

The Use of Minority Languages and the Sense of Belonging to Ethnic Groups

Yang Yuan^{1,2,*}

¹Faculty of Education, Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, 710062, Shaanxi, China

²School of Humanities and Communication, University of Sanya, Sanya, 572022, Hainan, China
yangyuan@sanyau.edu.cn

*Corresponding author

Abstract: In order to understand the relationship between the use of minority languages and the sense of belonging to ethnic groups, this article conducted a correlation analysis between the use of minority languages in China and the sense of belonging to ethnic groups. Research has found that in a survey of 100 people's proficiency in their own language, 69 were proficient in using their own language, 20 were not proficient in using it, and 11 were completely unable to use it. There is a significant positive correlation between the use of minority languages and the sense of belonging to ethnic groups, and its influencing factors include the number of ethnic populations, proficiency in language use, and attitudes of ethnic members towards ethnic languages. Due to the large population, wide distribution range, and complex influencing factors of ethnic minorities, as well as the high frequency and wide range of use of ethnic minority languages, their impact on the sense of belonging to ethnic groups is greater than in nonethnic minority areas with smaller populations. The use of minority languages can enhance a sense of social belonging within an ethnic group, and this impact is positive and positive.

Keywords: Ethnic Minorities, Language Use, Ethnic Group Belonging, Use of Mandarin, Ethnic Minority Language

1. Introduction

The Chinese nation is a large family composed of 56 ethnic groups, all of which have learned and helped each other in history, and together created a brilliant Chinese civilization. Throughout the long history, each ethnic group has its own unique language, culture, and social customs, and through long-term communication, they have learned and integrated with each other, forming a unique Chinese language and culture. However, due to geographical location, historical and cultural factors, and economic development, there are significant differences in language use and communication among different ethnic groups. These differences not only affect communication and communication between people, but also affect people's identification and belonging to ethnic groups.

There is a close relationship between the use of minority languages and the sense of belonging of ethnic groups, and it is also an important factor for an ethnic group to identify with its ethnic group. In this sense, there is an inseparable relationship between language use and a sense of national belonging. At present, research on the relationship between language use and ethnic belonging has achieved certain results in relevant fields. However, these achievements are mostly studied from a certain aspect or perspective, and have not formed a complete system, nor have they been analyzed and demonstrated from multiple perspectives.

Language is the most important communication tool in human society. Kessler Greg mentioned that humans live in an era of unprecedented opportunities to communicate with others in real and compelling language and cultural contexts [1]. Nguyen Trang Thi Thuy believed that mainstream language is established as a code of intergenerational solidarity among young members, while mother tongue is considered a power code related to older members of the family and community [2]. Against the backdrop of mainstream languages being the main language users, the language usage environment of ethnic minorities is worth discussing. Serrano Maria-Sierra Cordoba mentioned that the concept of "minority languages" has always been a topic of special concern in linguistic sociology [3]. Rodrigue Landry believed that social determinism has greatly influenced the use of minority languages in society [4]. Giollagain Conchur O believed that the symbolic language policy for ethnic minorities is harmful to threatened ethnic minorities because it ignores the social environment of ethnic minority language

decline [5]. Magdalena Skrodzka examined the impact of minority language use on history [6]. The Peace Hughes Tracey emphasized the importance of families and communities in the revitalization of minority languages [7]. In the contemporary world, language teaching is responsible for preparing learners to interact with people from other cultural backgrounds and teaching them skills, attitudes and knowledge [8-9]. Due to the fact that language is an important tool for people's communication and interaction, there is a need for mutual understanding and communication among different ethnic groups during the communication process, which also promotes the widespread use of minority languages.

Since entering the 21st century, with the continuous development of globalization, the connections between countries around the world have become closer, and they are facing opportunities and challenges together. At the same time, with the acceleration of economic and social development in ethnic areas, the increasing frequency of population mobility, and the increasingly close communication and integration of various ethnic groups, many ethnic groups have developed varying degrees of language and cultural barriers. These all affect the communication and development between different ethnic groups. How to enhance the sense of belonging and identification of ethnic minorities in a harmonious and stable language environment has become a noteworthy and important issue in current education work in ethnic minority areas. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the relationship between the use of ethnic languages and the sense of belonging of ethnic groups, which can not only provide a scientific basis for the state to formulate relevant ethnic language policy, but also provide a certain reference value for the development of ethnic regions.

2. Language Use and Group Belongingness

2.1 Language Usage

In Chinese mainland, most ethnic minority students face the challenge of learning three languages in school, namely their mother tongue, Mandarin, and a foreign language, usually English [10]. The degree of language use also represents the degree of identification with the language used. Language identification to a certain extent affects the direction of language retention patterns. The higher the sense of identification with the mother tongue, the more conducive it is to maintaining the mother tongue. The use of minority languages has various purposes, sometimes to promote the content of minority languages, but more often to attract people's attention to these language contents [11]. People who use their mother tongue as a common language exhibit a preference for their mother tongue [12]. Each ethnic group has varying degrees of emotional identification with their own language, while they have a more reasonable sense of identification with Chinese. Within the same region, there may be subtle differences in the specific manifestations of different races. However, most of them have a natural and profound emotional attachment to their mother tongue and the traditional culture of their own nation, which drives them to do their utmost to protect and protect their mother tongue and culture, thus enabling the long-term maintenance of their own language community. The ethnic languages of ethnic minority students constitute their ethnic connotations [13]. A common mother tongue indicates ethnic relations and trust [14]. In the process of urbanization, most urban minority groups have transitioned from monolingual and quasi bilingual to truly bilingual, multilingual, and multilingual. During this process, while maintaining the emotional identity of their mother tongue, the language communication function and identity of indigenous people have been weakened, and the status of Chinese as such has become more prominent. The common sense understanding of "national language" and monolingual or multilingual language has developed in the social context [15]. Speaking a late acquired second language involves an increase in cognitive needs, which is mainly reflected in young and middle-aged people [16].

For newcomers, the formation of their language identity is also directly related to the degree of urbanization, and their language identity vary with the degree of urbanization in the destination, thereby affecting the use and maintenance of their language identity. In areas with high levels of urbanization among ethnic minorities, people have a lower level of identification with their language communication function and are less likely to retain their mother tongue. Urban ethnic minority groups generally tend to prefer Chinese in language selection and use, but there are significant intergenerational differences in the use of their mother tongue, and the level of mother tongue use is decreasing, especially among the third generation and young people. Consistency and accuracy when used in ethnic languages are important factors in language acquisition [17]. In short, whether it is traditional urban ethnic minorities or different population types of urban ethnic minorities, their recognition of their mother tongue directly affect the maintenance mode of their mother tongue.

2.2. Expressions of National Belongingness

Sense of belonging is a unique psychological characteristic of a social group, and it is also the psychological belonging of social members to the social group they belong to. The sense of belonging plays an important role in group psychology and serves as a bridge for the interconnection and interaction between individuals and groups in social groups. A person can only be said to have a sense of belonging when they have a certain emotional attachment to the social group they belong to and are willing to make a certain contribution to this social group. Ethnic belonging refers to a psychological identification of a certain ethnic group towards the ethnic group to which it belongs. In psychology, people refer to this sense of national identity as a sense of national belonging. Sense of belonging is a broad concept that spans several disciplines of social science. In sociology, the concepts of belonging and identity can sometimes be interchangeably used to capture subjective feelings as part of a social group [18]. In a country, people with the same ethnic group have a sense of belonging, which can be shared experiences of war, disasters, and hardships, as well as shared development and prosperity. Regardless of the situation, there is a sense of identification with this country and nation. People further demand the development of precise measures regarding the need for a sense of belonging and the realization of a sense of belonging, as well as new measures to strive to achieve a sense of belonging through specific channels [19].

Ethnic groups not only represent genetic diversity, but also exhibit strong local characteristics in work and daily life [20]. In the study of ethnic identity, a sense of belonging to a group is an important concept. Ethnic identity is a complex structure that not only includes an individual's sense of belonging to the group, but also includes positive evaluations of the group to which they belong, as well as their investment in group activities. Some people believe that the core of national identity is the attitude towards the inner group, some believe that a sense of belonging and commitment are the core of national identity, while others believe that identification with national language, culture, and history is the core of national identity. By general standards, from the perspective of modern ethnic identity research, developmental psychologists often place self-identity at the core of ethnic identity. Social psychologists often put the shared values, sense of belonging, attitude and behavior of ethnic members at the core of national identity. Sociologists and anthropologists focus on cultural identity, language identity and national history identity in national identity.

3. Experimental Investigation

3.1 Experimental Ideas

Starting from the sense of belonging of ethnic minorities in Yunnan, the current situation, characteristics, and changes of the sense of belonging of ethnic minorities in Yunnan are analyzed, and the impact of the use of minority languages on the sense of belonging of ethnic minorities is explored.

100 ethnic minority residents from A community in a certain region of Yunnan were selected as survey samples, and the current situation of the sense of belonging of ethnic minority residents in A community in a certain region of Yunnan was studied. Establish the research object as ethnic minority residents of A community in a certain region of Yunnan, and design a survey questionnaire to conduct a questionnaire and pre survey on the sense of belonging of ethnic minority residents in A community in a certain region of Yunnan.

3.2 Experimental Samples

The sample structure for questionnaire collection is shown in Table 1.

From the sample structure in Table 1, it can be seen that the proportion of residents from ethnic autonomous regions and non ethnic autonomous regions in this community is 79:21, indicating a higher proportion of residents from ethnic autonomous regions. In the survey on the ethnic composition of parents, there were more cases where both parents were from ethnic minorities, with 81% having both parents from ethnic minorities and 19% having only one parent from ethnic minorities. In the survey of the proficiency level of the native language among 100 people, 69 were proficient in using the native language, 20 were not proficient in using it, and 11 were completely proficient in using it.

Table 1. Structure of questionnaire survey samples

| | | Number of people | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 60 | 60 |
| | Female | 40 | 40 |
| Birthplace | Ethnic autonomous regions | 79 | 79 |
| | Non-ethnic autonomous regions | 21 | 21 |
| Parental ethnic composition | They are all ethnic minorities | 81 | 81 |
| | Only one is an ethnic minority | 19 | 19 |
| Native language proficiency | Skillful | 69 | 69 |
| | Unskilled | 20 | 20 |
| | Not at all | 11 | 11 |

Statistics were conducted on the ethnic groups of 100 survey samples, as shown in Figure 1.

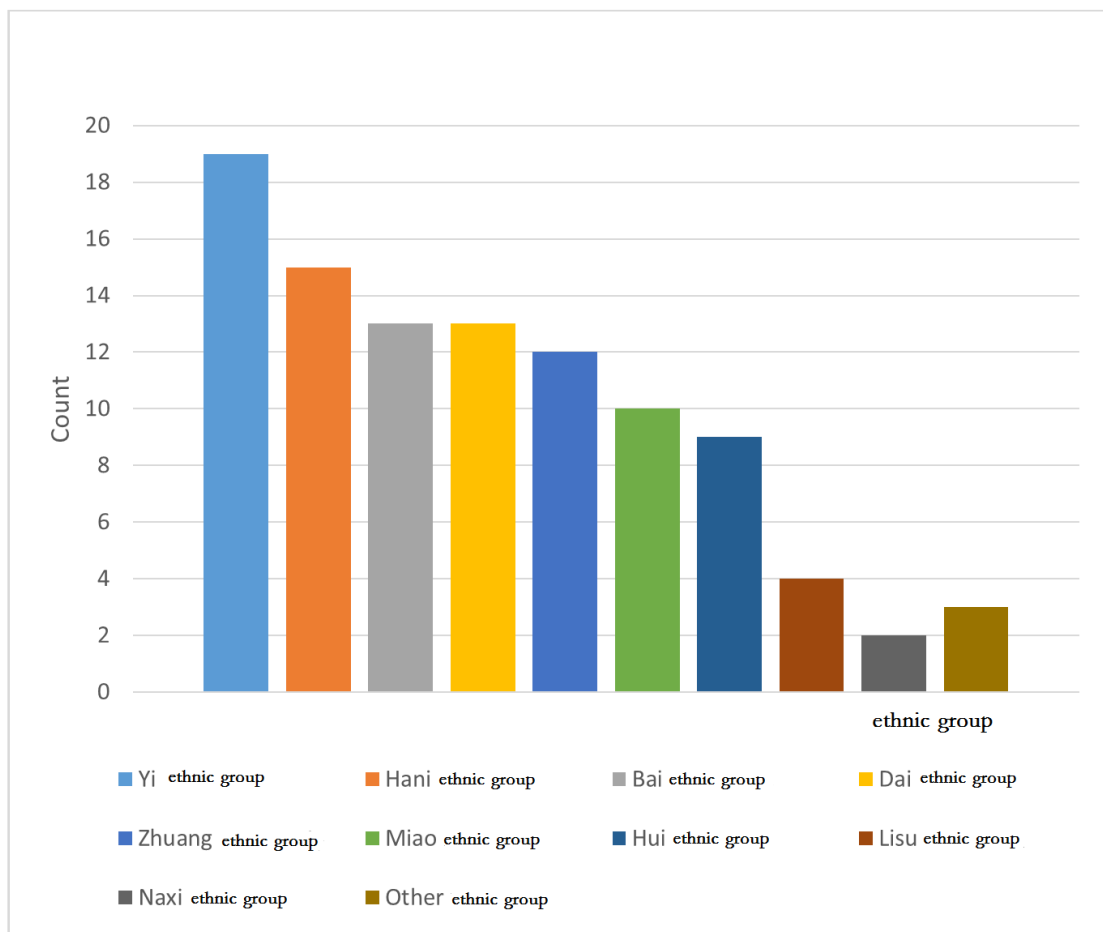


Figure 1. Distribution of residents of different ethnic groups

From Figure 1, it can be seen that in this community, the Yi ethnic group accounts for the majority, with 19 out of 100 people being Yi, 15 being Hani, 13 being Bai, and only 2 being Naxi.

Many ethnic groups live in the gap between the dual cultural collision, namely the collision between Chinese and foreign cultures and the collision between ethnic minority cultures and Han cultures. They not only enjoy the fruits of the dual culture, but also bear the impact of the dual culture. Therefore, the research object of this study is selected as the residents of ethnic minorities in A community of a certain region in Yunnan, and the sense of belonging of the residents of various ethnic minorities in the community is studied. The differences in language proficiency levels among 100 ethnic minority residents in A community of a certain region in Yunnan Province, as well as the differences in various dimensions of belonging among ethnic minorities, are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The differences of ethnic minority residents with different language proficiency in different dimensions of belonging

| | | City recognition | Social relations | Culture of minority communities | National self-identity | National language | National customs and habits | Equalization of the total |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Skillful (N=69) | Average | 24.19 | 11.23 | 6.73 | 15.29 | 9.41 | 6.35 | 73.20 |
| | Standard deviation | 3.12 | 2.90 | 1.93 | 1.94 | 1.60 | 1.89 | 13.41 |
| Unskilled (N=20) | Average | 22.15 | 10.92 | 5.14 | 14.93 | 8.24 | 6.19 | 67.57 |
| | Standard deviation | 3.01 | 2.49 | 1.05 | 1.89 | 1.72 | 1.90 | 12.06 |
| Not at all (N=11) | Average | 22.05 | 11.44 | 3.29 | 15.12 | 7.22 | 5.39 | 64.51 |
| | Standard deviation | 3.51 | 2.19 | 1.12 | 1.90 | 1.82 | 2.11 | 12.65 |

From Table 2, it can be seen that there are significant differences in the sense of belonging among ethnic minority residents with different language proficiency levels in the national language dimension. Ethnic language is an important ethnic characteristic of ethnic minorities, so there may be certain differences in the sense of belonging among ethnic residents with different proficiency levels in ethnic languages. The results of this study indicate that there are significant differences in the proficiency levels of ethnic languages and customs among ethnic minority residents who are proficient in using ethnic languages, not proficient in using ethnic languages, and completely proficient in ethnic languages. In terms of ethnic language and customs, the number of residents who are proficient in using ethnic languages is higher than that of residents who are not proficient in ethnic languages, and the number of residents who are not proficient in ethnic languages is higher than that of residents who are completely proficient in ethnic languages. Because ethnic minority residents who are proficient in using ethnic languages have very distinct ethnic characteristics, they may encounter communication barriers or differences in lifestyle habits in modern cities. Therefore, these ethnic minority residents urgently need an environment where they can use their ethnic languages to overcome learning and communication barriers and quickly align with mainstream culture. The proficiency in the use of ethnic languages also largely indicates that the residents have a high sense of ethnic belonging. Ethnic customs and habits have been maintained from childhood to adulthood, and are difficult to change in a short period of time. In modern cities where mainstream culture is abundant, there are naturally many differences in living habits, which is also a very confusing problem for many ethnic residents today, especially for some ethnic minority residents from mountainous areas, Before arriving in the city, there would not be any significant issues with customs and habits due to the fact that the surrounding people were all of the same ethnic group or ethnic minorities. On the contrary, in modern cities, it would be different. Multiple comparisons of the above two dimensions indicate that the significant differences in variance tests in the dimensions of national language and customs are mainly due to the fact that there is a significant difference between proficient and unskilled use of national language, as well as between unskilled and unskilled use of national language.

3.3 Correlation between Language Use and Ethnic Group Belonging

In order to further study the relationship between the use of minority languages and the sense of belonging of ethnic groups, relevant statistics on ethnic identity and language attitudes were conducted, and the statistical results are shown in Table 3.

From Table 3, it can be seen that both dimensions of ethnic belonging show a significant positive correlation between the level of ethnic identity and attitude towards ethnic language among the 100 ethnic minority residents in A community in a certain region of Yunnan. The commitment dimension of ethnic belonging also shows a significant positive correlation with their overall attitude towards general communication and other dimensions.

This positive correlation may be due to the high frequency and widespread use of minority languages. The reasons for this may be multifaceted. On the one hand, the use of minority languages has a certain historical and cultural accumulation, making them play an important role in inheriting their own culture and maintaining their national identity; On the other hand, as language is an important tool for people's communication and interaction, there is a need for mutual understanding and communication between different ethnic groups during the communication process, which also

promotes the widespread use of minority languages.

Table 3. Correlation statistics between language use and the sense of belonging of ethnic groups

| | The dimension of national sense of belonging | The commitment dimension of national belonging |
|---|--|--|
| The love of Mandarin | .021/.583 | .100*/.020 |
| The use of Mandarin | .012/.804 | .105*/.015 |
| The social influence of Mandarin | .049/.316 | .131**/.003 |
| Attitudes towards Mandarin | .027/.536 | .122**/.002 |
| The popularity of national languages | .241**/.000 | .292**/.000 |
| The usefulness of national languages | .291**/.000 | .312**/.000 |
| The social influence of national language | .199**/.000 | .245**/.000 |
| Attitudes towards their own national language | .319**/.000 | .356**/.000 |

3.4 Impact of Language Use on National Sense of Belonging

Through the above analysis of ethnic language use and sense of belonging, it can be seen that the use of minority languages has a positive impact on the sense of belonging of an ethnic group. From a practical perspective, in today's society, the level of economic and cultural development in ethnic minority areas is relatively low, but this does not mean that the local ethnic minority groups do not have a strong sense of social belonging. In ethnic minority areas, when people use ethnic languages for communication and exchange, it can fully reflect the local people's high recognition of their own culture and historical culture. These have created a good language environment for the local people. If an ethnic group uses their own national language for communication in this environment, they consciously form a sense of identification with their own national history and culture, as well as their own language and culture, and feel their own existence value from it. These can fully reflect the positive impact of minority language use on a sense of belonging of an ethnic group, and improve the positive impact of minority language use on a sense of belonging of an ethnic group.

4. Conclusions

This study mainly conducted a correlation analysis between the use of minority languages in China and the sense of belonging to ethnic groups. The results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between the use of minority languages and the sense of belonging to ethnic groups. However, overall, the use of minority languages has a positive impact on the sense of belonging of ethnic groups. Due to the fact that minority languages are mainly used as carriers and media, their impact on the sense of belonging of ethnic groups can be significant. With the increasing communication and interaction among various ethnic groups in China, there is a close relationship between the use of minority languages and the sense of belonging to ethnic groups. If a member of an ethnic group cannot use their own language, they develop a sense of unfamiliarity with their own country and ethnic group, which is not conducive to an ethnic group's identification with their country and ethnic group. Therefore, relevant personnel should pay attention to research on the use of minority languages, so that more people can understand this. To fundamentally enhance the sense of belonging of an ethnic group, it is necessary to strengthen the use of minority languages and fully utilize this favorable condition to promote the identification and belonging of minority groups to their own country and ethnic groups. This is an important guarantee for the development of various ethnic groups and the harmony and stability of their relations.

Acknowledgement

Funding: Sanya University University-level project: A Study on Sanya "Huihui Dialect" and National Cultural Identity from the Perspective of Linguistics (2018)

Sanya University Young Teachers Special training research project "Sanya City Youth Language Use and Language Attitude Survey" (2021) USYQNZX21-27.

References

- [1] Kessler, Greg. "Technology and the future of language teaching." *Foreign language annals* 51.1 (2018): 205-218.
- [2] Nguyen, Trang Thi Thuy, and M. Obaidul Hamid. "Language choice of Vietnamese ethnic minority students in family and community interactions: implications for minority language maintenance." *International Multilingual Research Journal* 15.4 (2021): 317-331.
- [3] Serrano, Maria-Sierra Cordoba, and Oscar Diaz Fouces. "Building a field: translation policies and minority languages." *International journal of the sociology of language* 2018.251 (2018): 1-17.
- [4] Rodrigue Landry, Real Allard, Kenneth Deveau, and Sylvain St-Onge. "Minority language learning and use: Can self-determination counter social determinism?" *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 41.3 (2022): 240-269.
- [5] Giollagain, Conchur O., and Iain Caimbeul. "Moving beyond Asocial Minority-Language Policy." *Scottish Affairs* 30.2 (2021): 178-211.
- [6] Magdalena Skrodzka, Karolina Hansen, Justyna Olko, and Michal Bilewicz. "The twofold role of a minority language in historical trauma: The case of Lemko minority in Poland." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 39.4 (2020): 551-566.
- [7] Peace-Hughes, Tracey. "Minority language education: Reconciling the tensions of language revitalisation and the benefits of bilingualism." *Children & Society* 36.3 (2022): 336-353.
- [8] Purkarthofer, Judith, and Haley De Korne. "Learning language regimes: Children's representations of minority language education." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 24.2 (2020): 165-184.
- [9] Byram, Michael, and Manuela Wagner. "Making a difference: Language teaching for intercultural and international dialogue." *Foreign Language Annals* 51.1 (2018): 140-151.
- [10] Feng Anwei, and Bob Adamson. "Language policies and sociolinguistic domains in the context of minority groups in China." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 39.2 (2018): 169-180.
- [11] Sarah McMonagle, Daniel Cunliffe, Lysbeth Jongbloed-Faber & Paul Jarvis. "What can hashtags tell us about minority languages on Twitter? A comparison of #cymraeg, #frysk, and #gaelge." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 40.1 (2019): 32-49.
- [12] Kaan, Edith, and Eunjin Chun. "Priming and adaptation in native speakers and second-language learners." *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 21.2 (2018): 228-242.
- [13] Seuring, Julian, Camilla Rjosk, and Petra Stanat. "Ethnic classroom composition and minority language use among classmates: Do peers matter for students' language achievement?" *European Sociological Review* 36.6 (2021): 920-936.
- [14] Xiaoyun Feng, Faqin Lin, and Nicholas CS Sim. "The effect of language on foreign direct investment." *Oxford Economic Papers* 71.1 (2019): 269-291.
- [15] Fortier, Anne-Marie. "On (not) speaking English: Colonial legacies in language requirements for British citizenship." *Sociology* 52.6 (2018): 1254-1269.
- [16] Kristin Prehn, Benedikt Taud, Jana Reifegerste. "Neural correlates of grammatical inflection in older native and second-language speakers." *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 21.1 (2018): 1-12.
- [17] Antonijevic, Stanislava, Sarah Ann Muckley, and Nicole Muller. "The role of consistency in use of morphosyntactic forms in child-directed speech in the acquisition of Irish, a minority language undergoing rapid language change." *Journal of Child Language* 47.2 (2020): 267-288.
- [18] Mallet-Garcia, Marie L., and Lisa Garcia-Bedolla. "Immigration policy and belonging: Ramifications for DACA recipients' sense of belonging." *American Behavioral Scientist* 65.9 (2021): 1165-1179.
- [19] Hirsch, Jennifer L., and Margaret S. Clark. "Multiple paths to belonging that we should study together." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 14.2 (2019): 238-255.
- [20] Xing Zhao, Feng Hong, Jianzhong Yin, Wenge Tang, Gang Zhang, Xian Liang. "Cohort profile: the China Multi-Ethnic cohort (CMEC) study." *International journal of epidemiology* 50.3 (2021): 721-721.