

# Research On The Socio-Cultural Influence Of Literature: A Case Study Of The Works Of Chinese Mongolian Writer Gerelqimuge Heihe

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**Abstract:** *Heihe, a prominent Chinese writer, has made significant contributions to children's literature and animal fiction. His works are deeply influenced by his childhood experiences and Mongolian heritage, which inform his creative consciousness. Heihe has discussed his writing philosophy in interviews and prefaces, emphasizing that his inspiration comes from his childhood memories, his affinity for animals, and his desire to portray a fading wilderness. His writing is often seen as a reflection of the complex relationship between humans, animals, and nature. Heihe's animal fiction is notably shaped by his ethnic background, with many of his stories reflecting the spirit of grassland culture. The animals he depicts—such as wolves, horses, and Tibetan mastiffs—embody characteristics shaped by their natural environment. Scholars highlight how his works integrate elements of nomadic culture and herding life, setting his narratives apart from other contemporary animal fiction. Critics also note that Heihe's writing is both culturally rich and emotionally resonant, drawing from his personal experiences to create universal themes. In addition to the cultural and emotional depth of his works, Heihe's writing engages young readers by stimulating their curiosity about the natural world and offering important life lessons. His writing is praised for its strength, poetic realism, and ability to teach resilience and self-awareness. Heihe's work fosters a deeper connection with nature, presenting an alternative to the commercialized city culture many children experience. Overall, Heihe's work has enriched Chinese children's literature, offerings new theoretical insights and expanding storytelling boundaries. His unique blend of cultural identity, childhood nostalgia, and animal narratives has garnered widespread acclaim, and his future works are eagerly anticipated for their potential to further explore the relationship between humans, animals, and nature.*

**Keywords:** *Ge Rileqimuge Heihe; Animal fiction creation; Research overview.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Heihe, a prominent Mongolian writer, is renowned for his contributions to Chinese children's literature and animal fiction. His distinct creative consciousness is deeply shaped by his childhood experiences and Mongolian heritage, which have influenced his portrayal of the complex relationship between humans, animals, and nature. Heihe's literary works reflect his personal emotional experiences and cultural background, particularly the spirit of grassland culture. In interviews and prefaces, Heihe has stated that his writing is rooted in his childhood memories, his love for animals, and his desire to depict the disappearing wilderness (Wang, 2023). His stories, often centered around animals like wolves, horses, and Tibetan mastiffs, capture the essence of life on the northern grasslands, emphasizing a deep connection to the natural world (Zhu, 2023).

Heihe's animal fiction is distinguished by its focus on the authentic depiction of animals' lives, a core principle of "true animal fiction." Scholars have praised his work for avoiding the imposition of human emotions and ethics onto animals, instead presenting them as equal life forms coexisting with humans (Wang, 2023). His style, characterized by delicate and precise portrayals of animals and a poetic realism, has earned widespread recognition and several literary awards. His stories offer young readers an engaging narrative that

stimulates curiosity about nature while imparting valuable life lessons on resilience, fearlessness, and the importance of preserving the environment (Qiu, 2023).

Heihe's works have had a profound impact on Chinese literature, particularly in the field of animal fiction. Scholars have increasingly focused on the ecological implications of his writing, highlighting his critique of industrial civilization and the ecological crisis facing the northern grasslands (Hao, 2023). By blending his cultural identity, childhood nostalgia, and ecological concerns, Heihe has enriched the genre and expanded the boundaries of storytelling, offering new insights into the human-animal relationship and the natural world (Yan, 2023). As Heihe's literary contributions continue to develop, his work remains a vital exploration of ecological and philosophical themes in contemporary children's literature.

Gerileqimuge Heihe, has significantly advanced Chinese original animal literature, following the legacies of Jin Zenghao and Shen Shixi. Since his debut in 2002 with *Old Brother*, Hei He has consistently produced innovative works, including novels such as *Black Flame*, *Ghost Dog*, *Roger*, *Aya*, *My Dog*, and *Blood Horse*, along with short story collections like *Return to the Grassland*, *Goose Farm*, *The Kingdom of Reindeer*, and *Wolverine River*. Set against the backdrop of China's northern grasslands and forests, these works provide a vivid portrayal of animals' survival and their relationships with humans, conveying nostalgia and lament for a fading wilderness culture. Hei He's unique artistic style—marked by delicate character portrayals and flowing language—has garnered him multiple literary awards and sparked a diverse range of critical reviews. This article organizes recent studies on Hei He's works through the four key elements of literary activity: "World—Work—Author—Reader" (Wang, 2023).

A central theme in animal fiction is the portrayal of animals' true lives, which contrasts with human-centric narratives. Many critics emphasize "authenticity" in animal fiction, where animals are not depicted through human emotions or ethics but as coexisting life forms. Hei He's works exemplify this approach, presenting animals with scientific accuracy, as highlighted by Zhu Ziqiang in his preface to *Old Brother*, which stresses Hei He's honest understanding of animal life (Zhu, 2023). This commitment to authenticity enriches Chinese animal fiction and integrates the natural world with the narrative, offering "a complete nature" (Wang, 2023).

Heihe's works also engage with ecological issues, particularly the human-animal relationship and the ecological crisis. Critics have explored his depiction of harmonious coexistence between humans and animals (Hao, 2023), while others, such as Qiu Rui, emphasize the ecological implications of his work, advocating for equal coexistence and critiquing the harm inflicted upon animals (Qiu, 2023). Further analysis by Wang Min suggests that Hei He's writing transcends literary art, carrying a philosophical message about an ideal way of life (Wang, 2023). However, while the ecological dimension is central to Hei He's stories, some critiques have overly focused on ecological issues, at times overlooking his literary qualities and aesthetic style.

## II. Some Interpretations of Heihe's Works

**Ecological Interpretation:** Many scholars focus on the ecological themes in Hei He's works, particularly how his stories reflect the broader environmental crisis. Critics like Hao Jingkun and Qiu Rui emphasize Hei He's engagement with the ecological value of animals and their relationship to the environment. Hao (2023) divides Hei He's works into periods of ecological focus, with early works like *Ancient Song* and *Feeding Wolves* reflecting a "retrospective posture," while later works, such as *Old Brother* and *Red Wolf Valley*, explore harmonious coexistence between humans and animals. Qiu Rui (2023) further emphasizes how Hei He's works advocate for equal coexistence between humans and animals, providing a critique of human harm to the natural world.

**Humanistic and Cultural Interpretation:** Scholars also interpret Hei He's works from a humanistic perspective, particularly in terms of his portrayal of animals as sentient beings with their own emotional and survival concerns. Critics like Zheng Xuefei (2023) argue that Hei He's writing explores the negative effects of human actions on animals and nature, offering a critique of industrial civilization and the degradation of the natural world. By portraying animals in their struggle for survival, Hei He's works also address human values, such as resilience, empathy, and the necessity of a balanced relationship with the earth.

**Philosophical and Existential Interpretation:** Beyond the ecological and humanistic dimensions, some scholars, like Wang Min, interpret Hei He's works in a philosophical context. Wang (2023) connects Hei He's narratives to Heidegger's theory of "poetic dwelling," interpreting the author's use of nature and animals as a

metaphor for the search for truth and a deeper connection to the world. This existential reading suggests that Hei He's works do not merely depict survival but offer profound reflections on human existence, the interdependence between life forms, and the potential for harmonious coexistence.

**Aesthetic Interpretation:** However, the discussions still appear somewhat unclear because they have not fully clarified the relationship of "who is speaking" and "who is observing" in the works. This is crucial to interpreting the aesthetic layers of Hei He's works.

**1. Imagery.** Drawing on his personal life experiences and regional cultural background, Hei He has created many sheepdog images. Researchers often associate this imagery with the deep influence of ethnic culture. Sui Lin and Zhang Dahai argue that the author shapes the image of the sheepdog within the context of Shamanistic culture. "Banuge" reflects the dualistic opposition of good and evil, while "Qinmuqie" represents an ancient "bodily utopia." Their paper further suggests that the dogs in Hei He's novels actually represent another form of himself—brave, loyal, and free. "They are not ordinary abstract dogs; rather, they are independent and iconic, the kind of dog that the novelist always seeks" (Sui & Zhang, 2023, p. 118). Yang Ruowen points out that Hei He uses depictions of animals such as grassland sheepdogs to "interpret the ancient culture and wildness of the Mongolian people" (Yang, 2023, p. 121). Li Sha focuses on Hei He's method of animal description, including "combining linear and three-dimensional depictions," which enriches the literary understanding of Hei He's unique animal portrayal (Li, 2023, p. 130).

**2. "Wilderness."** The imagery of "wilderness" appears frequently in Hei He's works and has attracted much attention from critics. Wu Qinan, in *Ge Rileqimuge Hei He: The Last Legend of the Grasslands*, suggests that the wilderness is a "much larger and more important imagery" than animals in the narrative, serving as the "true protagonist" of the works, characterized by "vigorous vitality," "savage power," and "primitiveness." This creation reflects the tension between the "primitive, scattered herding culture" and the "modern civilization expressing deep human desires." It is a shift "from anthropocentrism to an ecological system" in the perspective of the work. Placing this within the historical and contemporary context of the Eurasian grassland cultural belt, such "wilderness" is gradually "transforming and vanishing." Thus, Hei He's novels address not just one region or one ethnic group but "the entire humanity." This gives his works a depth rarely seen in animal fiction (Wu, 2023, p. 292). Ren Xuemei argues that wilderness, for Hei He, is both "an external material space" and "an internal spiritual sanctuary." It is "the initial context that triggers literary imagination, as well as the spiritual return that calls for life ideals." She further suggests that Hei He creates a "spiritual wilderness" through depictions of the dignity, growth, and death of animals (Ren, 2023, p. 142). Shi Shiyao sees wilderness as an expression of freedom and ease, and returning to it through depictions is an ideal representation of "human life states" (Shi, 2023, p. 150). These deep interpretations of "wilderness" expand its actual connotation, enhancing the value and significance of Hei He's works in the original Chinese animal fiction landscape.

**3. Death Imagery.** Shi Shiyao's paper also discusses Hei He's portrayal of death. She observes that Hei He uses a calm tone and objective descriptions to "peel away layer by layer" the essence of death. This approach stems from his understanding of death through the lens of life's cyclical nature, leading him to adopt a peaceful attitude. Additionally, the Shamanistic belief in the immortality of the soul further influences Hei He's depiction of death, giving it a distinct form (Shi, 2023, p. 158). The analyses of aesthetic images such as "sheepdogs," "wilderness," and "death" accurately reflect the aesthetic connotations of Hei He's novels, while also highlighting the cultural and multi-dimensional value of his works, which are rooted in his ethnic and universal human stance.

**4. Structure.** Yang Ruowen argues that the "chain structure" in Hei He's works corresponds with the continuous vitality of life on the grasslands, transmitting a "philosophy of survival" from the grasslands. The themes of "we are the children of the earth" and "dusk grassland" represent the "eternal," making "eternity and cycles" two mother themes of nature that become the artistic structure of the text. This "natural textualization" forms a distinctive narrative structure (Yang, 2023, p. 165). Hou Ying also addresses the structure of Hei He's works: "Hei He structures his works according to the rhythm of life's growth, full and spirited, like an ever-gilded age under the sun" (Hou, 2023, p. 170). This analysis links the structural features apparent in the text with the internal rhythm of life, revealing Hei He's natural aesthetic pursuit in his structural layout.

**5. Language.** Language is the cornerstone of constructing an artistic world in literary works and also a primary manifestation of a writer's artistic skill. Hei He's use of language has captivated many critics, who admire its craftsmanship. Sun Yue states, "Hei He's language is beautiful and lively, meticulously crafted without being

artificial, magnificent yet fresh," and he uses techniques like metaphor and personification with skill and expertise. His style and level are "rare in the field of animal fiction in mainland China" (Sun, 2023, p. 180). Zheng Xuefei suggests that Hei He's "poetic language" brings the images in his works to life, and his color descriptions "display a variety of beautiful forms." He excels at using "sensory details to repair and rebuild the reader's increasingly dulled sensory system" (Zheng, 2023, p. 190). Hou Ying praises Hei He for "creating a purely individual language world combined with effective narration," stating that his language "evokes a sensory experience rather than a focus on actions," and that it is "full of texture, passionate and emotional" (Hou, 2023, p. 200). Hei He is skilled at "materializing the intangible, abstract, and unfamiliar, intertwining color lines from painting, melody and rhythm from music, and beautiful realms from imagination into his words. His writing moves from experiential life to portraying the world and from expressing the world to conveying the spiritual state, giving his words a cinematic quality, calm yet profound" (Hou, 2023, p. 205). These evaluations, whether emotional impressions or rational analysis, capture the essence of Hei He's literary style.

The writer, Heihe, has a very clear creative consciousness, which he discusses in many interviews and prefaces. For example: "I do not know the hidden world that animals possess outside of the human world"; "I only write what I can understand"; "I describe a wilderness that is disappearing"; "To place the relationship between humans and nature into the realm of morality is also one way for humans to seek harmonious coexistence with nature"; "The most important inspiration for a writer comes from his childhood"; "I want to tell all children that when you must face growth, I am trying to present a complete world to you." These statements and confessions involve various elements of literary activity and provide accurate grounds for interpretation by critics.

From the perspective of the author's creative activity, Heihe's studies focus on the relationship between creation, childhood, and ethnicity. As the author himself says, memories of childhood are the fundamental driving force behind his creative work. Heihe's childhood, spent alongside dogs, and the deep emotional experiences he had, have become focal points for many critics exploring the origins of his work. Hou Ying states: "A strong childhood complex and a wild grassland life almost runs through his entire creation," and his work aims to "commemorate and create a utopia of life communities on the grasslands and deep forests." Wei Hong believes that Heihe views his childhood experiences as "the last ancient time," and in the shepherd dog, he consolidates his "spiritual attachment" from childhood. Li Sha proposes that the precious life experiences of childhood form the "utopian imagination of heaven" in the author's mind. Xiao Ning argues that the creation of the character Roger directly comes from the writer's childhood experiences and his adult reflection and attachment to childhood, suggesting that Roger represents "humanity's attachment to childhood," and the depiction of the puppy is "returning to the beloved childhood, sharing the survival experience of childhood, and guarding the dreams of childhood."

In addition to the influence of childhood experiences on his work, as a Mongolian writer, ethnicity and regional cultural characteristics are also key factors in Heihe's creative origins. Wang Quan, in his article *The Animal Novels of Geerleqimuge Heihe and Grassland Culture*, points out that "Heihe's animal novels show readers the spirit of grassland culture reflected in animals. The wolf's heroism, the bear's independence, the horse's vitality, and the Tibetan mastiff's innocent heart, all originate from the unique natural environment of the grassland." Shi Shaoyao's *The Animal Novel from the Perspective of Nomadic Culture* explores the characteristics of nomadic culture embedded in Heihe's narrative style. In the "narrative time" section, the article suggests that the author "chooses the movement and changes of natural landscapes as the event sequence guide," which highlights the natural instincts of the herders. In the "narrative rhythm" section, it points out that the novel adds considerable length to scene descriptions and irrelevant details in the arrangement of the main plot, showing an aesthetic effect similar to Mongolian long tunes. This analysis not only fills the gap in research on Heihe's narrative style but also places his creative examples within the broader context of nomadic culture, highlighting Heihe's distinctive individual style in Chinese animal fiction.

On July 8, 2014, the Jieli Publishing House held the *Grassland Culture and Animal Literature—Heihe's Animal Literature Symposium* in Hulunbuir, where attendees extensively discussed the ethnic cultural characteristics displayed in Heihe's works. They suggested that Heihe's creations "convey the complete code of grassland culture" and "shine with the soul of grassland culture," offering a comprehensive review of Heihe's work from the perspective of ethnic culture.

Additionally, Hou Ying's research touches on the "fusion" characteristic of the creative subject, which forms Heihe's unique narrative style in animal fiction. She says that in Heihe's work, "the objects themselves are not rigid and passive; they challenge the perception and emotional recognition modes of 'I,' causing changes in the

perceptual mode of 'I,' and leading to an adaptive shift towards animals. These shifts include emotional choices, rational recognition, wisdom's perseverance, and the unknowability of fate, making the animal world in his works communicate with human emotions through multiple dimensions." Heihe "mobilizes his entire body and mind to feel," and therefore, the text he creates is "a perfect combination of objectification and self-objectification, possessing a distinctive 'poetic realism,' which is the most essential difference between Heihe's animal narratives and those of other contemporary animal novelists." This evaluation highlights the significance of the writer's active involvement in literary creation and the aesthetic mediacy between the writer's agency and the realistic animal world, offering considerable inspiration.

The creation and research of children's literature place significant emphasis on the presence of target readers, and Heihe's work is no exception. Many critics believe that Heihe became a "dark horse" in Chinese children's literature largely due to the impact his works have on children's reading.

Some argue that the "knowledge density" of Heihe's works aligns closely with children's natural curiosity about animals. For them, Heihe's books depict an expansive animal world where they can not only appreciate the beauty of literature but also get closer to animals living on the grasslands, learning about their life trajectories and survival rules. Tan Xudong comments on *Black Flame* by stating that it can be read as a "coming-of-age novel," and "young readers can find the key to their own growth in the animals' development in the story. Of course, such an animal novel might also promote the spiritual growth of humanity, because these words can achieve a form of spiritual self-redemption."

More critics focus on the aesthetic impact of Heihe's writing style on readers. For instance, Xiao Ning states that Heihe's works "are filled with strong, ax-like, expressive styles, carrying a sense of desolate grandeur," and this approach, which does not deliberately "arrange the plot or focus on fine details," provides a different reading experience for children used to "lighthearted school stories." Tong Zhou in *Children's Literature Cannot Lack the Sense of Gravity* says: "Heihe's works have a backbone, its masculinity and bravery precisely clear up the overly sweet and soft atmosphere dominating children's literature, ushering in a song of life that is tenacious and fearless." Writer Xu Lu believes that the life journey of the Tibetan mastiff Gesang in *Black Flame* proves the truth that "any noble and pure life must be forged in three fires, boiled in three pots of boiling water, and washed in three baths of blood." This spirit of strength is something Chinese boys today lack. Heihe's books will impart to children a tenacity that never bows and an indomitable spirit.

On this issue, the most profound discussion comes from Tang Rui. Her article *Injecting Blood into Life—Heihe's Animal Literature in Contemporary Children's Reading Perspectives* is the only one to discuss Heihe's work from the reader's perspective. After fully affirming that Heihe's novels "record the rise and fall of a culture and reflect the changes of an era through stories about humans and animals," she explores what Heihe's animal literature actually brings to children: "For young readers immersed in a commercialized city culture, Heihe's works depict a completely different cultural scene. This scene not only satisfies their curiosity but also offers the unique poetic melancholy, simple human feelings, and wild spirit of grassland culture, expanding their aesthetic experience and cognitive horizons, as well as the breadth and depth of their spiritual world." In addition to expansion, it is also an enhancement: "Heihe's works emphasize blood and wildness. Blood signifies fearlessness, responsibility, resilience, and unwillingness to yield easily, while wildness represents an opening of the body and mind to nature and a free stretching of the innate nature. All of this provides today's children with a profound life education and an education of hardship." This evaluation, based on the reader's aesthetic and educational values, is another high affirmation of Heihe's creative significance.

The above summary attempts to capture the basic situation of Heihe's research through the four elements of literary activity. As a new force in Chinese original children's literature and animal fiction, Heihe's works indeed open up a large space for expression, offering profound and unique theoretical insights. These explanations and theoretical reflections undoubtedly add valuable new qualities to the theoretical construction of Chinese children's literature. On the other hand, as Nie Meng said in *Labels and Explanations—A Brief Discussion of Geerleqimuge Heihe's Animal Novels*, compared to various "labels," Heihe's works are more about "the rich and untranslatable interpretations behind the labels, which resonate deeply." Therefore, we should increasingly show special respect for the author's originality. At the same time, for the development of Chinese children's literature, we look forward to Heihe creating even greater works.

### III. Conclusion

This article provides a detailed discussion of Heihe's unique position in Chinese children's literature and animal fiction, as well as the distinctive features of his creative work. It offers an in-depth analysis of his creative motivations, the influence of ethnic culture, and aspects such as language, structure, and aesthetic imagery in his literary works.

Hei He's works can be interpreted through various lenses, from aesthetic and ecological to humanistic and philosophical. These interpretations reflect the complexity of his storytelling, which combines lyrical beauty, ecological awareness, and deep humanistic concern. Each of these critical perspectives helps deepen our understanding of Hei He's contributions to Chinese literature and his impact on readers both in China and abroad.

The article suggests that Heihe's works not only depict the profound emotional connection between humans and animals but also incorporate elements of grassland culture, Mongolian ethnic characteristics, and philosophical reflections on life and death. His novels are known for their refined, poetic language, which carries a strong artistic appeal, and convey themes such as the value of life, the relationship between humans and nature, and the transmission of culture through unique aesthetic forms.

In particular, Heihe's creative goals are clear, emphasizing that the animals in his works are not only subjects of literary expression but also serve as vessels for the author's emotions and ideas. His works have also been highly praised for their impact on children, especially those involving animal characters that represent bravery, loyalty, and freedom. These characters offer children a form of nourishment different from the modern urban culture, expanding their aesthetic experiences and cognitive perspectives. Overall, Heihe's work, both in terms of literary techniques and cultural depth, provides a fresh perspective and value to Chinese children's literature. His works not only occupy a significant place in the field of children's literature but also offer readers a diverse space to reflect on life, culture, and nature.

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