

Papua New Guinean literature: A unique narrative under multiculturalism

American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities

Vol. 10, No. 2, 34–45, 2025

e-ISSN: 2226-4809/p-ISSN: 2304-6945



Corresponding Author

Yan Yang¹

Zhengwei Pei²

^{1,2}College of Foreign Studies, Nanjing Agricultural University, Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, P. R. China.

¹Email: 2024115002@stu.njau.edu.cn

²Email: wei@njau.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the dynamic evolution of Papua New Guinean literature amid the collision and fusion of its indigenous traditions and diverse foreign cultural elements, and to further clarify how this literature articulates authentic indigenous voices and constructs a distinct national identity within a complex multicultural context. To achieve this goal, the paper adopts a literature research method: it systematically collects and analyses academic papers, literary monographs, and critical reviews related to Papua New Guinean literature, and based on this, conducts an in-depth analysis of three core dimensions of the literature—its historical development process from oral traditions to written works, representative authors and their works, and its evolutionary path under the dual influence of Western and Eastern cultures. The study finds that Papua New Guinean literary tradition not only vividly mirrors the country's societal transformations and inherent national ethos but also plays a pivotal role in preserving, inheriting, and promoting indigenous cultures in the age of globalization. Furthermore, the practical implications are that this research on Papua New Guinean literature is expected to offer novel perspectives for understanding the diversity and unique value of Pacific Island literature as a whole, thereby enriching regional literary studies and providing references for the exploration of indigenous literary identities in global multicultural contexts.

Keywords: *Eastern cultural influence, National identity, Oral literature, Papua New Guinean literature, Representative authors and works, Western cultural influence, Written literature.*

DOI:

Citation | Yang, Y., & Pei, Z. (2025). Papua New Guinean literature: A unique narrative under multiculturalism. *American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 10(2), 34–45.

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Funding: This study was supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Humanities and Social Sciences) (Grant number: SKCX2023008) and Nanjing Agricultural University (Grant number: SKYD2025037).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

History: Received: 22 August 2025/ Revised: 8 September 2025/ Accepted: 16 September 2025/ Published: 25 September 2025

Publisher: Online Science Publishing

Highlights of this paper

- The paper outlines the development trajectory of Papua New Guinean literature: oral literature carries the community's collective memory and daily behavioral guidance, while written literature shifted from pre-1975 radical political expressions to post-1975 reflective explorations of national culture, with themes evolving from individual autobiographies to national cultural characteristics.
- It emphasizes Papua New Guinean literature's unique value: as a key part of South Pacific/Oceanic literature, it is nurtured by the collision of colonial history and indigenous culture. Its representative writers reflect social changes, colonial traumas, and cultural resilience.
- This paper analyzes the dual cultural influences on Papua New Guinean literature: Western culture introduced colonial-era "heterogeneous narratives" and characterized it as "literature of the oceans," while Eastern culture contributed to the development of Tok Pisin—facilitating regionally influenced literary creation—and promoted two-way cultural exchanges under the Belt and Road Initiative.

1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the most culturally diverse countries in the Pacific region, Papua New Guinea (PNG) has a literature that carries rich national historical memories and cultural connotations. Influenced by both indigenous and foreign cultures, PNG has formed a unique literary landscape. In addition, with more than 800 languages and rich cultural traditions, PNG literature serves as a typical case study for examining the conflicts and integrations between cultural diversity and globalization. Since China put forward the initiative to jointly build the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, Pacific Island countries, as important part of China’s peripheral diplomatic landscape, have become increasingly prominent in their strategic significance. Among the many Pacific Island countries, Papua New Guinea stands out. Located in the western Pacific, it is the largest and most populous country in the region, with its vast territory, rich resources, beautiful scenery and a long history. It is known as the pearl of the South Pacific section of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Lu, 2017). As the first Pacific Island country to jointly build the “Belt and Road” with China, the cooperation between the two countries has covered multiple fields such as trade, investment, education, energy, infrastructure construction and climate change response.

This paper aims to study PNG literature to gain an in-depth understanding of the country’s cultural characteristics, social changes, and national spirit, while also expanding the research scope of Pacific Island literature and even world literature. This paper focuses on the following research contents: the historical development of literature in Papua New Guinea; some of the representative authors and works in this process and their roles in promoting the development of Papua New Guinean literature; the evolution of Papua New Guinean literature amid the intertwined influence of Western and Eastern cultures, particularly against the backdrop of the Belt and Road Initiative.

2. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PNG LITERATURE

Papua New Guinea is located in the western part of the Pacific Ocean, south of the equator, and the northwestern part of Oceania, and geographically belongs to the Melanesian Islands. The term “Melanesia” originates from colonial classification and cartography, reflecting European racial discourse. In the tripartite division of the Pacific, Polynesia and Micronesia were named based on the geographic characteristics of the islands, while Melanesia was named after the skin color of its inhabitants, meaning “black islands” (Kabutaulaka, 2015). Hayward and Long (2020) use modern and modernity in a way that challenges the Eurocentrism embedded in the terms and recognizes that “different communities, countries, and regions produce different modernisms at different times”. From around the 16th century, Papua New Guinea transitioned from isolation to contact with world

civilizations, marking the beginning of its modern history. First discovered by the Portuguese, it was later visited by Spanish, British, and French explorers. By the late 18th century, Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, and Australia began occupying parts of the region. During World War II, it was occupied by Japan before being recaptured by Allied forces of the United States and Australia, thus concluding the modern historical period of Papua New Guinea (Han & Zhao, 2018). In 1949, the Australian Federal Parliament merged Papua and New Guinea into a single administrative unit called the Territory of Papua New Guinea, with its capital in Port Moresby. In 1971, the Papua New Guinea Parliament decided to rename the territory Papua New Guinea. The territory achieved internal self-governance in December 1973 and declared independence on September 16, 1975, subsequently joining the Commonwealth.

The national literature of Papua New Guinea is both ancient and young: it is ancient in that its oral literature has a long history and has been passed down from generation to generation; it is young because the emerging literature that gives voice to the aspirations of indigenous peoples, which has risen vigorously on the basis of traditional oral literature, has only a history of several decades (Wang, 2006). Editorial Board of *Oceania Literature* (1983) pointed out that, before colonization, literature in Papua New Guinea was primarily orally transmitted, with myths, folk tales, and poetry carrying the local people's life experiences, values, and beliefs. These forms of oral literature played a crucial role in tribal cultural inheritance. Since the 20th century, Papua New Guinea has developed written literature based on oral traditions, which can be divided into two phases reflecting different relationships between the writers and politics. In other words, Papua New Guinea's written literature saw distinct shifts around 1975. Writers were deeply involved in political struggles, with works marked by direct, radical expressions amid pre-independence fervor. While they distanced themselves from politics, turning to reflective explorations of national issues, driving literary maturity after 1975 (Wu, 2023).

2.1. Cultural Roots and Origins: Oral Literature

Oral literature is the spiritual core of the indigenous societies in Papua New Guinea, permeating all aspects of social life. It defines the identity, sense of belonging, regional identification of individuals and communities, as well as their relationship with the environment, and serves as the foundation for constructing history. Through forms such as myths, folk tales, and poetry, it carries the collective memory of the community, including clan origins, ancestral wisdom, and moral norms, providing indigenous groups with a cultural map for survival and development and a guide for daily life behaviors (Stella, 2001). The oral literature of Papua New Guinea can be roughly classified into three categories: first, primitive myths; second, folk tales; third, oral poetry.

2.1.1. Primitive Myths

Primitive myths are vital components of oral literature, embodying the origin stories, worldviews, and cultural beliefs of communities. For the Tolai people—one of the indigenous tribes of Papua New Guinea—storytelling centered on their myths serves a purpose far beyond mere entertainment. Like many of the country's indigenous groups, the Tolai draw on their unique survival experiences and perceptions to explain the origins of the world and human existence; their goal is not to chronicle secular history, but to convey ancient Melanesian religious perspectives on good and evil, life and death, and humanity's beginnings. In Papua New Guinea, religious and mythological concepts differ from the abstract, mysterious notions often associated with Western understandings; instead, they fulfill practical, concrete functions in interpreting reality. The Tolai myths, when systematically documented in written form, form a rare and invaluable segment of Papua New Guinea's oral literary heritage. These narratives capture the early life and reproductive practices of the Tolai as a primitive tribe, preserving details

such as the daily routines of ancient Melanesians, their dualistic view of the universe, and their simple yet profound understandings of primitive societal structures (Wang, 2006).

2.1.2. Folk Tales

Folk tales include oral narratives about ancestral deeds, moral norms, and survival skills, reflecting the daily life experiences and values of communities. They are collective oral creations by the Papua New Guinean people to explain and describe the natural and social phenomena they encounter. Originally created to pass the time during long evenings and tedious rainy seasons, these folk tales are generally brief and easy to remember, covering diverse themes. They can be roughly classified into three categories by content: origin stories, animal tales, and everyday life stories. Among them, the origin story passed down by one tribe bears striking similarities to the “Noah’s Ark” in the Bible. The story goes that in ancient times the Earth was densely populated. When a catastrophic flood threatened humanity with extinction, a deity instructed a man to build a small wooden boat. Upon its completion, the flood broke out. The man survived in his boat, along with two women and another man, while all others perished in the waters. These four survivors are said to become the ancestors of humanity later. Such strikingly similar narratives across cultures reveal the shared, rudimentary understandings of humanity in its primitive stage (Ibid, p. 42). Papua New Guinea’s folk tales also mark the germination of its romantic literary tradition. Rooted in real life, they employ romantic narrative techniques, evolving through generations of oral transmission and collective refinement. These stories’ themes of longing to transform reality and pursue better lives have profoundly influenced later writers’ creation of positive romanticism. As a national artistic treasure, oral tales also provide invaluable materials for studying the history, culture, and customs of Papua New Guinea’s primitive villages.

2.1.3. Oral Poetry

Oral poetry is primarily defined by two key features: individual improvisation, or the expression of collective emotions during specific communal events. Meanwhile, traditional rituals—such as coming-of-age ceremonies and initiation rites—convey the significance, taboos, and cultural codes of these occasions through oral narration, weaving oral expression into the fabric of cultural practice. Rural poets emerged to meet societal needs and expectations, acting as spiritual intermediaries for their communities. They compose verses centered on pivotal life events: birth, death, natural disasters, and the arrival of missionaries, for instance. Additionally, at the request of relatives and friends, they create personalized poems for occasions like celebrations, funerals, and moments of love or friendship. Notably, their reputations are forged through peer recognition. Over time, fellow community members gradually affirm their unique status as cultural voices. Although these rural poets, of any age or background, lack formal training in poetry or literature, they engage in extemporaneous, amateur creation and rely on innate talent and eloquence to earn the approval of their communities. Unfortunately, due to the improvisational and oral nature of their work, most of these poems have been lost to time, with only a limited number surviving to the present day. (Ibid, p. 49–50).

2.2. The Rise and Development of Literature: Written Literature

Since the wave of national independence movements in the 1960s, a new literature of the islands of Oceania has arisen on the basis of traditional oral literature. Because of the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the South Pacific, and the fact that most of the archipelago was originally a colony of the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, English became the only means used by indigenous peoples who could not speak this language to communicate with each other. Papua New Guinean scholar Regis Stella (2007) stressed representation, particularly

in writing, as “important mechanisms through which society indoctrinates its members in its prevailing ideas, prejudices, and aspirations”. Pacific identity has long been shaped by dominant racist European representations of the Pacific, primarily by fiction writers, explorers, missionaries, and anthropological accounts. Since the 1960s, indigenous writers from all over the South Pacific islands have used their own pens to show the real local style and national demands, thus breaking the myth of the white man’s whimsical “South Sea Paradise” and conveying the true voice of the indigenous people of the South Pacific to the world for the first time (Wang, 2006).

Papua New Guinea is no exception, and on the basis of traditional oral literature, Papua New Guinea written literature has been formed. It is deeply influenced by local oral traditions, such as myths and stories, retaining an oral flow and charm. This characteristic is continuously reflected in subsequent literary works, for example, the creations included in the journal *Savannah Flames* (Winduo, 2007). Papua New Guinea’s written literature was different before and after 1975. Before 1973 autonomy, optimism prevailed. From autonomy to 1975 independence, writers were directly engaged in political struggles, with literary expressions growing more direct and radical, reflecting the era’s political fervor. After 1975, some renowned writers took government roles. As politics stabilized, writers diverged from politicians, shifting to calm reflection on national issues. This fostered literary maturity, with works exploring national identity more deeply (Wu, 2023).

2.2.1. The Rise of Literature and the Shaping of National Identity: From the 1960s to 1975

After the Second World War, under the impact of the wave of national independence, a group of educated intellectuals represented the emerging class and sought to get rid of the shackles of colonization in the interests of the people, so they used literature and art as a weapon of struggle. The emerging literature of the island countries of Oceania was born and developed in the convergence of various forces, such as political independence, the growth of regional consciousness, the establishment of universities, the growing sense of national democracy, and the Westernization of social systems (Wang, 1993).

Established in 1968, the Papua New Guinea Literature Bureau functioned as a transitional intermediary institution. The Australian government regarded it merely as a temporary tool and ceased funding in 1978 (three years after PNG’s independence). Eventually, it evolved into a department within the National Research Institute, retaining only the function of literary competitions and failing to become an independent participant in the literary system (Ellerman, 1995). The development of Papua New Guinea’s literature centered on the Literary Bureau. Under the colonial context, it was deeply influenced by African literary experiences, promoting the popularization of writing through competitions, periodicals, and other forms. However, constrained by funding shortages, political interference, and language disputes, it failed to form an independent and mature literary system. Its developmental trajectory reflects the limitations of cultural intermediary institutions during the colonial period and the dilemmas of cultural adaptation in the process of decolonization.

In addition, the University of Papua New Guinea, established in 1965, became one of the two centers of new literature on the islands of Oceania, and played an important role in promoting the origin and development of Papua New Guinea literature. The book *Decolonizing the Mind* focuses on the impact of the University of Papua New Guinea on local culture and national identity from 1971 to 1974. It explores how Ulli Beier and his wife Georgina promoted Papua New Guinea’s non-violent resistance to colonialism and the construction of local cultural identity through literature, art, and education. Ulli Beier and his wife Georgina were important catalysts for the development of literature in Papua New Guinea. They came to Papua New Guinea from Nigeria in September 1967, and Ulli took up a lectureship at the University of Papua New Guinea, dedicated to discovering, nurturing, and promoting Papua New Guinea’s local literary and artistic culture, using it as a tool to resist colonialism. This period

(the 1960s and 1970s) was on the eve of Papua New Guinea's independence, and the social mood shifted from subtle nationalism to intense anti-colonial resistance. Literature became an important carrier for expressing national sentiments and constructing identity.

As pivotal contributors to Papua New Guinea's literary development during its pre-independence era, the Beiers advanced local literature through multi-faceted practices—supporting writers, building educational and publishing infrastructure, and linking literature with other art forms—all to foster a distinct literary tradition rooted in PNG's identity and anti-colonial spirit. In terms of supporting local writers and works, they helped Albert Maori Kiki publish his autobiography *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime* (1968), which attracted widespread attention in Papua New Guinea and internationally. They guided Vincent Eri in his creation, and his work *The Crocodile* (1971), inspired by his experience representing Papua New Guinea at a writers' conference in Malaysia in 1966, was the first novel in Papua New Guinea. They also influenced writers such as Kumalau Tawali and Leo Hannet, whose works aimed to serve the people of Papua New Guinea and reflected national consciousness and anti-colonial spirit. In terms of establishing literary education and publishing systems, they set up creative writing courses at University of Papua New Guinea to cultivate local literary talents, with Vincent Eri being a representative student. They founded the *Papua Pocket Poet series* to provide a platform for local poets to publish their works. They also promoted the establishment of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies to further systematically support literary and cultural research. In terms of drama, Ulli Beier participated in the founding of the University Drama Association. Initially, it staged Western classic plays, and later turned to local creations, such as Leo Hannet's short play in Pidgin *Em rod bilong kago* and Rabbie Namaliu's *The Good Woman of Konedobu*, spreading local literary ideas through drama. As for art, the Beiers also promoted the development of visual arts, sculpture, and other fields, forming an overall atmosphere of cultural revival and providing a richer soil for literary creation (Winduo, 2007).

Since the 1960s, with the wave of national independence in the world, Albert Maori Kiki, Vincent Eri, Leo Hannet and other highly educated indigenous intellectuals representing the emerging class have used biographies, novels, poems, dramas and other literary forms as political tools, to show the village life of the islands of Papua New Guinea, depict their customs, violently attack the social norms of Western countries, and speak out for national autonomy and national independence. Efforts have been made to shape the national image, create public opinion for Papua New Guinea, and for the first time, convey the righteous voice of indigenous peoples to the world. Due to the widespread popularity of oral literature in this region, autobiographies and sketches were the most common forms of early Papua New Guinean short stories (Wang, 2006). Although their works are somewhat immature with rough plot development and character portrayal, they are extremely realistic (Han & Zhao, 2018). Before the 1973 autonomy, Papua New Guinea was full of optimism. Between the realization of autonomy and the country's independence in 1975, many writers were directly involved in political struggles, and the forms and approaches of literary expression were more direct and radical than before (Wu, 2023).

2.2.2. Reflections on Literary Development and Divergences: After 1975

After Papua New Guinea's independence, some renowned writers took up government positions. For example, Albert Maori Kiki served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Trade; Vincent Eri became Consul-General to Australia; John Kasaipwalova dedicated himself to rural political movements, and Leo Hannet focused on the Bougainville Island dispute. Occupied with administrative duties at various government levels, they had little time for creative writing. With national independence and political consolidation, writers gradually diverged from politicians and eventually went their separate ways. They began to

calmly reflect on and examine many national cultural and sociopolitical issues, leading to the increasing maturity of Papua New Guinean literature (Wu, 2023).

During this period, there were notable changes in writing themes and creative techniques. The previously prominent autobiographical works centered on individuals became insignificant, as more writers turned their attention to the characteristics of national culture and literature. Many writers produced numerous essays to explore such issues. For instance, writers like John Kasaipwalova had long been committed to establishing a more solid philosophical foundation for the poetic sentiments expressed in the late 1960s; in *Sugarcane Day* (1976), Albert Toro examined the roots of Melanesia; poets Kama Kerpi and Henginikai Ri provided us with two compelling interpretations of the relationship between Pidgin culture and religion (Wang, 2006). In terms of poetry, after going through the stages of denouncing colonialism and depicting the conflict between two cultures, Papua New Guinean poets gradually split into coastal poets and highland poets. Coastal poets focus on introducing Western perspectives and pay attention to the impacts arising from cultural confrontation; in contrast, highland poets are skilled at analyzing and inheriting traditions, deeply portraying the spiritual and moral complex phenomena emerging from rural life, and strongly refuting the long-standing distortion of the simple and original style of primitive poetry (Ibid. p. 274).

After gaining independence, Papua New Guinea took systematic measures to support literary development, driving its literary creation into a new phase. To encourage writing and cultivate writers, Papua New Guinea established the Writers' Association and convened writers' conferences in 1976. Subsequently, professional institutions such as the National Cultural Commission and the Literary Bureau of the Ministry of Education were founded to organize and lead national literary and artistic work. Journals like *Tsemboeli* and *Papua New Guinea Writings* were launched, providing opportunities for both established and emerging writers to publish their works. Literary and artistic groups were organized to foster literary creation, facilitate mutual consultation and promotion, and jointly improve the writing skill, while also discovering and nurturing new talents. Older generation writers represented by Russell Soaba and John Colia continued to be active on the literary scene, never ceasing their creative activities. Meanwhile, younger writers such as August Kituai and Jim Baital rapidly emerged. In July 1980, Papua New Guinea hosted the Third South Pacific Arts Festival in Port Moresby and seven other towns, promoting the development of literary and artistic works with national characteristics. As a result, literary creation in Papua New Guinea entered a new stage (Lu, 2017).

In the 21st century, the “tok stori” (storytelling) in Melanesia reveals how social media interactions integrate into the culturally embedded Melanesian concept of storytelling, illustrating how social media has become a contemporary venue for Pacific digital narratives. This digital storytelling represents a decolonizing digital wave of Pacific artistic renaissance and reimagination, stemming from post-independence art and literature of the 1970s. Matthews (2024) demonstrates how Papua New Guineans subversively employ the tools and functions of social media to counter simplified colonial narratives and representational depictions in mass media that reduce Papua New Guineans to stereotypical images; and explores the significance of digital and visual articulations of Papua New Guinean identity through Instagram by analyzing two public Papua New Guinean Instagram accounts. Different from traditional mainstream media, the tools of visual social media platforms are utilized by Pacific people as bottom-up participatory technologies to achieve self-representation (Waitoa, Scheyvens, & Warren, 2015).

3. REPRESENTATIVE WRITERS AND WORKS OF PNG LITERATURE

Papua New Guinean literature has nurtured a unique creative style in the collision between colonial history and indigenous culture, with its representative writers deeply reflecting social changes and national spirit through their

works. Wang (2006) listed 33 major Papua New Guinean writers in the appendix of his book *History of South Pacific Literature*, and their works cover genres such as novels, short stories, poetry, and drama. Among them, Albert Maori Kiki, Vincent Eri, and Russell Soaba hold significant positions and exert profound influences in the development of Papua New Guinea's literature. From the early autobiographical works exposing colonial realities, to the in-depth exploration of human nature and cultural conflicts in full-length novels, and then to the diverse presentation of social issues in short story collections, their works together construct a pluralistic picture of Papua New Guinean literature, which not only records colonial traumas but also demonstrates cultural resilience, providing rich textual resources for understanding the social changes and cultural identity of Papua New Guinea.

3.1. Albert Maori Kiki: Initiated the National Voice with Autobiography

In 1968, Albert Maori Kiki published his autobiography *Kiki: Ten Thousand Years of Life*, marking the beginning of Papua New Guinea's emerging literary creation. This work marks the first instance in which the people of Papua New Guinea courageously and confidently denounced colonial rule before the world. With a quiet and simple writing style, Kiki depicts the image of a New Guinean growing up in a remote forest: a ten-year-old boy suddenly pulled into a missionary school, subjected to completely unfamiliar foreign education and humiliation by Europeans, and finally awakening to New Guinea's reality and devoting himself to determining his motherland's destiny.

This book showcases the enormous social changes in Papua New Guinea, spanning from early tribal life to the colonial era and post-independence development, encompassing rich historical content. It portrays the conflicts and fusions of lifestyles and values across different cultural backgrounds, profoundly reflecting the impact of social transformations on individuals and families. In terms of literary characteristics, *Kiki: Ten Thousand Years of Life* uses plain language to authentically reproduce the social scenes of the time, allowing readers to feel the atmosphere of life and emotional world of that era.

The book sparked various interesting reactions in Australia at the time: it aroused great interest among sympathizers in literary circles and universities, while colonizers viewed it with suspicion and even hostility. For the people of Papua New Guinea, this book was a major breakthrough, reminding the younger generation of New Guinea that they possessed not only the responsibility but also the capability to manage both their own and global affairs. In the following five years, an increasing number of works from Papua New Guinea emerged continuously across the country (Wang, 1993).

3.2. Vincent Eri: Deepened the Theme of Cultural Conflict Through Novels

In 1970, Vincent Eri published Papua New Guinea's first full-length novel *The Crocodile*. The work reflects the lives of rural people in Papua New Guinea before and after World War II, focusing on the development of the protagonist Hoiri's personal ideology amid the conflict between old and new ways of life, and relentlessly exposes and criticizes colonialism. The book consists of two parts and eight chapters, uses crocodile as a metaphor, and integrates such indigenous elements as witchcraft and the spirits of the dead (Stella, 2001). The first four chapters of Part One depict the protagonist's rural life in his boyhood and his yearning for the idealized world of white people; the four chapters of Part Two describe how, after reaching adulthood, he repeatedly confronts the harsh realities of this "ideal world" and ultimately becomes a victim of the conflict between the old and new social orders. Through the protagonist's repeated failures, the author directly reveals the true face of colonialism. The title of the work implies that the predatory hypocrites in the book are actually crocodiles that prey on the weak.

A comparison between Kiki's first autobiographical novel and Eri's debut full-length novel reveals that both works share the same theme, namely, to show the world the real life of Papua New Guineans and correct white people's misunderstandings of Papua New Guineans and their way of life. Kiki describes how Papua New Guineans stand independently in places where white people have left; while Eri uses the introverted Hoiri to delve into the inner depths of Papuans. Kiki demonstrates the strength and adaptability of Papua New Guineans amid the upheavals of colonial politics; while Eri portrays Papuans' inner vulnerability. The latter work engages in deeper exploration and description (Wang, 2006).

3.3. Russell Soaba: Explored the Spiritual Dilemmas in the Social Transition Period

Russell Soaba, a researcher at the Papua New Guinea Institute, wrote a trilogy of short stories—*A Portrait of the Odd Man* (1971), *A Glimpse of the Abyss* (1972), and *The Victims* (1972)—which depict the dream and setback of the protagonist. The protagonist exposes the depravity, deceptiveness, and destructiveness of modern lifestyles, mocks the blind obedience of fellow countrymen, and himself become social outcast for contradicting traditional moral codes. In *The Villager's Request* (1974), Soaba portrays an elderly villager navigating a hostile world, facing discrimination at every turn and ultimately abandoning his pursuit of ideals amid hardship. Soaba's pessimism was overcome in the protagonist of his later work *Jjiaya* (1977)—a young artist. While nurturing new dreams for the future, the protagonist always maintained his independent and unyielding spirit (Wang, 2006).

In 1978, Soaba published *Loneliness*, which traces three phases in the lives of young men and women around the time of Papua New Guinea's independence, before and after they enter university. Through contrasting personalities, ideological conflicts, and divergent outlooks on life, the work reflects the longing and pursuit of Papua New Guinean intellectuals for national independence, while showcasing the painful transition from confusion and perplexity to eventual awakening in the pre-independence era (Han & Zhao, 2018).

4. THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN AND EASTERN CULTURES ON THE EVOLUTION OF PNG LITERATURE

The development of South Pacific literature has been deeply influenced by multiculturalism. As an important component of it, Papua New Guinean literature has likewise evolved amid the intertwining of indigenous and foreign cultures. Historically, the South Pacific region has undergone Western colonial rule and Eastern immigration waves, resulting in a cultural landscape where tradition and modernity, as well as Western and Eastern elements, coexist in a hybrid manner (Liu & Wang, 2022). Papua New Guinean literature has gradually developed against this backdrop.

4.1. The Influence of Western Culture on PNG Literature

The influence of Western culture on Papua New Guinean literature began during the period of colonial expansion. Since the 18th century, the arrival of Western explorers and missionaries initiated the colonization process of Papua New Guinea and gave rise to a "heterogeneous narrative" dominated by white perspectives. Early Western writers portrayed PNG as a "barbaric land". Fu (2022) notes that in South Pacific white literature, the binary opposition between the "noble savage" and the "ignoble savage" was often used to reinforce the theory of white superiority. A persistent divisive colonial representation in the Pacific region portrays Polynesians as innocent, light-skinned, and beautiful noble savages, while contrasting Melanesians as evil, dark-skinned, and inferior ignoble savages. Furthermore, this has led to racism from Polynesians towards Melanesians, as well as colorism within the Melanesian community itself (Kabutaulaka, 2015). This stereotype manifested in works on

PNG themes as exoticized depictions of local cannibal legends and primitive tribes, such as the deconstruction of colonial discourse in *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas*. Besides, Western modernist literary techniques were widely spread. For instance, Ulli Beier studied at the University of London in his early years and had contacts with African writer communities in Nigeria. He urged indigenous writers to learn Frantz Fanon's theory of violent revolution, which helped shape the distinct characteristic of local literature—criticizing colonial hegemony. He also introduced Western and African literary resources to Papua New Guinea, invited writers such as Taban Lo Liyong from Uganda and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria to give lectures, and encouraged indigenous writers to draw inspiration from the Black civil rights movements in the United States and South Africa (Wang, 2023).

Additionally, South African critic Meg Samuelson argues that Oceanic literature is a form of “literature of the oceans”. This literary form focuses on the global circulation of European and American literature, yet it does not place Europe at the center of world literature. It also argues that Oceanic literature is no longer a marginal or exotic category; instead, it is a literature that embodies integration, connection, hospitality, and cosmopolitanism (Helgesson, Neumann, & Rippl, 2020). As a key component of Oceanic literature, Papua New Guinean literature exhibits the characteristics of openness and connectivity. PNG maintains literary exchanges with Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific Island countries, and its writers, literary editors, and critics frequently establish connections with the outside world. For instance, James McAuley, an Australian writer, was conscripted into military service in 1942 and served as an instructor at the military camp. After 1943, he visited Papua New Guinea on multiple occasions, and his poetry collection *Under Aldebaran*, published in 1946, profoundly reflects his understanding of life in Papua New Guinea. Another Australian writer, Randolph Stow, once resided in Papua New Guinea for a short period; his 1979 novel *Visitants* is set on the islands of Papua New Guinea. The creations and exchanges of these writers with Western backgrounds have, to a certain extent, facilitated the connection between Papua New Guinean literature and the Western-dominated Anglophone literary world. Besides, writers from Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Samoa had worked together to promote regional literary integration, embodying the openness of Oceanic literature that transcends national boundaries. The University of Papua New Guinea influenced the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, prompting it to establish the South Pacific Creative Arts Society and launch the English literary magazine *Mana* in 1973, which further facilitated regional literary exchanges (Wang, 2023).

4.2. *The Influence of Eastern Culture on PNG Literature*

The influence of Eastern culture on Papua New Guinean literature has manifested as a gradual infiltration carried by immigrant communities. Since the 19th century, laborers from China, India, and other countries have entered Papua New Guinea alongside colonial trade, forming unique immigrant cultural circles. From 1870 to 1880, Chinese merchant Li Tande arrived in the country to seek business opportunities, followed by a large influx of Chinese into PNG. To facilitate communication with indigenous peoples, Li and other Chinese used makeshift pidgin English they had hurriedly learned. Local indigenous people quickly adapted to this language, forming the embryonic basis of today's Tok Pisin. The local Tok Pisin retains a strong Chinese-English flavor and is frequently used in parliamentary debates and public advocacy campaigns. Approximately 5 million people in the country can use Tok Pisin to some extent, with around 1 million using it as their first language, particularly in urban households (Wu, Yue, & Sun, 2019).

Tok Pisin, a Creole language widely used in Papua New Guinea, carries the indigenous culture and the emotions of the people. Literary works created in Tok Pisin are closer to the daily life of the local people, vividly

presenting the linguistic style of the people, thus enhancing the regional cultural color of the works and the sense of identity among the public. Besides, Papua New Guinean literature shows diversity in language choice. The use of different languages not only endows literary works with unique charm but also reflects the pluralistic coexistence of the country's cultures. For instance, Steven Winduo's poetry regards rivers as symbols of ancestral habitats and cultural memories, with a particular focus on major rivers in Papua New Guinea such as the Sepik River. His poetry collection *Hembemba* reconstructs the traditional relationship between humans and nature through the imagery of rivers, emphasizing that rivers are not merely geographical entities but living beings that carry indigenous knowledge, ethics, and identities. Winduo writes in English, Tok Pisin, and his native Nagum Boiken language. His works incorporate river narratives in multiple languages, aiming to preserve and revitalize the indigenous languages of Papua New Guinea. Through the multiplicity of languages, it echoes the polyvocality of rivers, embodying a commitment to cultural diversity (Charles, 2022). John Kasaipwalova presents scenes of independence celebrations through mixed languages (English, Tok Pisin, and indigenous words), highlighting cultural differences and power negotiations. He integrates local cultural expressions into mainstream English, enabling the language to carry unique cultural experiences and expressions. In his work *The Naked Jazz*, untranslated words and transcribed dialects are inserted to both preserve cultural differences and capture the rhythm of dialects, such as the use of words like "kabisawali" and "maski" (Stella, 2001).

Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, Papua New Guinean literature has embraced new opportunities for two-way exchange, shifting from "passive acceptance" to "active dialogue." On one hand, the influence of Western colonial narratives persists, but academia has begun to deconstruct this hegemonic discourse. On the other hand, contemporary Papua New Guinean literature now features more diverse Eastern cultural elements. Driven by the Belt and Road Initiative, increased cultural exchanges between Papua New Guinea and China have sparked imaginative engagement with Chinese civilization. For instance, Chongqing Normal University and Papua New Guinea University of Science and Technology jointly established the first and only Confucius Institute in PNG in Lae on February 19th, 2021. In addition to regular courses, the Confucius Institute in PNG also collaborates with the Chinese Embassy in PNG and Chinese-funded enterprises to organize a variety of cultural activities on a regular basis, such as the "Chinese Bridge-Chinese Proficiency Competition for College Students Worldwide" and the "Chinese Film Week". These activities help promote the spread of the Chinese language in PNG and continuously deepen the cultural, social, and educational exchanges between China and PNG (Han & Zhang, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

Influenced by the interweaving of indigenous culture and foreign Eastern and Western cultures, Papua New Guinean literature has undergone a process from oral transmission to written creation, and from national awakening during the colonial period to reflective development after independence. Its literary works not only reflect social changes and national spirit but also play an important role in indigenous cultural inheritance and global literary exchanges. Papua New Guinean literature will adopt a more open attitude to construct a new literary paradigm with both local roots and a global vision in the mutual learning of civilizations.

Future research can deepen the understanding of multiculturalism by excavating literary resources, strengthen interdisciplinary and cross-field research to analyze classic works from multiple dimensions, and integrate Papua New Guinean literary studies into the global literary vision. Through these efforts, we can further reveal the indigenous charm and unique value of Papua New Guinean literature and make greater contributions to the prosperity of Pacific Island literature and even world literature.

REFERENCES

- Charles, R. J. (2022). Hydropoetics: The rewor (l) ding of rivers. *River Research and Applications*, 38(3), 486-493. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rra.3844>
- Editorial Board of Oceania Literature. (1983). *Oceania folk tales collection (Oceania Literature series)* (Vol. 6). China: Institute of Oceania Literature of Anhui University.
- Ellerman, E. (1995). The literature Bureau: African influence in Papua New Guinea. *Research in African Literatures*, 26(4), 206-215.
- Fu, Y. (2022). Research on the ethnic literature of the South pacific island countries: The construction and evolution of whiteness in white literature. *Foreign Languages and Literature*, 38(6), 26-33.
- Han, F., & Zhao, J. L. (2018). *Country studies: Papua New Guinea*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.
- Han, J. Y., & Zhang, M. (2022). Research on Chinese language education in the post-pandemic era: Overview of the development of Chinese language education in Papua New Guinea. In (pp. 335-341). China: Digital International Chinese Language Education.
- Hayward, M., & Long, M. (2020). *New Oceania: Modernisms and modernities in the pacific*. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Helgesson, S., Neumann, B., & Rippl, G. (2020). *Handbook of anglophone world literatures*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- Kabutaulaka, T. (2015). Re-presenting Melanesia: Ignoble Savages and Melanesian Alter-natives. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 27(1), 110-145. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2015.0027>
- Liu, S., & Wang, X. L. (2022). The Non-Western turn of civilizational mutual learning: On the development trend of South Pacific literature research. *Foreign Languages and Literature*, 38(6), 17-25.
- Lu, Q. H. (2017). *History and current situation of Papua New Guinea*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.
- Matthews, A. K. (2024). Melanesian reimagining: A digital tok stori of Papua New Guinean identity on Instagram. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 20(2), 279-288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801241246732>
- Stella, R. (2001). Papua New Guinea literature at the crossroads: Islands, languages, and cultures. *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 32(1), 137-152.
- Stella, R. (2007). *Imagining the other: The representation of the Papua New Guinean subject*. United States: University of Hawaii Press.
- Waitoa, J., Scheyvens, R., & Warren, T. R. (2015). E-Whanaungatanga: The role of social media in Māori political empowerment. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 11(1), 45-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F117718011501100104>
- Wang, L. B. (2023). The Oceania genealogy of world English literature. *Comparative Literature in China*(1), 20-36.
- Wang, X. L. (1993). The rise of new literature in Papua New Guinea. *Journal of Huaibei Coal Industry Teachers College (Social Sciences Edition)*(3), 92-96.
- Wang, X. L. (2006). *History of South pacific literature*. Hefei: Anhui University Press.
- Winduo, E. S. (2007). Decolonizing the mind: The impact of the university on culture and identity in Papua New Guinea, 1971-1974. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19(1), 330-332.
- Wu, P., Yue, J. J., & Sun, H. Y. (2019). *Research on the national conditions of the Pacific Island Countries*. Beijing: Current Affairs Press.
- Wu, Z. Y. (2023). A comprehensive discussion on the aboriginal literature of the three major Island groups in the South pacific. *Journal of Social Sciences of Harbin Normal University*, 14(2), 106-114.

Online Science Publishing is not responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability, etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content. Any queries should be directed to the corresponding author of the article.