

Educational Mission, Challenges, and Paths of Ethnic Colleges and Universities from the Perspective of Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation

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Abstract: Ethnic colleges and universities play an important role in the education of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. As key institutions undertaking ethnic higher education, they shoulder the special mission of cultivating talents for ethnic regions, promoting development, and maintaining unity and harmony. Their particularity makes them important bases for carrying out related education and research. Strengthening the education of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation in ethnic colleges and universities is an essential requirement for inheriting excellent cultures of all ethnic groups, maintaining national unity and long-term stability, and advancing the construction of the Chinese national community. Through an analysis of the educational paths of ethnic colleges and universities in forging this sense of community, this paper addresses issues such as a lack of professional talent and the imperfect integration of educational resources in ordinary higher education institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to enrich teaching methods, deepen the understanding of community, strengthen research institutions and cultivate full-time faculty, and integrate educational resources and consolidate educational strength, in order to improve the effectiveness of this education in colleges and universities and cultivate outstanding talents for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Keywords: college students; ethnic colleges and universities; forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation

1. Introduction

Ethnic colleges and universities are important bases for carrying out the education and academic research on forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. In the process of building a modern socialist country, ethnic colleges and universities must take the concept of a community sharing weal and woe, honor and disgrace, life and death, and destiny as the main approach, and actively guide teachers and students of all ethnic groups to firmly establish the sense of community of the Chinese nation, embedding ideological and political work and ethnic affairs broadly and deeply in the fertile soil of higher education. "Forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation is the 'main thread' of the Party's ethnic work in the new era, and all work should focus on this." [1] As major undertakers of ethnic higher education, ethnic colleges and universities shoulder special national responsibilities and missions. They cultivate and deliver a large number of high-quality professionals for ethnic regions, promote socio-economic development, improve the cultural quality of the masses, and maintain national unity and cohesion, occupying an irreplaceable and special position and role among higher education institutions [2].

2. The Necessity of Strengthening the Education of Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation in Ethnic Colleges and Universities

2.1 The Distinctiveness of Ethnic Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities are the front line of ideological work, and ideological and political education is the main channel through which mainstream ideology is conveyed. The sense of community for the Chinese nation is an important component of mainstream ideology [3]. As key institutions for implementing higher education in China, ethnic colleges and universities possess distinct characteristics compared to ordinary colleges and universities. They are among the most important platforms for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation [4]. Currently, China has 21 publicly-funded ethnic colleges and universities at the undergraduate level, of which 6 are administered by the National Ethnic Affairs Commission, and 15 are ethnic institutions administered at the local level. There are also 12 ethnic colleges at the vocational level. At their inception, the founding mission of ethnic colleges and universities was to serve ethnic minority regions and ethnic minority populations. As of 2023, data from the Ministry of Education of China shows that the total number of ethnic

minority students in higher education exceeds 48 million, with about 3.7 million being ethnic minority students, accounting for approximately 7.63% of the total (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number and Proportion of Ethnic Minority Students in Higher Education

Level	Total (persons)	Ethnic Minority Students (persons)	Proportion of Ethnic Minority Students (%)
Graduate	3139598	175001	5.57
Doctoral	466549	28218	6.05
Master's	2673049	146783	5.49
Regular Undergraduate and	32852948	3289489	10.01
Junior College	18257460	1768698	9.69
Undergraduate	14595488	1520791	10.42
Junior College	7772942	607246	7.81
Adult Undergraduate and	4051025	326329	8.06
Junior College	3721917	280917	7.55
Undergraduate	8464464	594068	7.02
Junior College	3111899	194234	6.24
Online Undergraduate and	5352565	399834	7.23
Junior College			

Source: Statistical data from the official website of the Ministry of Education

More than 20% of China's ethnic minority cadres graduated from ethnic colleges and universities. The enrollment rate of ethnic minority students at ethnic colleges and universities under the administration of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission generally reaches or exceeds 50%. It can be said that strengthening the education on forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation in ethnic colleges and universities is not only a requirement of the times but also a realistic necessity. Apart from ethnic colleges and universities, few organizations or institutions offer an environment where highly educated ethnic minority youth are concentrated. Therefore, both emotionally and in terms of actual conditions, ethnic colleges and universities possess unique characteristics in forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. For over half a century, ethnic colleges and universities have provided an excellent platform for communication among teachers and students from different ethnic groups, connecting people from different regions and ethnic backgrounds. This interaction has allowed the outstanding ideas, cultures, and customs passed down through generations among all ethnic groups to be fully exchanged and integrated in the spheres of study, life, and work. It has greatly promoted development and construction in ethnic regions and advanced the cause of ethnic unity.

Forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation among college students is the core of the national work on ethnic unity and progress in the new era, and a key element of ideological and political education in contemporary colleges and universities[5]. Ethnic colleges and universities generally enroll a large number of teachers and students from diverse ethnic backgrounds and regions. While promoting higher education, they also bear the important mission of deepening ethnic unity and progress, forging a strong sense of national community, and promoting interethnic communication, exchange, and integration. Facing the changes of the times, ethnic colleges and universities not only carry the important mission of pursuing excellence and enhancing national core competitiveness, but also shoulder the arduous task of cultivating a new generation of young people with a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation in service of ethnic groups, ethnic regions, and the country in the new era. This is a significant historical responsibility.

2.2 An Inevitable Requirement for the Inheritance and Promotion of Excellent Ethnic Cultures

The traditional cultures of China's ethnic minorities have a long history, rich cultural connotations, and diverse forms of expression. They are the crystallization of wisdom born from centuries of production and daily life among ethnic communities and represent the intangible treasures of the Chinese nation. In the inheritance and promotion of regional cultural customs and traditional arts in ethnic areas, teachers and students of ethnic colleges and universities play an irreplaceable and vital role. Although in daily life, people of all ethnic groups constantly develop their cultures through interaction; strengthen interethnic relations through exchange; and promote national development and progress through integration — these processes are often foundational and lack systematic and scholarly exploration. In recent years, ethnic colleges and universities have actively promoted the outstanding heritage of the Chinese nation through the lens of the continuity, innovativeness, unity, inclusiveness, and peacefulness of Chinese civilization. By upholding tradition while seeking innovation, they have significantly enhanced the protection and development of excellent traditional ethnic cultures.

2.3 The Practical Need for Ethnic Unity and Long-Term National Stability

Since the 1980s, with the onset of economic globalization, disputes and strategic games among major powers have become increasingly intertwined and escalated. The world today is undergoing unprecedented changes unseen in a century, and with the advent of a new technological revolution, humanity is entering a new stage of higher-level development. Since the beginning of globalization, the trend of integration among global markets has grown stronger, binding nations more tightly together. The irreversible trend of global integration has made interdependence a defining feature of our era. While globalization has brought development dividends to countries around the world and facilitated the flow of populations and ideas, it has also accelerated changes in crises and frictions among nations and ethnic groups. Globally, forces of extreme nationalism and populism continue to stir up conflicts. In recent years, ethnic and racial tensions and disputes have shown an upward trend worldwide. Even wars triggered by ethnic issues have occurred with increasing frequency and intensity. Over time, a multipolar world structure has taken shape, and global order is being painstakingly restructured in various fields. Numerous unprecedented changes are converging and intensifying within a short period. Therefore, whether from the perspective of ethnic unity or national long-term peace and stability, it is increasingly urgent to carry out effective education on forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation in ethnic colleges and universities. To ensure the country's long-term stability, it is essential to prioritize the issue of ethnic unity and address it at its root by advancing education and the construction of the Chinese national community.

2.4 An Inevitable Choice in Building the Chinese National Community

In October 2023, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held its ninth collective study session on forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. During the session, the importance of optimizing discipline structures, strengthening academic development, identifying accurate research directions, and deepening research on major foundational issues concerning the Chinese national community was stressed. Efforts should be made to accelerate the formation of China's independent systems of historical materials, discourse, and theories relating to the Chinese national community. The construction of the Chinese national community requires a cohort of top-level experts as well as a large number of faculty and students at undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels to serve as a backbone force. This group is responsible for interpreting and promoting the conceptual connotation, extension, and spirit of the Chinese national community during the development and dissemination of the academic theoretical system. Tens of millions of undergraduate and junior college students are required to master the basic theories of the Chinese national community, understand the core of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, and grasp the key connotations of national community construction. In doing so, society as a whole can enhance its understanding of this mission and contribute to its effective dissemination and promotion. The effort to forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation is currently in an exploratory stage. Discipline construction remains incomplete and urgently needs the input and suggestions of faculty and students alike. Joint efforts are required to build a sound academic system for the Chinese national community and to promote the cultivation of a shared sense of a community with a shared future for mankind.

3. Deficiencies in Education on Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation in Higher Education Institutions

3.1 Monotonous Teaching Methods and Insufficient Depth in Education

Classroom instruction is the core component of education at any stage, and the efficiency and effectiveness of achieving educational goals largely depend on the success of classroom teaching. At present, across various disciplines in university education, there are common issues such as monotonous teaching methods and a lack of educational depth. Taking multimedia teaching as an example, teaching slides were originally designed to serve as supplementary tools in ideological and political education classes. However, in actual teaching practice, some instructors overly rely on these slides, causing them to overshadow the classroom interaction, which is a crucial component of effective teaching[6]. For instance, a considerable number of college instructors participate in teaching as mere "PPT readers," reciting slide content verbatim. This approach has become a default mode—neither outstanding nor erroneous—resulting in a complacent teaching mindset. The intended use of PPT slides to present visuals, text, sound, and video to clarify difficult teaching points has in some cases been reduced to a "memory extraction tool," a database of sorts that instructors use to deliver knowledge. In addition, the traditional teacher-centered educational model is one of the causes behind the monotonous approach to teaching the concept of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation in ethnic colleges. Currently, Chinese universities generally implement a credit-based evaluation system, where students primarily aim to earn credits, and large class sizes make personalized education difficult. Moreover, existing faculty evaluation systems at universities often lead to a struggle between fulfilling

teaching and research responsibilities. Beyond these common issues, there is a lack of extracurricular interaction and practical courses specifically related to the education on forging a strong sense of national community. This concept should be deepened through interethnic communication, exchange, and integration, and experienced in real-life production and daily life. Compared to ordinary colleges and universities, ethnic colleges benefit from the abundant enrollment of students from ethnic regions and should continue to leverage this advantage to enrich educational formats and activities for fostering a strong sense of national community.

3.2 Shortage of Professional Talent and Insufficient Number of Full-Time Faculty

Currently, students' awareness of the Chinese national community tends to be spontaneous and fragmented. To develop a systematic and theoretical understanding of this concept, it must be instilled by educators[7]. Though the concept of a Chinese national community was first proposed in 2014, it was not until 2024 that the first textbook dedicated to this field, *An Introduction to the Chinese National Community*, was compiled and published. This delay not only reflects the slow development of the theoretical system of the discipline but also reveals a deeper issue of inadequate reserves of professional talent. For many years, the shortage of researchers in academic institutions and the lack of cultivation of full-time teachers in Chinese national studies have created a vicious cycle. According to human capital theory, talent is the core element of disciplinary development, and professional educators are the key carriers of knowledge dissemination and theoretical innovation. Due to a lack of professional expertise, teachers currently tasked with teaching courses related to forging a strong sense of national community often face the dilemma of “not being able to teach, not daring to teach, or not qualified to teach.” “Not being able to teach” stems from inadequate knowledge reserves, making it difficult to explain complex theories in an accessible way. “Not daring to teach” reflects a lack of confidence due to insufficient depth in research. “Not qualified to teach” results from limited professional capabilities that hinder the ability to manage course content. This situation not only affects teaching quality but also hinders the effective transmission and development of disciplinary knowledge. From the perspective of disciplinary characteristics, Chinese national studies involve the interdisciplinary integration of history, ethnology, and other fields, requiring teachers to possess broad and deep professional competencies. In terms of talent cultivation systems, the long-standing absence of structured professional training pathways has led to a severe shortage of qualified ethnic studies teachers. Currently, most instructors in this field have transitioned from other specialties. Although they may possess a certain academic foundation, they often lack depth and interdisciplinary integration skills. This shortage of specialized faculty prevents the formation of a stable talent pipeline, restricting the sustainable development of the discipline. As a new direction and field, Chinese national studies inevitably face structural issues such as a lack of talent and insufficient full-time faculty, especially a significant gap in mid-level and young core research talent. With the full rollout of *An Introduction to the Chinese National Community* as a course, how to fill the gap in full-time teaching staff remains a pressing concern.

3.3 Inadequate Integration of Educational Resources and Underutilization of Teaching Assets

Within the broader category of Chinese national studies, there are several subfields, such as ethnic education, ethnic development, and ethnic arts. Currently, relevant educational resources are often scattered across various departments. For example, experts in the School of Education may teach ethnic education and national community topics, while those in the School of Economics may handle ethnic development and nation-building content. Although most ethnic colleges have established institutes or departments focused on the Chinese national community, many experts and professors related to this field remain dispersed within their original schools, and the integration of subject-relevant educational resources is still lacking. At the same time, the underutilization of existing educational assets is a problem that needs urgent attention. China's vast territory has been jointly developed by all ethnic groups; its long history has been collectively written; its splendid culture has been co-created; and its great national spirit has been co-cultivated. Non-ethnic universities, in particular, should recognize the unique role of minority students in promoting “three-dimensional” ethnic integration (communication, exchange, and integration) and in advancing education on forging a strong sense of national community. These students can play a vital role in pushing forward this type of education. As the course *An Introduction to the Chinese National Community* is comprehensively implemented, problems related to the incomplete integration of educational forces and underuse of educational resources will become even more prominent. If this gap is not promptly addressed, it will not only affect the quality of teaching but also hinder the widespread adoption and deepening of education on forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

4. Pathways for Ethnic Colleges and Universities to Guide Education on Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation

With their rich pool of experts and scholars in ethnology and related disciplines, ethnic colleges and universities have accumulated extensive experience and developed a variety of effective approaches to guide college students in strengthening

their sense of national community.

4.1 Enrich Educational Formats and Deepen Understanding of the Chinese National Community

Ethnic colleges and universities have a large number of ethnic minority teachers and students, representing many different ethnic groups and spanning vast regions. Faculty and students in these institutions generally possess a strong understanding of their own ethnic identities and can accurately express and vividly interpret the excellence of their native cultures. In the new era, it is necessary to deeply explore the rich cultural connotations of all ethnic groups and to solidly advance the integration of ethnic cultures into campus life. This requires integrating cultural and educational efforts to jointly cultivate talent. To advance the practical implementation of education on forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, ethnic colleges and universities should, based on the diverse backgrounds of incoming ethnic minority students, formulate top-level designs to promote interethnic communication, exchange, and integration. With effective implementation plans and the engagement of reliable participants, institutions can build a knowledge system for inheriting excellent ethnic cultures that is rich in content, highlights unique features, and captures students' interest. By establishing the "big ideological and political education" concept, schools can leverage both "curriculum-based ideological education" and "dedicated ideological and political courses" to integrate the concept of forging a strong sense of national community into the core of ideological instruction[8]. In daily classroom teaching, instructors at ethnic colleges in minority regions should proactively assume their responsibilities by diversifying teaching methods. In class, they should intentionally implement "flipped classrooms" to encourage minority and regional students to share their ethnic stories, showcase outstanding ethnic cultures, colorful traditional costumes, and unique ethnic symbols — thereby enriching classroom content and enhancing engagement. Throughout the teaching process, emphasis should be placed on deepening students' understanding of the Chinese national community and advocating the idea of "unity in diversity" within the Chinese nation. While the various ethnic groups differ in population size and pace of development, they are all equal in status. Moreover, in the educational environment, forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation must be grounded in traditional Chinese virtues. Core values such as harmony, gentleness, benevolence, and self-discipline should be fully explored to spiritually nourish all ethnic groups and foster shared values and aspirations[9].

Rich and varied educational formats can greatly enhance students' understanding of the Chinese national community, helping the education on forging a strong sense of national identity to penetrate deeply into students' minds and touch their hearts.

4.2 Promoting the Development of Research Institutions and Cultivating Full-Time Faculty

Education is a cornerstone of national strength, and the construction of disciplines related to the Chinese national community requires the support of research institutions with strong scientific research capabilities. According to Burton Clark's "triangle of coordination" theory, the healthy development of research institutions necessitates a dynamic balance among government, market, and academic forces. The construction of such institutions is not only vital for enhancing the quality and connotative development of higher education, but also serves as a powerful tool for strengthening education's contribution to economic and social development. Talent development is fundamental to enhancing the research strength and educational quality of disciplines related to the Chinese national community. This can be achieved by optimizing the management structure of research institutes. First, in terms of structural optimization, one approach is to draw on the theory of bureaucratic flattening to simplify management layers within research institutes—reducing hierarchical levels and shortening communication chains to improve administrative efficiency. This helps overcome the problems of information lag and slow decision-making inherent in traditional bureaucratic systems. Second, based on theories of academic freedom and university autonomy, greater autonomy should be granted to research teams, allowing them more say in determining research directions and allocating resources. This can invigorate research activity and enhance flexibility in both research and management. At the same time, guided by the theory of interdisciplinary integration, strong support should be given to collaboration and exchange across different disciplines. Establishing interdisciplinary research platforms and hosting joint academic conferences can promote mutual learning between different knowledge systems and introduce diverse perspectives into the study of the Chinese national community. The objects and content of ethnological research have changed significantly, creating an urgent need to move beyond traditional single-discipline research methods and to establish a new paradigm of interdisciplinary research that promotes methodological innovation in ethnology[10]. Therefore, it is especially important to strengthen investment in basic research and in cultivating young talent. This aligns with the "long-cycle" pattern of talent development and the "intergenerational inheritance" theory of scientific innovation. Dedicated funding programs should be established, and a dual-track training model combining "academic mentorship + practical platforms" should be developed to provide young researchers with ample resources and space for growth. Moreover, the construction of research institutions

dedicated to Chinese national community studies should focus on expanding research horizons through comparative and cross-cultural research paradigms. This will help deepen and broaden the study of national community consciousness and further improve the theoretical system of the discipline. Finally, with regard to full-time faculty development, this should be incorporated into the strategic planning of disciplinary development. Based on the theory of teacher professional development, a layered and categorized capability training system should be established. Regular, high-quality academic exchanges and seminars related to Chinese national community studies should be conducted. Through expert lectures, collaborative projects, and other forms of engagement, teachers can continuously update and enrich their knowledge systems.

4.3 Integrating Educational Resources and Consolidating Educational Strength

By integrating existing educational resources, ethnic colleges and universities can significantly enhance their educational strength in a short period, while also offering valuable experience for non-ethnic institutions. Digital educational resources are a core element of the digital education ecosystem and are crucial for building a high-quality education system[11]. To this end, digital technologies should be leveraged to immerse college students in the charm of ethnic cultures through experiential learning[12]. For example, a digital resource database can be established to compile and store research materials and outputs related to forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. Digital information technologies should be employed to organize, summarize, and archive relevant materials and collections on Chinese ethnology, interethnic communication, exchange, and integration. A participatory upload/download management system should be implemented to encourage both institutions and students to contribute to the construction, co-creation, and sharing of the resource pool. Through the empowerment of "digitalization," a blended educational space that combines online and offline, virtual and real environments can be created[13]. To consolidate educational strength, the development of regional educational alliances should be strengthened. The establishment of an educational alliance on Chinese national community studies will promote exchanges among institutions, enable resource sharing, and encourage collaborative development of teaching capacities. Additionally, a regular and long-term monitoring mechanism should be established to track the allocation and usage of educational resources, ensuring timely updates to the resource database. Ensuring the timeliness of resources enhances their effectiveness. Feedback and suggestions from teachers and students regarding education on forging a strong sense of national community should be widely collected through various methods. In the new era, college students in ethnic institutions are not only bearers of the historical responsibility for economic and social development in ethnic regions, but also a vital force for building socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics. Strengthening education on forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation among students in ethnic higher education institutions helps maintain national unity and regional stability, while positively impacting the security, harmony, and sustainable development of ethnic regions. Taking ethnic colleges and universities as models, steadily advancing and strengthening education on forging a strong sense of national community plays an active role in deepening the study and dissemination of the Party's ethnic theories and policies. Effectively carrying out this form of education and developing Chinese national community studies will benefit university development, contribute to social stability, and support national progress. Therefore, this task should be taken seriously and strongly supported by both ethnic and non-ethnic higher education institutions.

Furthermore, promoting education on forging a strong sense of national community is conducive to cultivating outstanding professionals and cadres in the field of ethnic affairs, thereby advancing the Party's ethnic work toward higher-quality development in the new era. Modern Chinese civilization is both a theoretical concept and a practical endeavor. In this new era and on the new journey, building modern Chinese civilization requires college students to continually create new culture and promote cultural prosperity through practical action[14]. Through reflection and summary of the implementation of national community education in ethnic higher education institutions, both Chinese ethnology and education on forging a strong sense of national community will surely yield notable educational achievements in university education today. This, in turn, will steadily enhance the quality of talent development in China and contribute to cultivating a generation of university students who are politically firm and deeply rooted in patriotism, ultimately supporting the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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