

Between Pride and Profit: A Case of Speaking the Jing Language

Qilin Mo¹, Hongmei Yang¹ & Shupeì Huang¹

¹ School of Foreign Language, Yunnan University, China

Correspondence: Hongmei Yang, School of Foreign Language, Yunnan University, Kunming, China.

Received: April 12, 2024

Accepted: June 10, 2024

Online Published: June 17, 2024

doi:10.5539/jel.v13n4p240

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v13n4p240>

Abstract

This study investigates the role of speaking the Jing language in the contemporary context of China's active engagement with Vietnam. Based on the fieldwork conducted in Dongxing Guangxi in January 2024, the study shows that the Jing language plays an important role in both maintaining the cultural heritage as pride and empowering the educational and employment trajectories as profit. More importantly, the capacity of speaking the Jing language can contribute to the social and medical communication between China and Vietnam. This can be manifested in terms of cultural communication with Vietnam and medical treatment for Vietnamese migrants. However, speaking the Jing language as pride is not always consistent with speaking the Jing language as profit. The internal differentiation within Vietnamese varieties may cause communication barriers for Jing speakers. The limited development of the Jing language also creates another layer of communication challenges for Jing people engaging in professional practices. How to mobilize the Jing language to facilitate the bilateral communication between China and Vietnam deserves our attention for future studies. The study has enriched the scope of the studies on language planning and policy in the borderlands. The study can shed lights on implementing language policy in China's border provinces and provide practical implications to facilitate the political and economic communication between China and other neighbouring countries for border prosperity and border stability.

Keywords: the Jing language, language as pride and profit, China-Vietnam borderland

1. Introduction

In December 2023, President Xi has just visited Vietnam, which indicates China's determination to build up a shared future with Vietnam (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Speaking Vietnamese can contribute to effective communication for China's engagement with Vietnam. Since China became the second largest economy in 2011, Chinese universities have actively established 'small' language degree programs. The development of 'small' languages in China is in line with geopolitical strategies (Li et al., 2020). For instance, Yunnan Province, bordering Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam with a border of more than 4000 kilometers, has the largest number of colleges and universities in China established 'small' language majors mainly in South Asian and Southeast Asian languages (Li & Li, 2021; Wang & Xia, 2019).

In addition to the valorized 'small' languages, cross-border minority language speakers have benefited from speaking 'small' languages in the shifting paradigm of China's regional integration with neighbouring countries (Li, 2020, 2021). In China's border areas, several 'small' languages belong to the same language groups. For example, the Sino-Tibetan language family is the second largest language family in the world, including more than 400 languages, which are mainly distributed in China, Myanmar, Thailand, the north of the South Asian subcontinent, and other places (Zhang & Jin, 2019). In this language family, Yi language, Jingpo language, and Naxi language, which are mainly distributed in the southwest border of China as minority languages, belong to the Zang-Mian language group along with Myanmar, while Zhuang language, Dai language, Thai language, and Lao language belong to the Kam-Tai language group (Deng, 2006). When 'small' languages become foreign languages taught in colleges and universities in China, it provides a new development space for minority students in border areas. As Li (2020) has noted, a Dai student who switched to a Thai major can understand 40% of the Thai language due to the similarity between her mother tongue and Thai language and also gains academic promotion by running an official account introducing Dai and Thai cultural practices on a project with her teacher. Another Zhuang student from the China-Vietnam border in Yunnan Province, due to the similarity between the Zhuang language and Thai language combined with her prolific Thai drama watching, her proficiency in Thai language rather than her major helped her get a position as a business translator for an international company in Guangzhou (Li, 2021). The Zhuang student had achieved a breakthrough in employment by learning the Thai language.

Jing people are one of the 55 officially acknowledged ethnic minorities in China and are mostly distributed in Guangxi, Southwest China. The Jing language is very similar to Vietnamese. In the contemporary context, Vietnamese has been valorized by Chinese universities as an important international language. Against this social and historical background, this study aims to study how speaking the Jing language might enhance the future academic and employment trajectory of the Jing people.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Valorization of 'Small' Languages in China

'Small' languages have been widely promoted in China over the past two decades. The continued and mutually beneficial cooperation between China and other neighboring countries has been deepening since China became the world's second-largest economy in 2011. The promotion of 'small' languages is particularly prominent in Chinese universities. Chinese universities are committed to diversified language construction by adding many 'small' language majors. By the end of 2017, 583 universities in China had instituted 1417 non-English language programs, including a total of 65 languages that emerged as language degree programs that had never been taught before in Chinese universities (Han et al., 2019). The establishment of 'small' languages in Chinese universities embodies the consideration of geographical characteristics. As an important channel connecting China with South Asia and Southeast Asia, "24 colleges and universities in Yunnan Province have set up 15 South Asian and Southeast Asian language majors as of the end of December 2020" with the most established language majors being Thai, Myanmar and Vietnamese in turn (Li & Li, 2021, p. 84). In the context of China's rapid socioeconomic development, 'small' languages are often conceptualized as technical skills related to China's reconfiguration of nationalism and moral values of entrepreneurship (Li & De Costa, 2023). Since the paradigm of the world economy shifted towards neoliberalism, China has been actively engaged in globalization with the accelerated new valorization of 'small' languages (Li & De Costa, 2023; Li et al., 2020).

2.2 Multilingual Profile in China's Border Provinces

China's border provinces tend to be perceived as peripheral regions. However, in the contemporary context of China's regional integration and global development, China's border provinces have acquired strategic positioning linking China to the rest of the world. The valorized multilingual profile can be manifested in China's Southwest border provinces.

China has a total of nine border provinces that share land borders with 14 neighbouring countries which boosts the Belt and Road Initiative together with a reconfiguration of Chinese border provinces with shifting multilingual populations (Li & Zhang, 2020). Two multilingual groups, cross-border expatriates and local ethnic groups, are of particular concern in Chinese border provinces. As the world's second-largest economy, China's development dividends have benefited neighboring countries and regions, attracting a large number of cross-border expatriates to study, engage in business, and settle in China (Li & Zhang, 2020). With the establishment and transformation of economic demonstration zones, free trade zones, and industries in border towns, Chinese border provinces have attracted more and more cross-border migrant workers (Wang & Yang, 2020). Influenced by Chinese popular culture, Vietnamese cross-border workers have increased their willingness to learn Chinese in training institutions to accumulate language capital and enhance their multilingual ability for cultural and social adaptation (Zhou, 2023). Besides, many Myanmar border students choose to continue their education in China because they believe that learning Putonghua can further empower and provide them with future educational opportunities and social mobility after they master Yunnan Mandarin, Myanmar, and their minority languages (Li, Ai, & Zhang, 2020).

In addition to foreign migrants crossing the border, many 'returnees' have chosen to migrate 'back' to China. These returnees can be referred to as ethnic Chinese who used to live in China but migrated to neighbouring countries (See Li and Han's study for a detailed description). Similar to ethnic Chinese, millions of ethnic minorities have been historically residing in border areas. As Li and Zhang (2020) have noted, the integrated development of multi-ethnic areas along the China-Myanmar border covers more than one million cross-border ethnic minorities. According to Liu and Ma (2020), eight languages, including Zhuang language, Putonghua, Cantonese, Hakka, and Vietnamese, are spoken in 37 villages inhabited by the Zhuang ethnic group within three kilometers of Vietnam. Multilingual ethnic groups generally see improving their multilingual skills as an important development path to raising income.

2.3 The Jing Language in China-and-Vietnam Borderlands

The Jing language is one of the minority languages in China, and it is also known as Vietnamese in Vietnam and Jing people in Vietnam constitute a major group. Historically, Jing people used to live in China and the Jing nationality developed in the long term with the Luoyue nationality as the main body and was reorganized after the

10th century (Wang, 1994).

Apart from the fact that Vietnamese was derived from the Jing language, many internal varieties exist in Vietnamese across the whole country. According to Yang (2012), the pronunciation and writing of Vietnamese have not been completely unified for nearly two thousand years in history. In the evolution stage of the ancient Yue language—Mang language, Vietnamese was differentiated in the continuous contact with Chinese, and after the monosyllabic phenomenon appeared, the tone and language system of Vietnamese were gradually improved (Yang, 2012). Jing people once created their characters—Chu Nom, which was based on Chinese characters mainly with the methods of borrowed meaning, Pictophonetic, and ideogram to create it (Zheng, 2016). From the public information of the Jing nationality museum, it can be known that one of the Jing traditional narrative ballads *Song Zhen* in Chu Nom preserved by Jing people tells the story of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–979 AD), beginning with the content of Emperor Taizong of Tang ruled the world and achieved peace and stability. Chu Nom was officially used during the Third Era of the Northern Domination of Vietnam, and also in the Sui and Tang dynasties of ancient China before Vietnam became an independent feudal state in 968 AD. In history, Vietnam was under the control of Chinese feudal dynasties for around a thousand years during three times of the Era of Northern Domination, later colonized by France, after its independence, Vietnam still maintained close relations with China (Huang, 2019). Therefore, Chu Nom first appeared in ancient China during the Sui and Tang dynasties and was widely used in Vietnam folk society until it was officially replaced by the Vietnamese alphabet (Wang, 2005).

The Jing language and Vietnamese are not completely the same and neither of them is different from each other. Language mixing is quite common for the Jing language and Vietnamese. One of the reasons is related to the historical influence of migration. Wei (2006) pointed out that the Jing nationality of China migrated to the three Jing-inhabited Islands from Tushan and other places in Vietnam from the early 16th century to the end of the 19th century. In the nearly 500 years of separation, many scholars (Wang, 1984; Wei, 2006; Yang, 2016) believe that the Jing language in China and Vietnamese in Vietnam have some differences in phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar. For example, “s” in Vietnamese is pronounced as [s] while is pronounced as [th] in the Jing language, and in addition, the three sounds of “d” “gi” and “r” in Vietnamese are all pronounced as [z] while they tend to be pronounced as [j] in the Jing language, and some of the lipped sounds in Jing language disappear (Wang, 1984; Wei, 2006; Yang, 2016). Wang (1984) and Wei (2006) have made the following series of findings. In terms of vocabulary, the two languages have different sources of word creation and borrowings and are affected by different national conditions. In addition to Chinese, Vietnamese is also influenced by French and English while the Jing language is mainly influenced by Cantonese, followed by Mandarin and Zhuang language. Grammatically, the Jing language has absorbed many pronouns, adverbs, and function words from Chinese.

In the new era of China’s rapid development, Vietnamese has become a revitalized international language in China as Vietnamese has become a language degree program in Yunnan and Guangxi in particular. For national strategy and regional development needs, Guangxi Minzu University offered a Vietnamese major in 1964 (Mo & Yang, 2016, p. 72). Because of the enhancing status of Vietnamese, the Jing language can be expected to play an important role in facilitating the communication between China and Vietnam. While acting as a useful language for China’s communication with Vietnam, the Jing language has been historically perceived in China as a cultural heritage for Jing minority people. In this case, the Jing language has acquired both economic and cultural functions: as profit for making business transactions and as pride of ethnic minority identity. This study aims to explore the role of speaking the Jing language in the context of China’s and Vietnam’s socioeconomic transformation. To better understand the multiple functions of speaking the Jing language, the concept of language as pride and profit is adopted as a theoretical framework as described below.

2.4 Language as Pride and Profit

To explore the implications of speaking the Jing language in China in the context of establishing Vietnamese as an important international language for China’s regional integration into Vietnam, this study adopts the theoretical framework of language as both pride and profit.

This conceptual framework, first proposed by Duchêne and Heller (2012), points out that traditional discourse in the reconfigured paradigm shift to embrace emerging discourse from associating language with pride to treating language as a valuable asset for profit. The concept of regarding language as a source of pride prioritizes elements such as heritage, rights, and citizenship, correlating them with the construction of nation-states through a perspective of modernity and nationalism (Heller & Duchêne, 2012; Wang & Li, 2024). Pride as a marker of minoritized identity for speaking a language and having historical and literary heritage, is associated with affiliation to the cultural group, attachment to the geographic place, and valuation from other linguistic groups

(Tuktamyshova & Kirillova, 2023). In a study by Wang and Li (2024, p. 9) on changing discourses of Chinese language maintenance in Australia, first-generation Chinese immigrant parents have a strong perception of Chinese as identity, and speaking Chinese is seen as “the legitimate means by which visible embodiment is linked to symbolic identity”. Parents believe that learning Chinese, especially Mandarin Chinese, is not only a powerful tool to ward off potential racial discrimination but also a strong link to pride in the Chinese national identity that is supported and strengthened by China’s growing economy (Wang & Li, 2024).

On the contrary, the ideology of language as profit is often associated with late capitalism, with the language industry being a prominent characteristic, transcending state market regulations, out of territorial boundaries, fixed identities, and nation-state systems (Heller & Duchêne, 2012). According to Pavlenko’s study (2017), when Russia re-entered the global economy, the development of the service sector for Russians was accompanied by a process of commoditization of Russian in Europe and beyond, and the demand triggered several forms of supply of Russian as a commodity in the language teaching industry. It can be seen that the transformation of language from a marker of ethnonational identity to a measurable skill as a marketable commodity distinct from identity (Heller, 2003). Furthermore, the importance of language as a resource with exchange value has become increasingly prominent under the political-economic conditions of late capitalism, which sets a strong trend to shift from the discourse of pride to the discourse of profit that defines the language in economic terms as commodities useful for the production of resources (Heller, 2010; Pavlenko, 2017).

In the context of preserving minority languages, the interplay between language ideologies focused on pride and profit often becomes intertwined (Wang & Li, 2024). The recontextualization of minority cultural heritage can mobilize cultural symbols, places, and traditions to bring added value to products in the process of commercialization, and at the same time serves as a trope of pride in new articulations, but in actual practice, pride and profit become confused in many ways (Dlaske, 2014).

For example, while the Tatar language in Russia in tourism maintains the pride it derives from cultural connection and identity characteristics, under late capitalism conditions it has been inscribed in the new discursive frame of profit and reconfigured as a technical skill and packaged as a brand tourism commercial product, and the result is that pride and profit are intertwined and recast value-added meaning of the language (Tuktamyshova & Kirillova, 2023).

Drawing on the theoretical framework of language as pride and profit, the study focuses on the following questions:

- (1) How is speaking the Jing language as pride manifested in the daily practice of Jing people?
- (2) How is speaking the Jing language as profit valorized in various social domains?
- (3) What are the tensions mediated in speaking the Jing language as a legitimate language?

3. Methodology

3.1 Selection of Participants

Two participants were selected in this study based on a large ethnography conducted in China’s Southwest Borderlands (This study was supported by the National project chaired by Jia Li and granted by the National Social Science Foundation of China (Grant No. 22BYY064). Two members of the project group participated in this study.

The choice of participant selection was based on the following criteria. First, two participants are Jing people who speak the Jing language and who are living in the China-Vietnam borderland. Second, two participants have realized the value of speaking the Jing language because of their exposure to Vietnamese people of diverse backgrounds. Therefore, their Jing language communication experiences can shed light on how speaking the Jing language might be shaped by social and political forces in the context of China and Vietnam’s socioeconomic transformations.

Table 1. Basic information of participants

| Anonymity | Gender | Age | Profession | Language backgrounds |
|-----------|--------|-----|--------------------|--|
| Shishi | Female | 21 | University student | Jing/Vietnamese, Cantonese, Putonghua, English |
| Dong | Male | 50 | Physician | Jing/Vietnamese, Cantonese, Putonghua, English |

Here are some summative features of my participants whose life trajectories seem to be closely associated with their mother tongue (the Jing language), which is also called Vietnamese in Vietnam.

Shishi is a student at a university in Guangxi. She decided to major in Vietnamese because of her early exposure to the Jing language, her mother tongue, which was also called Vietnamese in Vietnam. Shishi was born in a village in Fangchenggang, Guangxi Province, where her parents were busy working before her primary school years. She and her sister were brought up by her grandmother who has inherited the ancestral Jing language. Before going to school, Shishi always spoke the Jing language with her grandmother and sometimes spoke Cantonese with her parents. Cantonese is the lingua franca of Fangchenggang, and Shishi didn't learn Putonghua until she went to school. After entering university, Shishi took advantage of her native language (the Jing language) to master Vietnamese at different stages more easily than her peers. At the same time, Shishi has gained recognition and personal growth through her afterschool Vietnamese social practice and internship activities. It is foreseeable that Shishi's future career plan will be closely related to the language practice of Vietnamese.

Dong is a physician at a China-Vietnam border hospital in Fangchenggang. Similar to Shishi, Dong speaks the Jing language as his mother tongue. Dong is trusted by patients for his solid professional skills and rich clinical experience. More importantly, Dong has gained a high reputation in the China-Vietnam border areas because of his medical services and his proficiency in Vietnamese. Language intercommunication has greatly facilitated Vietnamese people's access to medical services in this hospital. Dong's Vietnamese proficiency was enhanced because of his capacity to speak the Jing language. While receiving education in university, he used tapes and textbooks to correct the pronunciation of Vietnamese, and later he went to a training center to learn Vietnamese, which further enhanced his effective communication with Vietnamese people.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

3.2.1 Data Collection

Data were collected between January 11 and January 22, 2024. The types of data include semi-structured interviews, linguistic landscapes, participant observation, and field notes. Two major participants (Shishi and Dong) were interviewed and each interview lasted for over an hour. The main questions centered on their Vietnamese communication experiences at different stages of life.

The pictures of linguistic landscapes were collected at Dongxing City. 166 in total were collected. Among them, there were 76 public signs and 90 private signs covering main places for citizens in their ordinary lives like government office buildings, Dongxing Port, hospital, commercial area, Jing nationality museum and Dongxing Guo Men scenic area, etc. Participant observation and field notes were conducted during the fieldwork. While walking around the city, a particular observation was given to Jing people and Vietnamese people. In particular, participant observation in the hospital was carefully conducted when the author went to visit Dong and observed how he communicated with his patients of diverse backgrounds.

3.2.2 Data Analysis

Content analysis was adopted to understand how Vietnamese language learning experiences shape my participants' life trajectories. The conceptual foundations of content analysis can be learned from Krippendorff (2004, p. 18), who states that "content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use". All collected data, including interview recordings and their transcripts, as well as linguistic landscapes, were classified and analyzed for reliability based on the research content, and then to "identify general themes and later more specific themes are allowed to emerge through the continuous coding and recoding process" (Li, 2017, p. 94). The study first focuses on "how to reflect the value of speaking the Jing language on the China-Vietnam border". When gathering information in the field research, relative concepts emerged like "Jing language inheritance", "cross-border ethnic", "Vietnamese language major" and "Vietnamese language services at the hospital". Based on the similar deductibility of the Jing language and Vietnamese in the application of the Pride and Profit concept, these themes are connected and further identified as "speaking the Jing language as Pride", "speaking the Jing language as Profit" and "tensions in speaking the Jing language".

3.3 Research Limitations

Due to time and energy constraints, this study only focuses on two typical participants of the Jing ethnic group in China. It is recommended that future research should broaden its scope to include perspectives from Vietnamese Jing ethnic group members using the Jing language in China given the increasing number of Vietnamese migrants of diverse backgrounds crossing the border daily. Meanwhile, due to limited language proficiency, the author is unable to engage in native language communication activities in the Jing-inhabited areas of Dongxing, thus hindering the comprehensive understanding of language usage and experiences within the Jing community.

4. Findings

4.1 Speaking the Jing Language as Pride

Speaking the Jing language means maintaining a heritage identity. Such ideology of seeing language as one's ethnic pride can be observed in both public and private domains.

One of the public domains is associated with the promotion of the Jing language as an ethnic identity. This can be observed in the Jing language displays in the Jing nationality museum and the Jingzu school on the inheritance and development of the Jing language are remarkable.

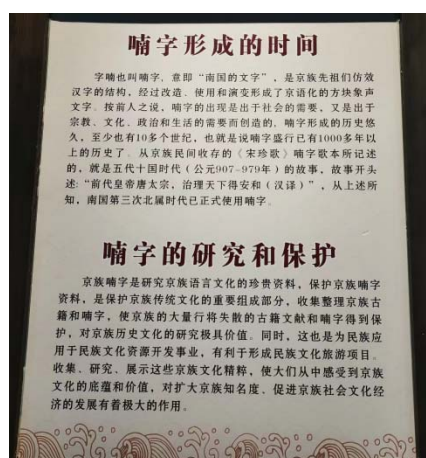


Figure 1. Introduction of Chu Nom in Chinese



Figure 2. Culture wall of Chu Nom

In July 2009, the Jing nationality museum was officially opened in Dongxing City, providing a platform for collection, protection, research, and display for the inheritance and development of the Jing culture (Qin et al., 2023). The ancestors of the Jing nationality utilized the Chinese character-making method to invent Chu Nom in history. Despite Chu Nom was popular for a while, it failed to be popularized in China because not many Jing people were proficient in it. A more detailed introduction about Chu Nom, as shown in Figure 1, is available in the Jing nationality museum. The culture wall of Chu Nom in Figure 2 and the common Chu Nom and Chinese

comparison table in Figure 3 show people what are Chu Nom like in a more accessible way. Meanwhile, religious books of the Jing nationality in Chu Nom, as shown in Figure 4, reflect the folk belief with the characteristics of the Jing people. The Jing nationality museum not only carries the spiritual and material civilization of the Jing people but also provides a written language basis for speaking the Jing language as pride.

| 喃字 | 汉字 | 喃字 | 汉字 | 喃字 | 汉字 |
|----|--------|----|----|----|----|
| 啖粉 | 吃饭 | 𠵼𠵼 | 三四 | 𠵼𠵼 | 拉网 |
| 𠵼𠵼 | 去玩 | 𠵼𠵼 | 五六 | 𠵼𠵼 | 捕鱼 |
| 𠵼𠵼 | 干活(办事) | 𠵼𠵼 | 七八 | 𠵼𠵼 | 墨鱼 |
| 𠵼𠵼 | 日时 | 𠵼𠵼 | 九十 | 𠵼𠵼 | 花蟹 |
| 𠵼𠵼 | 年月 | 𠵼𠵼 | 学生 | 𠵼𠵼 | 虾 |
| 𠵼𠵼 | 上午 | 𠵼𠵼 | 喃字 | 𠵼𠵼 | 青蟹 |
| 𠵼𠵼 | 中午 | 𠵼𠵼 | 房屋 | 𠵼𠵼 | 螺 |
| 𠵼𠵼 | 晚上 | 𠵼𠵼 | 住房 | 𠵼𠵼 | 土地 |
| 𠵼𠵼 | 半夜 | 𠵼𠵼 | 买卖 | 𠵼𠵼 | 田地 |
| 𠵼𠵼 | 一二 | 𠵼𠵼 | 出海 | 𠵼𠵼 | 放牛 |

Figure 3. Common Chu Nom and Chinese comparison table



Figure 4. Religious books of the Jing nationality in Chu Nom

Similarly, the Jing language has been discursively promoted as a language of ethnic identity at school. As a typical ethnic educational base, the Jingzu school has been supported by the local government and promoted as the inheritance of the Jing culture. The teaching of Chu Nom of Jing language accounts for part of ethnic education as displayed in public in Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7.



Figure 5. Publicity board on traditional Jing culture of the Jingzu school



Figure 6. Publicity board on ethnic education of the Jingzu school



Figure 7. Publicity board on ethnic education of the Jingzu school

For ethnic Jing students, speaking the Jing language is promoted as performing their knowledge in Jing-related linguistic knowledge. At school, Jing students are not only taught to speak the Jing language but also to develop their proficiency in Chu Nom. They should know this ancestral written language and strive to recognize the current writing in Vietnam in the systematic course of “Jing language (Vietnamese)—Chu Nom—Vietnamese alphabetic writing” (Long, 2012, p. 88). Besides, Jingzu School actively carries out many cultural and educational exchange activities with domestic and foreign educational groups. In these activities, the promotion discourse is associated with seeing the Jing language as pride. The Jing language class with the characteristics of the Jing nationality is an important window to show the atmosphere of national culture in the school.

In addition, the promotion of the Jing language has been incorporated into legal regulations. The *Regulation on the Protection of the Jing Culture of Fangchenggang City* (see Figures 9 and 10) was approved at the 17th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 13th People’s Congress of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on July 24, 2020, and came into effect on November 1, 2020. The Regulation points out that “the ethnic and religious authority is responsible for the administration of the spoken language and written language of the Jing nationality, and guides the study, use, translation, rescue, and protection of them” (2020, p. 5). Article 22 of the Regulation states that “communities and villages in Jing-inhabited areas should be encouraged and supported to set up study centers to teach Jing language” (2020, p. 13) and other contents of Jing culture. The Jing culture protected by the Regulation refers to the culture represented by the material cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation by the Jing people, including the Jing language, oral literature, and Chu Nom (2020, p. 2). Fangchenggang municipal government has a relatively sound policy on protecting the Jing language as the

ancestral language and has received the attention of the autonomous region government at the same time.



Figure 8. Regulation on the Protection of the Jing Culture of Fangchenggang City

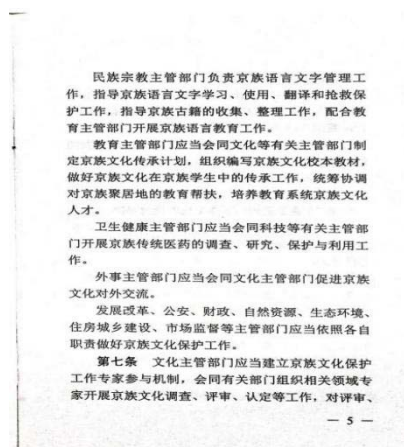


Figure 9. Regulation on the Protection of the Jing Culture of Fangchenggang City

Apart from the exposure in public spaces like museums, schools, and official documents, the Jing language is also consistently circulated in private domains. Speaking the Jing language at home is such a case in point. According to Li (2022), although the level of Cantonese of Jing people is higher than that of the Jing language, most of them still choose to use the Jing language in communication with family members, and the choice is inseparable from the emotional value of the Jing language in the hearts of Jing people. One of my participants, Shishi, also said that her grandmother insisted on communicating with her in Jing's language at home. Shishi's parents encouraged her to learn Putonghua from her childhood, which was more easily associated with good school performance. Therefore, Shishi grew up in a trilingual practice with Cantonese as the local lingua franca. As an elderly parent of a typical ethnic family, Shishi's grandmother pays more attention to the emotional bonding role of language. She is eager for future generations to pass on the Jing language, and would actively invest time and energy to teach it. It was in this intentionally created good language acquisition environment that Shishi laid the foundation of speaking Vietnamese. It is common for Jing children to carry out such family language practice related to a sense of ethnic pride and benefit from it.

4.2 Speaking the Jing Language as Profit

The previous section has demonstrated how speaking the Jing language is related to maintaining one's ethnic identity and cultural heritage. This section turns to another aspect of language practices: how speaking the Jing

language might enhance one's academic attainment and employment prospects.

4.2.1 Empowering Academic Achievement

Many previous studies show that language can be capitalized as a commodity that can be converted into many other values (Heller & Duchêne, 2012; Pavlenko, 2017; Tuktamyshova & Kirillova, 2023). In the context of China's regional integration into Southeast Asia, speaking Vietnamese is considered as a capital that can profit students' trajectories.

In our study, the capacity to speak the Jing language is closely associated with the fact that the Jing language is very similar to Vietnam, and Jing people can make use of their ethnic identity and language capacity (mother tongue) to prove themselves in the study. Shishi is such a case in point.

When Shishi majors in Vietnamese at university, she benefits from speaking the Jing language, and her Jing proficiency is successfully converted into her academic achievement. In her freshman year, Shishi stood out among her peers because her mother tongue (Jing language) is very much similar to Vietnamese. While Shishi's classmates were struggling to pronounce every single alphabet, Shishi was able to strike up a fluent conversation in Vietnamese. Despite there are slight differences in pronunciation between Vietnamese and Jing languages, Shishi's mother tongue has transformed her into a successful Vietnamese learner.

Shishi's Vietnamese pronunciation is highly recognized by her teachers and classmates, and she always receives praise for her excellence. During her freshman and sophomore years, Shishi received academic scholarships for all two years of the university because of her high GPA. In her junior year, Shishi received a CSC scholarship to study at a university in Hanoi, Vietnam. Meanwhile, she participated in Vietnamese speech contests and Vietnamese interpretation competitions, while her presentation platform changed from the university to the province and then the national level. After finishing studying abroad, Shishi got many opportunities to work for part-time Vietnamese services outside the university, including an internship opportunity in the Foreign Affairs Office of a district of Fangchenggang City. During her internship, Shishi worked as a Chinese translator during many meetings, exchanges, and visits between China and Vietnam. During the Hangzhou Asian Games, Shishi was selected to assist in the translation of the Vietnamese athletes, mainly responsible for their bank card business.

4.2.2 Increasing Revenue for Local Hospital

Apart from getting empowered to study, speaking the Jing language also helps local institutions generate revenue. This is particularly true at a local hospital where the Jing language facilitates multilingual communication between Chinese doctors and Vietnamese patients.

Dong, one of my key participants, works at a hospital in China's border town where an increasing number of Vietnamese patients choose to cross the border and come to visit a local hospital in China. According to the interview with Dong, Dong said that most Vietnamese patients are from Mong Cai, and taking up different businesses. They enter China through Dongxing Port with passports or border resident cards. Vietnamese patients who decide to visit China's hospital are those with frequent and chronic diseases in pediatrics, gynecology, and internal diseases, and critical patients have craniocerebral injuries, severe fractures, and multiple organ injuries caused by car accidents. Compared with the hospital in Mong Cai, Vietnam, many Vietnamese believe that China's border hospital has more mature medical treatment and technology. When Vietnamese patients come to the hospital, they can choose to have the help of a medical escort who provides language services, or they can directly contact Dong or other Jing medical personnel to complete the medical treatment process more quickly and efficiently. According to the personnel section chief of the hospital, nearly 10% of the medical staff are of Jing nationality at present. They are a major part of the Vietnamese Language Volunteer team at the hospital and can provide language services to Vietnamese patients.



Figure 10. Bilingual sign outside the hospital consulting room



Figure 11. Bilingual ward sign for taking the hospital elevator

The linguistic landscapes of the hospital mainly consist of Chinese, followed by Vietnamese, and English is relatively small among them. Whether it is the main medical procedure prompts, as shown in Figure 10, or the use notices of hospital facilities, as shown in Figure 11, it is covered in Vietnamese. Vietnamese is necessary in the hospital, which can give Vietnamese patients effective guidance with a certain psychological comfort.

In recent years, this China border hospital has taken advantage of the opportunity of establishing a Three-A general hospital to build the brand of “China-Vietnam Friendship Hospital” through various measures such as upgrading medical hardware facilities, introducing excellent talents and building specialized alliances to provide better medical services for the Chinese and Vietnamese people. In the process of carrying out foreign medical work, Vietnamese patients enjoy “national treatment” for medical treatment, and the hospital provides equal convenience in key links such as diagnosis and treatment process and service mode, increasing the willingness of Vietnamese patients to seek medical treatment in this local hospital.

4.3 Tensions in Speaking the Jing Language

Although speaking the Jing language can display multiple functions such as helping the inheritance of language and culture of the ethnic minority, achieving individual academic promotion, and improving the service quality of local patient treatment, some tensions are emerging in both speaking the Jing language and speaking different varieties of Vietnamese.

Vietnamese language has many internal varieties, which has caused many communication challenges. When my participant, Shishi, went to southern Vietnam, she found that she could not use the Vietnamese she had learned in university and her own Jing language skills to communicate with people in southern Vietnam. As described by Li (2012), there are similarities and differences between the Jing language and the Vietnamese language, and the comparison between the two languages is represented by the research of Mr. Wang Lianqing. As Wang (1984, p. 194) has noted, “After a preliminary comparison of the survey results with the pronunciation of various Vietnamese

languages, it is found that the pronunciation of the Jing language in the Jing-inhabited areas is close to that of the south dialect of the middle region of Vietnam". The Vietnamese language taught in the class of Shishi's university is mainly official Vietnamese with a Hanoi accent in northern Vietnam. Therefore, Shishi encountered difficulties in the communication context of South Vietnam. When she checked into the hotel in southern Vietnam, she couldn't understand the attendant saying "name" in Vietnamese and had to rely on English to help communicate.

In addition to different varieties of speaking Vietnamese, another problem is associated with the fact that Jing speakers cannot successfully communicate with Vietnamese migrants because of the limited development of the Jing language. This has been reported by Dong who found it challenging to translate medical terms and other professional expressions into Vietnamese.

Although Dong has treated many Vietnamese people in the emergency room throughout the years, his pronunciation of Vietnamese is limited to communicating with patients in northern and central Vietnam. Moreover, the vocabulary of the Jing language is limited when it comes to professional communication in medical medicine. As indicated by the interview with Dong, Dong's Vietnamese knowledge is only confined to daily communication and there are still many language barriers for doctor-patient encounters in health communication. It is argued that the limited proficiency in Jing can be a result of the fact that the Jing language is mostly perceived as a cultural heritage rather than a language that can serve the communication between China and Vietnam. Therefore, it is suggested that ethnic minority language (Jing language in this case) in the borderlands can be better mobilized to participate in China's Belt and Road Initiative, play an important role in health communication, and construct China's soft power orienting towards the neighbouring country.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates the role of speaking the Jing language in the contemporary context of China's active engagement with Vietnam. Based on the fieldwork conducted in Dongxing Guangxi in January 2024, the study shows that the Jing language plays an important role in both maintaining the cultural heritage as pride (see the findings in Jing landscapes displayed at the museum and the interview with Jing people) and empowering the educational and employment trajectories as profit (see interviews with Shishi and Dong). More importantly, the capacity to speak the Jing language can contribute to the social and medical communication between China and Vietnam. This can be manifested in terms of cultural communication with Vietnam (see section 4.2.1) and medical treatment for Vietnamese migrants (see section 4.2.2). However, speaking the Jing language as pride is not always consistent with speaking the Jing language as profit. The internal differentiation within Vietnamese varieties may cause communication barriers for Jing speakers. The limited development of the Jing language also creates another layer of communication challenges for Jing people engaging in professional practices. How to mobilize the Jing language to facilitate the bilateral communication between China and Vietnam deserves our attention for future studies. The study has enriched the scope of the studies on language planning and policy in the borderlands. The study can shed light on implementing language policy in China's border provinces and provide practical implications to facilitate the political and economic communication between China and other neighbouring countries for border prosperity and border stability.

The findings of this study examine the multifunctions of the Jing language in the China-Vietnam border city. From the perspective of the trajectories of my participants who are the Jing Vietnamese learner and the Jing doctor, the social and medical service functions from the language requirements allow speaking the Jing language to go beyond its identity function as the ancestral language and to play its role of profit and value-added in border areas. Border areas are important platforms for China to deepen cooperation with neighboring countries and regions. In the context of the economic and social development of the border provinces seeking from neighboring countries, local language education should tap the value of border minority languages, while paying attention to the fact that 'small' languages, to some degree, are more profitable than English. Therefore, the cultivation of border language talents should be extended to the perspective of empowering academic achievement and benefiting local social services and the economy, which is further in line with the strategic positioning of the border areas. This study can also broaden the perspective of the research on the inheritance and development of ethnic minority languages with their multifunctional value. It encourages the further exploration of new development space with increasing social recognition of minority languages in China. China's ethnic minorities in border areas can achieve effective development through the practice of border languages, and enrich ethnic language and cultural connotations with new missions in new roles. It is necessary to formulate favorable policies for the development of border languages based on the understanding of the dynamic changes and the increasing importance of 'small' languages, which is of great significance to promote the implementation of the Belt and Road strategy under the overall trend of national reform and development.

Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Authors' contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

The field work of the study was funded by Developing High-Quality Courses by Graduate School of Yunnan University, Yunnan Philosophy and Social Sciences Project (YB2020085), and National Social Science Foundation of China (common project) (22BYY064). The publication was funded by the School of Foreign Languages of Yunnan University as part of the National First-class Undergraduate English Major Construction.

Competing interests

Not applicable.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

References

- Deng, X. (2006). *The relationship and classification of Sino-Tibetan languages*. Wuhan: Huazhong University of Science & Technology.
- Dlaske, K. (2014). Semiotics of pride and profit: Interrogating commodification in indigenous handicraft production. *Social Semiotics*, 24, 582–598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2014.943459>
- Fangchenggang City People's Congress Standing Committee. (2020). *Regulation on the Protection of the Jing Culture of Fangchenggang City*. Fangchenggang: The Office of the Fangchenggang City People's Congress Standing Committee.
- Han, Y., Gao, X., & Xia, J. (2019). Problematising recent developments in non-English foreign language education in Chinese universities. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 40(7), 562–575. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1571072>
- Heller, M. (2003). Globalization, the new economy, and the commodification of language and identity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7, 473–492. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2003.00238.x>
- Heller, M. (2010). The commodification of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 39, 101–114. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.012809.104951>
- Heller, M., & Duchêne, A. (2012). Pride and profit: Changing discourses of language, capital and nation-state. In *Language in Late Capitalism* (pp. 1–12). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203155868>
- Huang, J. (2019). A study on the cross-border exchange of the Jing nationality of traditional culture to promote the friendship between the Chinese and Vietnamese people—The sixth study on the exploitation and utilization of the Jing traditional culture. *Journal of Qinzhou University*, 4, 1–6.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Li, F. (2012). A review of the Jing language studies. *Minority Translators Journal*, 4, 69–75.

- Li, J. (2017). *Social reproduction and migrant education: A critical sociolinguistic ethnography of Myanmar students' learning experiences at a border high school in China*. PhD Thesis, Macquarie University.
- Li, J. (2020). *Foreign language learning for minority*. Retrieved from <https://www.languageonthemove.com/foreign-language-learning-for-minority-empowerment/>
- Li, J. (2021). *Peripheral language learners and romance of Thai*.
- Li, J., Ai, B., & Zhang, J. (2020). Negotiating language ideologies in learning Putonghua: Myanmar ethnic minority students' perspectives on multilingual practices in a borderland school. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41(7), 633–646. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1678628>
- Li, J., & De Costa, P. I. (2023). 'Small' language teacher emotions between nationalism and neoliberalism. *System*, 116, 103071. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103071>
- Li, J., & Han, H. (2021). Learning to orient toward Myanmar: Ethnic Chinese students from Myanmar at a university in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 34(4), 360–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1858095>
- Li, J., & Li, L. (Eds.). (2021). The educational status quo of universities offering South Asian and Southeast Asian language degree programs in Yunnan. In *State Language Commission. Language Situation in China: 2021* (pp. 81–87). Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Li, J., Xie, P., Ai, B., & Li, L. (2020). Multilingual communication experiences of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Multilingual*, 39(5), 529–539. <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2020-0116>
- Li, J., & Zhang J. (2020). The interplay of Myanmar migrants' language competence and employment trajectory at Ruili Yunnan. *Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning*, 6, 69–77.
- Li, W. (2022). From monolingual to multilingual: A survey on the family language life of Jing nationality in Guangxi. *Culture & Communication*, 2, 33–40.
- Liu, J., & Ma, J. (2020). An empirical study on the leverage of language in border ethnic areas for poverty-alleviation: Taking Jinxi City of Guangxi as an example. *Cuangxi Ethnic Studies*, 3, 136–143.
- Long, Y. (2012). *A study on the educational characteristics of the Jing nationality in the inheritance of national culture—A case of the Jingzu school in Wanwei village*. Beijing: Minzu University of China.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2023). *President Xi Jinping Meets with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh*. Retrieved from https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202312/t20231213_11201711.html
- Mo, Z., & Yan, R. (2016). A study on the influence of changing China-Vietnam Relations on Vietnamese education in Chinese Universities—A case of Chinese universities in Yunnan, Guangxi and Sichuan. *University Education*, 2, 71–74, 77.
- Pavlenko, A. (2017). Russian-friendly: How Russian became a commodity in Europe and beyond. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 20(4), 385–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2015.1115001>
- Qin, X., Ouyang, L., & Zhang, H. (2023). Current situation and development countermeasures of the Jing nationality oral literature protection. *Library World*, 4, 15–18.
- Tuktamyshova, A., & Kirillova, K. (2023). Pride and profit: Language, identity and tourism in Russia. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 17, 33–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2022.2101330>
- Wang, H., & Xia, J. (2019). The less commonly taught languages of the “Belt and Road” countries in Chinese higher education institutions: A survey of the talent cultivation and the market demand. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education*, 1, 30–36.
- Wang, L. (1984). Preliminary comparison of pronunciations between the Jing language in three Jing-inhabited Islands and Hanoi. *Studies in Language and Linguistics*, 2, 194–204.
- Wang, S. (2005). A brief account of the present state of the exchange of Guangxi's Jing language with Chinese and Vietnam's Kinh language. *Around Southeast Asia*, 12, 64–68.
- Wang, W. (1994). My view of the origin and development of the Jing and Mang nationalities in Vietnam. *Cuangxi Ethnic Studies*, 3, 124–127.
- Wang, Y., & Li, J. (2024). Changing discourses of Chinese language maintenance in Australia: Unpacking

- language ideologies of first-generation Chinese immigrant parents from People's Republic of China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1259398. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1259398>
- Wang, Y., & Yang, T. (2020). Embedding differentiation: The spatial features of foreign workers in the southwestern borderland of China. *Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 3, 78–83.
- Wei, S. (2006). The variation of the Chinese Jing language. *Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 2, 13–18.
- Yang, J. (2012). Analysis of systematic relation of the Jing language in Vietnam. *Thinking*, 2, 133–134.
- Yang, Q. (2016). A discuss of the difference between the Jing language and Vietnamese from the phonetic level. *Shanxi Youth*, 13, 10–12.
- Zhang, M. & Jin, L. (2019). The developing evolutionary linguistics on Sino-Tibetan languages. *Science*, 5, 15–19, 4.
- Zheng, K. (2016). A brief analysis of the evolution of the Jing language. *Popular Science*, 3, 137–138.
- Zhou, D. (2023). A study on the adaptation of Vietnamese cross-border labor in Pingxiang City of Guangxi. *Guangxi Ethnic Studies*, 6, 93–102.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author, with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).