is likely to diminish. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, ethnic identity is constructed through the distinction between “us” and “others,” with language serving as one of the most salient symbolic markers of group membership. As the use of Salar continues to decline, the symbolic boundary separating the Salar community from surrounding groups becomes increasingly blurred. Over time, this process may place the distinctive cultural identity of the Salar ethnic group at greater risk of assimilation.

4.3 Strategies for the Preservation of the Salar Language

To address the challenges facing the intergenerational transmission of the Salar language, preservation efforts should be firmly rooted in the cultural practices of the Salar community while also drawing upon established theories of language maintenance and revitalization. Based on the interview findings, this study proposes a three-dimensional preservation framework involving coordinated efforts by the family, school, and community.

4.3.1 The Family as the Primary Site of Intergenerational Language Transmission

The participant emphasized that family education plays a fundamental role in the transmission of the Salar language. From a practical perspective, family-based preservation should strengthen intentional language use in everyday life. For example, families could establish a regular “Salar Language Day,” during which all members communicate exclusively in Salar. Elders should also be encouraged to recount traditional narratives, thereby recreating the traditional mode of language acquisition through daily interaction and storytelling.

Moreover, strengthening intergenerational linguistic interaction is equally important. Parents should prioritize the use of Salar kinship terms, expressions of guidance, and everyday instructions when communicating with their children. By integrating language learning with the transmission of behavioral norms and cultural values, children are more likely to recognize that speaking Salar constitutes an essential aspect of their ethnic identity.

From a theoretical perspective, the core objective of family-based preservation is to reconstruct the emotional value of the Salar language. When children experience affection, acceptance, and a sense of security through their mother tongue within the family, they develop emotional attachment to the language. Such attachment serves as an intrinsic motivation for resisting external pressures of linguistic assimilation.

4.3.2 Schools as Builders of an Integrated “Language-Culture” Educational Model

The participant suggested that “*introducing Salar language courses into schools in Salar communities would be both feasible and highly significant for cultural transmission.*” Specifically, three measures are recommended.

First, teaching materials should integrate linguistic knowledge with cultural content by incorporating religious vocabulary, migration legends, historical narratives, and expressions associated with traditional customs, thereby promoting the simultaneous acquisition of language and cultural knowledge.

Second, teacher development should involve recruiting fluent Salar speakers from local communities, particularly elders with extensive knowledge of traditional culture, as part-time instructors. Their participation would ensure the cultural authenticity of classroom instruction and prevent the separation of language learning from its cultural context.

Third, instructional approaches should emphasize communicative and context-based learning. For example, teachers could simulate festival gatherings in which students exchange greetings such as Salaam in Salar or organize storytelling and speech contests conducted in the Salar language. Such activities would enhance both the practical application of the language and students' engagement with learning.

The value of school education lies in granting the Salar language the status of formal knowledge. By extending its functions beyond the private sphere and incorporating it into institutional education, schools can provide Salar with educational capital comparable to that of Mandarin Chinese, thereby strengthening younger generations' recognition of and identification with their mother tongue.

4.3.3 The Community as a Public Space for Revitalizing Language Use

The participant further emphasized the importance of *"establishing language preservation groups and organizing various cultural activities to encourage residents to use the Salar language."* Examples include singing songs in Salar and producing short videos in Salar, such as storytelling videos based on traditional narratives. These activities essentially aim to reconstruct the social functions of the language through collective participation.

Language preservation groups could institutionalize such activities by organizing regular Salar cultural festivals featuring folk storytelling, poetry recitation, and demonstrations of traditional food preparation, thereby restoring the presence of the Salar language in public life. In addition, new media platforms should be actively utilized by encouraging young people to create and share short videos in Salar on popular social media platforms. This approach not only aligns with contemporary communication practices among younger generations but also endows the Salar language with renewed relevance in modern society.

Ultimately, the primary objective of community-based initiatives is to ensure that the Salar language remains socially meaningful and practically useful. When speakers realize that using Salar enables them to gain social recognition, participate in cultural activities, and even access economic opportunities, their willingness to use and transmit the language is likely to increase naturally.

V. CONCLUSION

This study systematically examined the central role of the Salar language in the transmission of Salar culture, highlighting the profound significance of language as a living carrier of culture. It also identified the serious implications of language endangerment for cultural continuity and proposed targeted strategies for language preservation and revitalization.

First, the findings demonstrate that the Salar language serves as the primary vehicle of Salar culture, with functions extending across multiple cultural domains. Within the family, it facilitates the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage through everyday interaction and parental guidance, thereby fostering individuals' sense of ethnic belonging. In religious practice, the localization of religious vocabulary and ritual discourse enables sacred Islamic teachings to be connected with secular moral values, enhancing both the comprehensibility and practical relevance of religious culture. In culinary culture, the naming of traditional foods encodes the community's migration history, religious norms, and collective values. In historical transmission, the Salar language functions as the principal medium of oral history, preserving memories of ethnic origins and the collective spirit that underpins Salar identity. Together, these functions establish the Salar language as the linguistic foundation of cultural continuity, supporting the view that language is not merely a medium for transmitting culture but an integral component of culture itself.

Second, the endangerment of the Salar language poses a substantial threat to the transmission of Salar culture. The declining frequency of mother-tongue use among younger generations and the fragmentation of their communicative competence have weakened the effectiveness of intergenerational cultural transmission within families. At the same time, the gradual disappearance of vocabulary and expressions closely associated with traditional culture has made it increasingly difficult to preserve the cultural nuances embedded in religious practices, culinary traditions, and historical narratives. As a consequence, the collective historical memory of the Salar people and the foundations of their ethnic identity have been progressively weakened. In essence, the crisis of language endangerment represents the risk of a rupture in the chain of cultural transmission. Without effective

intervention, the distinctive cultural heritage of the Salar people may be further diluted through linguistic and cultural assimilation.

Third, the three-dimensional preservation framework proposed in this study, integrating the family, school, and community, provides a practical approach to safeguarding both the Salar language and Salar cultural heritage. Within the family, intentional language practices and strengthened intergenerational interaction can reconstruct the emotional value of the mother tongue. Schools can promote an integrated “language – culture” educational model, granting the Salar language the status of formal knowledge while strengthening younger generations’ identification with their linguistic and cultural heritage. At the community level, regular cultural activities and the strategic use of digital media can revitalize public domains of language use and restore the social functions of the Salar language. The coordinated implementation of these three dimensions can simultaneously reinforce emotional attachment to the mother tongue and expand opportunities for its practical use, thereby contributing to the revitalization of the language.

The continued vitality of the Salar language is fundamentally linked to the integrity and distinctiveness of Salar culture. Preserving the Salar language therefore entails not only safeguarding an endangered language but also protecting the historical memory, religious beliefs, traditional knowledge, and cultural values embodied within it. Such efforts are of considerable significance for maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity in China and around the world. Moreover, the preservation framework proposed in this study offers a practical model of protecting culture through language and revitalizing language through culture, which may serve as a useful reference for the preservation of other endangered languages facing similar challenges.

Future research may further explore the application of digital technologies to Salar language preservation, including the establishment of digital language archives, the development of online teaching resources, and other technology-assisted approaches. These initiatives could provide stronger technical support for language revitalization and contribute to the sustainable transmission of Salar culture in the context of ongoing modernization.

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