

The CPC's Approach to Ethnic Affairs in the New Era

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Abstract: Since the 20th Party Congress, China's ethnic affairs have encountered numerous emerging challenges. Addressing how to advance ethnic work in the new era has become a critical imperative for the Party. The 20th Party Congress incorporated Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era into the Party Constitution, marking another step forward in the evolution of the Party's guiding ideology. Xi Jinping's important discourse on ethnic matters has enriched and advanced the theoretical framework for ethnic work with Chinese characteristics, offering theoretical guidance for addressing ethnic issues in the new era.

Keywords: ethnic theory; ethnic affairs; ethnic exchange and integration

1. Theoretical Innovation and Development

1.1 Scientific Understanding of the Pluralistic–Unity Characteristics of the Chinese Nation

Due to China's vast territory, it has been a multi-ethnic country since ancient times. There are significant differences in customs and lifestyles among various ethnic groups; multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism constitute major characteristics of China. The Chinese nation is one big family, while every ethnic minority represents individual family members. In “pluralistic unity,” “pluralistic” refers to the various ethnic minorities with their distinct differences, while “unity” refers to the community of the Chinese nation as a whole. Unity encompasses pluralism, and pluralism constitutes unity; unity cannot exist without pluralism, nor can pluralism exist without unity. Unity serves as the main thread and direction, while pluralism provides the elements and driving force—the two form a dialectical unity that constitutes “pluralistic unity.”

China's fifty-six ethnic groups are an objective existence formed through long-term historical evolution, existing as entities that are both independent from and interdependent with one another. When addressing ethnic issues, comprehensive consideration is required, with emphasis on coordination among all ethnic groups and promotion of common development. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: “Our great motherland was developed jointly by all fifty-six ethnic groups, and the future of the Chinese nation must also be created jointly by all fifty-six ethnic groups.”

“Pluralistic unity” encompasses not only diversity but also “unity”; we must forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. In China, separatist forces have never abandoned their infiltration of ethnic minorities, constantly scheming to divide them. In the new era, with the continuous development of science and technology, these hostile forces have adopted more covert methods of infiltration with broader scope. Faced with these dangers and challenges, we must adhere even more firmly to the sense of community for the Chinese nation.

1.2 Ethnic Unity is the Lifeline of All Ethnic Groups in China

As a multi-ethnic country, ethnic unity is of paramount importance to China. Ethnic unity refers to the mutual respect, harmonious coordination, mutual assistance, peaceful coexistence, and equal solidarity among different ethnic groups in social life and normal interactions—a unity that transcends differences in population size, advancement, or backwardness.

Looking back at history, people of all ethnic groups across the country achieved unprecedented great unity under the leadership of our Party. During the War of Resistance Against Japanese

Aggression and the War of Liberation, people of all ethnic groups fought side by side, united in their quest for national independence and people's liberation. During the period of socialist construction, our Party united people of all ethnic groups to jointly carry out socialist construction, consolidating the newly established socialist regime and laying a solid foundation for socialist development. Since the reform and opening up, our Party has united and led people of all ethnic groups to win the battle against poverty, improve people's living standards, and stride confidently toward the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that "ethnic unity is the lifeline of all ethnic groups in China," and that "we must cherish ethnic unity as we cherish our own eyes, value it as we value our own lives, and hold together tightly like pomegranate seeds." As a multi-ethnic country, properly handling ethnic relations is one of the priority tasks in China's ethnic work. People of all ethnic groups must unite closely together, ensuring that no one is left behind on the path of development.

In today's era, with the development of productive forces and the diversification of cultural thought, ethnic unity has become even more important. Summarizing historical experiences and patterns, the unity and stability of all ethnic groups can safeguard the interests of people of all ethnic groups, advance ethnic work, and achieve common prosperity for all ethnic groups.

1.3 Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in the report to the 20th CPC National Congress: "Deepen education on ethnic unity and progress, and forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation." In the ethnic work of the new era, we must steadfastly and actively cultivate and forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. This concept contains three dimensions of meaning:

First, forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation is of great significance. The Chinese nation has continued through five millennia, passed down from generation to generation, and the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation have jointly created the excellent traditional Chinese culture. The united and unified Chinese nation is our root, and the profound and extensive Chinese culture is our soul. Forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation enables us to enhance ethnic identity and build a shared spiritual home for all ethnic groups.

Second, forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation is a major task in ethnic work in the new era. When elaborating on the main tasks of ethnic work in the new era, the report to the 20th Party Congress explicitly proposed to "forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation." Under new circumstances in the new era, the conduct of ethnic work cannot be separated from a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. When ethnic minorities no longer possess this sense of community, the Chinese nation will lose its cohesion, ethnic minorities will fall apart, and the Chinese nation will lose its roots and soul.

Third, there are abundant approaches to forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. These include continuously creating conditions to satisfy the people's aspirations for a better life, continuously strengthening all ethnic groups' identification with the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China, and socialism with Chinese characteristics, and striving to build a shared spiritual home for all ethnic groups. On the path to forging this sense of community, much remains for us to strive for together. With the development of science and technology and the changes of the times, methods for forging a strong sense of community have also become more innovative. Utilizing modern electronic media for publicity, grounding ourselves in the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and drawing upon the profound and excellent traditional Chinese culture, we can create more powerful means of communication to forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

The proposal of the concept of "forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation" has

deepened our understanding of the laws governing the unity and progress of the Chinese nation. It holds major theoretical significance and practical value for building a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation and realizing the vision of the Chinese nation as one family.

2. The Practice and Development of the Party's Ethnic Work

2.1 Leveraging the Institutional Advantages of the System of Regional Ethnic Autonomy

The system of regional ethnic autonomy is a fundamental political system in China. By adopting this system, our Party has both ensured national unity and solidarity and realized the common mastery of affairs by all ethnic groups. Practice has proven that the system of regional ethnic autonomy conforms to China's national conditions and has played important roles in safeguarding national unity and territorial integrity, strengthening ethnic equality and solidarity, promoting development in ethnic regions, and enhancing the cohesion of the Chinese nation.

Regional ethnic autonomy must achieve the “two combinations”: First, we must adhere to the combination of unity and autonomy. The primary requirement in implementing the system of regional ethnic autonomy is to safeguard national unity and ethnic solidarity. Unity and solidarity represent the common interests of people of all ethnic groups and are the prerequisites and foundations for implementing the system of regional ethnic autonomy. Without national unity and solidarity, autonomy cannot be discussed. Ethnic autonomy, meanwhile, refers to the exercise of autonomous powers in autonomous areas where ethnic minorities reside in concentrated communities, based on the implementation of national laws and policies, enabling ethnic minority peoples to also be masters of their own affairs. By exercising autonomous powers, ethnic minorities enjoy certain special rights and are able to formulate more practical policies in ethnic minority areas, resolve special issues in autonomous areas, and better promote development in ethnic minority regions.

Second, we must adhere to the unity of ethnic factors and regional factors. In China, the distribution characteristics of ethnic minorities are “wide dispersion with small concentrated communities and intermingled residence.” Therefore, an area where ethnic minorities reside in concentrated communities will not contain only one ethnic minority, but rather many ethnic minorities living together. Regional ethnic autonomy is not autonomy enjoyed exclusively by a single ethnic group, and autonomous areas are definitely not territories belonging exclusively to a single ethnic group. Autonomous areas must, based on the characteristics of their own autonomous regions, give comprehensive consideration to the common interests of all ethnic minorities and promote the common development of all ethnic groups.

The implementation of the system of regional ethnic autonomy has fully guaranteed that people of all ethnic groups are masters of their own affairs, stabilized relations among all ethnic groups, consolidated the strength of all ethnic groups, created an excellent situation featuring equality, solidarity, and joint efforts toward development and prosperity among all ethnic groups, and laid a solid ethnic foundation for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

2.2 Achieving Common Prosperity for All Ethnic Groups

Unleashing and developing the productive forces of society is an essential requirement of socialism and the fundamental driving force for the continuous advancement of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Marxism holds that the productive forces are the ultimate determining force of social development, and changes in relations of production must adapt to the objective needs of the development of productive forces. Since the reform and opening up, China has successfully accomplished the historic transformation from the planned economic system to the socialist market economic system, greatly stimulating the creative vitality of various market entities and creating two miracles: rapid economic development and long-term social stability. Entering the new era, developing the socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics and

promoting effective improvement in economic quality and reasonable growth in quantity are not only the foundation and key to solving all problems in China, but also the material guarantee for consolidating and developing the socialist ethnic relations characterized by equality, solidarity, mutual assistance, and harmony. Historical experience shows that the fundamental solution to ethnic problems ultimately depends on development; the consolidation and strengthening of ethnic unity is based on the common prosperity and development of all ethnic groups.

However, due to the combined effects of historical, geographical, and natural factors, areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in China are mostly located in remote border regions, alpine mountainous areas, deserts and gobi, or areas suffering from severe rocky desertification, facing severe development challenges. From the perspective of geographical location, ethnic autonomous areas nationwide account for 64% of the country's total land area, but most are located west of the "Hu Huanyong Line", far from economic centers and sea access routes. In terms of natural conditions, these areas include either the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau with high altitude and oxygen deficiency, or the arid and water-scarce northwest inland regions, or the rocky mountainous areas of the southwest concentrated with karst topography, featuring barren land, fragile ecology, frequent disasters, and harsh conditions for agricultural production. From the perspective of development foundations, long-term insufficient investment has led to serious lag in infrastructure construction such as transportation, water conservancy, energy, and communications; some remote villages still lack paved roads and access to stable power grids. Regarding economic structure, many ethnic regions have long relied on extensive agricultural and pastoral development and primary mineral resource extraction, with short industrial chains, low added value, and weak risk resistance, highlighting the paradox of "resource abundance yet economic poverty." In terms of human resources, due to the scarcity of educational and medical resources, the overall quality of the labor force is relatively low, with severe shortages of professional technical personnel and highly skilled workers, and the widespread problem of being unable to attract or retain talent. These constraining factors are intertwined and mutually reinforcing, forming a "poverty trap" that is difficult to break, resulting in severely insufficient self-development capabilities in ethnic regions and a continuously widening development gap with the eastern developed regions.

At the critical historical juncture of completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, the Party and the state have attached great importance to the development of ethnic minorities and ethnic regions, making a series of major strategic deployments that profoundly embody the fundamental purpose of the Communist Party of China to serve the people wholeheartedly, demonstrate the significant advantage of the socialist system in "mobilizing resources to accomplish major tasks," and point out the direction forward and provide fundamental guidelines for the development of ethnic regions in the new era. Achieving this goal requires not only sustained investment and special support from the central government, but even more importantly, the close unity and hard struggle of cadres and masses of all ethnic groups, forming a powerful synergy combining endogenous development with external assistance, ensuring that ethnic regions enter the moderately prosperous society in all respects together with the rest of the country, and laying a solid foundation for achieving the Second Centenary Goal.

2.3 Upholding Law-Based Governance of Ethnic Affairs

Governing the country according to law is the basic strategy of our Party in governing the country. Handling ethnic relations and doing ethnic work well likewise requires adhering to the rule of law and establishing and improving the relevant legal and regulatory system for ethnic affairs.

In handling ethnic affairs, disputes must be mediated on the basis of respecting the Constitution and relevant laws and regulations, and in accordance with the requirements of relevant ethnic groups. Nothing should depart from the legal framework; there must be laws to rely on, and laws must be observed. Various ethnic autonomous regions may exercise their autonomous powers to formulate certain local regulations and policies in accordance with relevant legal provisions to

address special ethnic issues.

In conducting ethnic work at present, we must be vigilant against separatist forces at home and abroad, handle cases and incidents involving ethnic factors in accordance with the law, and crack down on various infiltration, subversion, and sabotage activities, violent terrorist activities, ethnic separatist activities, and religious extremist activities. We must resolutely crack down on criminals who deliberately incite ethnic discord and undermine ethnic unity, showing absolutely no tolerance. At the same time, we must vigorously popularize relevant legal knowledge, enhance the awareness of the rule of law among people of all ethnic groups in ethnic regions, and foster faith in the law. Only by establishing faith in the law can people of all ethnic groups consciously act in accordance with the law. We must foster the awareness that everyone is equal before the law. Whether between ethnic minorities and the Han people or among ethnic minorities themselves, all are equal before the law, enjoying equal rights and fulfilling equal obligations.

2.4 Promoting Exchanges and Interactions Among All Ethnic Groups

At present, the exchanges, interactions, and integration among China's ethnic groups are entering a new historical phase, characterized by unprecedented depth, breadth, and speed. As the new-type urbanization strategy advances in depth and the unified national market takes shape at an accelerated pace, cross-regional population mobility among all ethnic groups has become increasingly dynamic, shifting from traditional "migrant bird" style temporary employment to settlement-oriented, entrepreneurship-driven, and investment-motivated migration. This has created a new pattern of "large-scale mobility and integrated residence." According to statistics, the floating population of ethnic minorities in China currently exceeds 30 million, making inter-embedded residence patterns and intermingled communities the norm. Meanwhile, modern information and communication technologies, represented by the internet, big data, and artificial intelligence, have developed rapidly, completely breaking temporal and spatial boundaries and constructing a "digital community" that transcends geographical borders. New business formats such as WeChat, short video platforms, and live-streaming e-commerce not only enable real-time sharing of information resources among people of all ethnic groups but have also given rise to new interaction models such as "internet celebrity economy" and "cloud-based culture." These developments push ethnic exchanges from offline physical spaces to online virtual spaces in depth, continuously elevating them from superficial material mutual assistance to profound spiritual resonance, permeating all fields and processes of social life including clothing, food, housing, transportation, education, healthcare, and cultural entertainment.

However, we must soberly recognize that as a unified multi-ethnic country, China's 56 ethnic groups have developed distinctive cultural systems through long historical processes. These differences manifest in linguistic diversity, religious pluralism, unique customs and habits, and varied lifestyles. They represent both the precious wealth of the profound and extensive Chinese civilization and potential sources of misunderstanding due to cognitive biases and communication barriers. Particularly in the rapid urbanization process, some citizens lack scientific understanding of ethnic cultural differences, harboring stereotypes or even cultural prejudices; in certain areas, specific interest issues such as resource distribution, employment competition, and neighborhood disputes may be erroneously labeled with ethnic tags; and residual influences of historical "Han chauvinism" and "local nationalism" still affect the harmonious development of ethnic relations to some extent. If these obstacles are not removed, they can easily be exploited by hostile forces at home and abroad as tools to undermine ethnic unity and create social antagonism.

Therefore, to promote exchanges, interactions, and integration among all ethnic groups, we must adhere to forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation as the main thread, and construct a multi-level, three-dimensional work system.

First, deepen the construction of inter-embedded social structures. At the community level, promote the establishment of social conditions for all ethnic groups to live, study, build, share,

work, and enjoy together. Break down physical barriers and psychological distances between ethnic groups through mixed residence, mixed classes, and mixed team composition. In the employment field, encourage enterprises to recruit employees from multiple ethnic groups and establish cross-ethnic collaborative teams to enhance mutual understanding through shared labor. In terms of cultural space, build platforms for creating ethnic unity and progress, and construct cultural activity centers, libraries, and sports venues shared by multiple ethnic groups to provide platforms for daily interactions.

Second, innovate the forms and carriers of exchanges and interactions. Make full use of new media and new technologies to launch the “Internet Plus Ethnic Unity” initiative. Support netizens of all ethnic groups in creating and disseminating short videos, live webcasts, and animation works that demonstrate ethnic unity, and tell touching stories of mutual assistance among people of all ethnic groups. Organize cross-regional and cross-ethnic “pairing up” and “hand-in-hand” programs, promote ethnic exchanges in east-west cooperation, and encourage young people of all ethnic groups to participate in exchange activities such as summer camps and study tours, deepening the “Five Identifications” (with the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China, and socialism with Chinese characteristics) through interaction.

Third, improve legal safeguards and institutional mechanisms. Resolutely oppose all forms of ethnic discrimination and prejudice, crack down on illegal and criminal acts that undermine ethnic unity in accordance with the law, and take a clear stand against ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism. At the same time, firmly resist and correct erroneous tendencies toward Han chauvinism, prevent the misunderstanding of special preferential policies for ethnic minorities as “privileges,” and also oppose narrow local nationalism to prevent placing the interests of one’s own ethnic group above the overall interests of the Chinese nation. By improving the system of ethnic policies and regulations, safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of all ethnic groups, use law to regulate interaction behaviors and resolve conflicts and disputes, and enable people of all ethnic groups to interact equally, communicate amicably, and integrate deeply within the legal framework.

Fourth, promote cultural mutual appreciation and learning. Respect the diversity of ethnic cultures, protect and inherit the excellent traditional cultures of ethnic minorities, and promote innovative development of all ethnic cultures through exchange and mutual learning. Encourage activities such as ethnic cultural festivals, traditional craft exhibitions, and ethnic cuisine experiences, enabling people of all ethnic groups to enhance understanding through appreciating differences and build consensus through sharing culture. Educate and guide the public to establish correct views on the state, history, ethnicity, culture, and religion, recognizing that Chinese culture is the main trunk while ethnic cultures are the branches and leaves—only with deep roots and a strong trunk can the branches flourish and leaves grow lush.

Fifth, strengthen the role of economic bonds. Adhere to the common unity and struggle and common prosperity and development of all ethnic groups, improve differentiated regional support policies, and increase investment in infrastructure construction, industrial development, and livelihood improvement in ethnic regions. Through industrial chain division and collaboration, labor service cooperation and matching, and tourism cooperative development, enable people of all ethnic groups to form community of shared interests in economic cooperation and consolidate emotional bonds through sharing development fruits.

In short, promoting exchanges, interactions, and integration among all ethnic groups is a systematic project requiring the joint efforts of the whole society. We must cherish ethnic unity as we cherish our own eyes and value it as we value our own lives. Let all ethnic groups treat each other with brotherly affection and watch out for each other as neighbors within the big family of the Chinese nation. Together, let us compose a magnificent chapter of the times entitled

“The Chinese Nation is One Family, Building the Chinese Dream Together with One Heart,” and gather tremendous strength for realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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