

# Leaving and death: the awakening of individual modernity in ethnic minority films——Based on the reading of "A Mongolian Tale" and "Jinpa"

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**Abstract:** The relationship between national tradition and modern ethics has become an important proposition of ethnic minority films in the new century. With the development of society, the minority areas are more closely connected with the outside world, and some individuals of the minorities can be exposed to modern ethics and realize their superiority over the traditional national ethics. Due to the connection with the traditional national society, the awakening individual often bears strong tearing and pain in the conscious transformation from tradition to modern. This irreversible transformation process accompanied by strong pain has been condensed into two symbols of "leaving" and "death" in the film text.

## 1. Preface

"The whole world may feel such a dilemma, how to adjust the inheritance of a nation in the changing world, as well as how to get along and integrate with the present." [1] In the 1970s, Chinese society stepped into the track of modernization development, and the traditional lifestyle and ethical concepts of citizens changed greatly. However, compared with the central and eastern urban agglomerations, the modernization processes of ethnic minority areas tend to be more slow due to geographical and linguistic isolation, and their ethnic cultural traditions tend to be stronger.

With the enhancement of social mobility, some minority individuals are able to walk out of the strong context of traditional minority culture and receive the education of modern civilization, so they have to face the "two-way choice between traditional culture and modern culture" [2]. Many creators of ethnic minority films paid attention to the unique life experience of the awakening individuals in this period, and extended their more profound thinking on national tradition and modern civilization in the film and television texts.

As excellent works in ethnic minority films, both *A Mongolian Tale* and *Jinpa* pay attention to the dual recognition of traditional culture and modern ethics, as well as their simple and painful thoughts on the future destiny of the nation. The result of identification and thinking is reflected in the film and television text: "leaving" and "death". Through these two symbols, the creator conveys his complex feelings of affirmation and reflection on both modern civilization and modern ethics in the film.

## 2. Leaving: the inevitable choice to integrate into modern civilization

For the protagonists of the two works, Baiyinbaolige and Jinpa, leaving is a necessary way for their growth. Individuals first enter into the discourse system of modern civilization through a certain betrayal of national tradition, accept and identify with the superior part of modern ethics, review the traditional national discourse and national life based on the cultural standpoint of modern cities, and finally complete the awakening at the individual level.

In the film and television text, road and truck are the symbols of departure (Figure 1), the material basis of the minority individual departure in the realistic level, and also the ultimate source of individual rebellion against rationality. In *"A Mongolian Tale"*, Bai's two escapes are made with the help of trucks and roads, while Jinpa in *"Jinpa"* becomes a link between Tibetan culture and modern civilization with his status as a "truck driver". As creations in the industrial era, trucks and roads, on the one hand, break the geographical isolation and cultural closed state of the minority areas, and on the other hand, bring the minority individuals into the discipline of modern society. In the film, this discipline can be attributed to the care for individual life, the respect for the female body in *A Mongolian Tale* and the reflection on the tradition of homomorphic revenge in *Jinpa*.

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Figure 1. The road and truck in “Jinpa”

The protagonist of “Jinpa” is a truck driver, who always traveling between cities and small towns.

Receiving the discipline of modern civilization is not only out of the pressure of administrative orders, but also the result of the active choice by members of ethnic minorities. However, not all acts that actively integrate into modern society can be regarded as a conscious choice of modern culture. For example, in *The Silent Holy Stones* directed by Pema Tsenden, the son of the stone carving old man goes to Lhasa to become a living Buddha, while the little lama is attracted by “The Journey to the West” on TV (Figure 2). The resources and spirit from the city simultaneously enter the ethnic minority areas through the road, bringing more abundant recreational activities, educational resources and judicial forces. The influence of material resources on social consciousness is often imperceptible. People do not have to study or reflect spontaneously, but can enter a new state of life due to the need for rich entertainment and the passive acceptance of authoritative discipline. In the process of becoming a member of modern society, ethnic minority members often do not realize the cultural separation and ambiguity between national tradition and modern society, and their naturalized behavior is more like a comfortable behavior out of sensory perception and profit-seeking psychology.

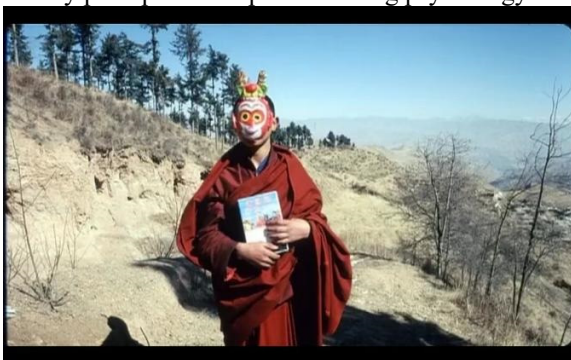


Figure 2. The little lama with the optical disc of “The Journey to the West”

In “The Silent Holy Stones”, the little lama was deeply attracted by “The Journey to the West” on TV, which was a symbol of modern civilization.

On the cultural level, the individual ethnic minorities who can be regarded as being awakened should meet two preconditions: one is to have a

relatively deep understanding of the traditional national culture; the other is to realize the differences between the modern civilization and the national tradition and make a choice. Baiyinbaolige first realized the great dedication of women on the grassland in his grandmother and Somia, and realized the value of “birth” in the harsh environment of the grassland. Only the modern society's respect for the female body and sympathy for the tragic fate of women aroused strong ripples in his heart. It is the strong tear between the attachment to the grassland and the recognition of modern civilization that makes the story of *A Mongolian Tale* so stirring. Similarly, the driver Jinpa also has a deep attachment to the traditional Tibetan culture, which is aroused by the innocent dead sheep and the Avengers with the same name, so that Jinpa can not continue to live in the secular life constructed by modern ethics.

In film and television texts, tearing often ends in the victory of modern civilization. Baiyinbaolige's study broke the grassland women can not go to school tradition, ending the tragic fate of women in the grassland culture; Jinpa “ended a Kangba tradition in a dream and a cycle of revenge, making the killer Jinpa from the revenge of Mazza's son” [3]. The superiority of modern ethics based on the economic foundation of the city in the face of traditional national ethics makes the departure of awakening individuals inevitable, which is the common judgment of Xie Fei and Pema Tsenden as the creators of ethnic minority films, and also the inevitable trend of ethnic minorities in the development of *The Times*.

### 3. Death: a painful sacrifice free from national tradition

The national tradition has its lag behind the age, but it can not be based on the dross. Both the dedication and sacrifice of women under the grassland civilization, with the religious belief and homorphic revenge tradition in the Tibetan civilization have played an important role in continuing the national blood and maintaining the social order in the long history. Because of this, the individuals bred by the national tradition are often inextricably linked with the minority land in the spirit and flesh, making their departure often accompanied by strong shock and pain. Therefore, in the film texts of *A Mongolian Tale* and *Jinpa*, the ritual scenes designed by the creators to represent their complete departure from the national tradition are often related to death.

In *A Mongolian Tale*, the ceremony that marks the loss of contact with grassland civilization is the death of Gahala. Both Ganggahala and Baiyinbaolige were raised by their grandmother after losing their families. Their grandmother give them the chance to survive. Therefore, Ganggahara became the embodiment of Baiyinbilige. After Baiyin left, She replaced the company in the traditional social network of the grassland, continuing the connection between Baiyinbilige and the grassland, and fulfilling the

latter's responsibility as the son of the grassland. When her grandmother died, Ganggahala completed her final response to the national tradition in the last moments of her life, namely the reward of her birth. The death of Ganggahala became the cult of Baiyinbaolige's escape from the grassland, symbolizing the death of the national character in the life of Baiyinbaolige, which has since become a modern man in the complete sense.

In the creation process, "Jinpa" also set the national incarnation for the driver Jinpa, that is, the sheep killed on the road and the killer encountered by chance. The process of the death is the process of the driver Jinpa separated from the Tibetan ethnic tradition. Under the influence of religious culture, Pema Tsenden gives a richer presentation of death, and the text of "Jinpa" therefore presents two meaningful "transcendence".

Firstly, Jinpa expiate the sin of the dead sheep, and the innocent dead sheep is the embodiment of the driver jinpa body. The sudden death of a sheep while driving a truck on a modern road, is a symbol of a rediscovery of traditional national life. In the modern way of life, Jinpa betrayed the rules of national survival, which caused his inner guilt. Therefore, Jinpa urgently sought religious rescue. After the transcendence of the dead sheep, Jinpa's body could comfortably go into the secular world, and bought mutton and trust lovers in the secular world. Secondly, the driver Jinpa release the soul of the killer Jinpa from purgatory. The killer Jinpa represents the soul of the driver Jinpa which attaches to the tradition.. Similar to Ganggahala, the killer Jinpa replaces the driver Jinpa embedded in the revenge network of the Tibetan society, following the tradition to complete the task of revenge. Therefore, when the killer Jinpa continues its revenge action, the soul of the driver Jinpa is still unable to obtain stability in the secular world. The second ceremony in the text represents the driver Jinpa's complete separation from the national tradition. — Since religion is also a part of the tradition, this separation can no longer be carried out through the rituals provided by religion. Thus, Jinpa turns to his dream, which "breaks through the despair of the imagination and reproduces the repressed emotions of the day in an incredible form" [3]. Jinpa kills Marza in a dream, "bringing the end to tradition, and making it from reincarnation"[4]. Through the killing in the dream, Jinpa surpasses the sin of the murderer, and also freed the responsibility of the Avengers. So at the end of the dream, Maza stands among the sheep, and the vulture flies by, presenting a celestial burial. But when Jinpa looked up again, a plane flies by in the sky, symbolizing that the traditional national law of survival finally gives way to modern ethics.

Images often become a ritualized display of reality. Through the visual presentation of death and excess, "A Mongolian Tale" and "Jinpa" not only write the inevitability of awakening, but also show the pain brought by awakening to the audience. The affirmation and reflection of modernization are combined in the

film, which enriches the artistic connotation of the text and provides the audience with a broader thinking space.

The vulture and plane respectively symbolize tradition and modernity in the film (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The vulture and plane

#### 4. Conclusion

The creators of the literary text and film text of A Mongolian Tale are not grassland people, and the protagonist BaiYinolige also has a natural alien temperament. He was born in the city, raised by the grassland, and educated in the city. Deviating from the grassland and returning to the city are the inevitable choice of Baiyinbaige. However, in the process of leaving, the rational confusion and emotional pain is also the inevitable fate. As a result, "A Mongolian Tale" focuses more on "running away", which is a display of the process of individual awakening. Xie Fei's unique life experience between the grassland and the city conveys the understanding and thinking of the grassland tradition and modern ethics.

While the hero of "Killing a Sheep" is a Tibetan, which is more the result of individual awakening, that is, the subject of ethnic minorities seeks the difficult exploration of modernization. Therefore, the text uses a larger part of the scene of "death" and "excess".

"Only after the individual awakening, can the awakening of the nation as a whole be possible and the nation have hope." [5] "A Mongolian Tale" and "Jinpa" with the modern rational spirit, build a bridge of communication and dialogue between national tradition and modern ethics.

However, if we treat the minority with an attitude towards a backward group, ethnic minorities will usually be marginalized.

It is worth noting that the modernization of ethnic minorities has become inevitable because the social and economic foundation has undergone major changes. Due to the progress of productive forces and the development of educational resources, women on the grassland no longer need to sacrifice their youth and freedom to ensure the continuation of settlement; due to the perfection of modern legal system, the Tibetan residents no longer need to rely on religious ethics and homomorphic revenge principles to maintain the social order. As we know, at the end of "A Mongolian Tale", there are many girls in the school, and in "Jinpa", the concept of rule of law has penetrated into the daily life of the Tibetans. The changes in these societies are the basis of the modernization of ethnic minorities. In the face of national tradition, we should hold a dialectical attitude, not simply regard it as a symbol of ignorance and backwardness, nor should we regard the members of the awakening ethnic minorities as uncivilized people.

When Baiyinbaolige return to the grassland, girls can also go to school (Figure 4). The lives of women have been changed as the development of society.



Figure 4. The classroom in "A Mongolian Tale"

Both "A Mongolian Tale" and "Jinpa", not only provide the rational speculation of the national tradition and modern ethics, but also show the humanistic care for the minority — whether awakened or not yet awakened. It is precisely because of the rational reflection and emotional care that the film and television texts have a lofty value in the dimension of history and art.

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