

# Tracing the Historical Development of Ethnic Colleges and Universities to Strengthen the Consciousness of the Chinese National Community: Oral Narratives of Southwest Minzu University's 70 Years of Development

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**Abstract:** “With copper as a mirror, you can wear a crown; with history as a mirror, you can know the rise and fall.” This paper takes the 70-year development process of Southwest Minzu University as the carrier, the casting of the Chinese national community as the main line while tracing back to the source, adopts the recording method of “oral history of the school,” interviews witnesses to the development of Southwest Minzu University, including school leaders, teachers, alumni, and other representative figures, records the memories of these parties on the practices of Southwest Minzu University in different periods to cast the awareness of the Chinese national community, and collates them into a text. From the perspective of students, it is important to understand the history of the Chinese national community in the past 70 years since the establishment of Southwest Minzu University, collect and sort out the historical memories of Southwest Minzu University for the education of the Chinese national community, supplement and confirm the school’s historical documents, preserve the history, make up for the gap in the history of the school, and at the same time provide a realistic basis for Southwest Minzu University to formulate future development strategies.

**Keywords:** Minzu University; Cast a solid sense of the Chinese national community; Oral narrative

**Online publication:** May 31, 2022

## 1. Introduction

The cause of national unity and progress as well as the forging of a solid sense of the Chinese national community are closely related. In September 2019, at the National Ethnic Unity and Progress Commendation Conference, it was stated, “It is necessary to cast the solid sense of the Chinese national community as the main line, fully implement the party’s ethnic theory and ethnic policy, adhere to the common unity, common struggle, common prosperity and development, as well as take the cause of national unity and progress as the basic cause and grasp it well.” The solid national ethnic community is the main line of the party’s ethnic work in the new era and runs through the entire ethnic work, while national unity and progress is the basic cause of solving ethnic problems<sup>[1]</sup>. It is an important guarantee for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Both are important manifestations of the path to resolving ethnic issues with Chinese characteristics. Promoting national unity and progress is the development goal of ethnic colleges and universities, and it is their responsibility to forge a solid sense of

the Chinese national community <sup>[2]</sup>. In the modern era, Minzu University casts the consciousness of the Chinese national community throughout education, teaching, reform, and development, constantly promotes the innovation of educational content, carrier, and path, as well as actively practices the great mission of deepening national unity and progress and forging a solid sense of the Chinese national community <sup>[3]</sup>. As one of the earliest ethnic colleges and universities, Southwest Minzu University has made outstanding achievements in the past 70 years in earnestly cultivating outstanding talents of all nationalities in the reunification of the motherland, serving the development of ethnic minority areas and the cause of national unity and progress. Taking Southwest Minzu University as a case study, we can trace the history and origin of the education of Chinese national community consciousness in ethnic colleges and universities.

## **2. Research design**

### **2.1. Problem statement**

This study focuses on the interview outline design of “Casting a Solid Sense of the Chinese National Community in the 70 Years of the Founding of Southwest Minzu University and the 70 Years of Running the Law of Southwest Minzu University.” This study aimed to explore the following questions from the perspective of students:

- (1) How does Southwest Minzu University carry out the education on “national unity and progress”?
- (2) What difficulties are faced in the process of carrying out the “cause of national unity and progress”?
- (3) What suggestions do you have for Southwest Minzu University in the future of “forging a solid sense of the Chinese national community”?

### **2.2. Subjects and methods**

In view of the fact that Southwest Minzu University was founded in July 1950 and officially established on June 1, 1951, it is one of the earliest ethnic colleges established after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. This study used semi-structured interviews to interview eight retired teachers from Southwest Minzu University, including three former school leaders, four outstanding teachers, and an alumnus, as well as middle-level cadres of the school <sup>[4]</sup>. According to the research objectives and questions as well as the demographics of the interviewees, four different interview outlines were designed, including the background of the establishment of Southwest Minzu University, the 70-year development process of Southwest Minzu University, the contribution of Southwest Minzu University in the education on national unity and progress, the difficulties encountered in the process of carrying out the education on ethnic unity and progress, the successful experience of Southwest Minzu University in promoting the education on national unity and progress, as well as the prospects of Southwest Minzu University in forging a solid sense of the Chinese community in the future. With the consent of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded and videotaped, with an average duration of two hours per person.

The interview process can be divided into the pre-interview preparation stage, the formal interview stage, and the post-interview data collation and feedback stage. The first stage is the preliminary preparation of the interview work. In order to carry out the interview smoothly, we made full preparations for the interview by selecting the subjects, formulating the interview outline, training the research team members, and understanding the specific situation as well as the research direction of the interviewees. The second stage is the formal interview phase. We determined the time and place of the interview and conducted the interview in a courteous manner, with concise language, fluent expression, and a logical flow. During the interview, we personally felt the interviewees’ pride in the cause of national unity and progress, their reverence for the cause of education, their concern for the development of the school, and their hope for the growth of “national” students. After each interview, we were inspired and rewarded. The third stage involved data collation and feedback after the interview. The collation of the interview content and the

interview were carried out at the same time, and the general workflow was as follows: setting the interview in advance via telephone (to determine the time and place of the interview), arriving at the agreed place in advance, and organizing the interview content and creating a backup for the interview data [5]. In ensuring the interview contents were authentic, objective, and constant to the narrator's expression, we provided feedback on the interview content of the eight interviewees one by one after collating, giving them suggestions to amend, supplement, and correct accordingly.

### 2.3. Collation of data and information

After the interview, the interview content was transcribed into a written text based on the recording, and the interview content of the eight interviewees was finally transcribed into a 35,000-word interview record. Based on Professor Chen Xiangming's rooted theory, this paper used the keyword cloud function of NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software to perform word frequency statistics on the text data, generate a word cloud as shown in **Figure 1**, and encode the finished interview text. Relevant concepts and categories in the interview were summarized, the connection between the categories was constructed, the interview content was analyzed, and the core view of the oral narrator on the experience of Southwest Minzu University in forging a solid sense of the Chinese national community was formed.



**Figure 1.** Southwest Minzu University casts a keyword cloud for the retrospection of the consciousness of the Chinese national community over 70 years

## 3. A retrospective of Southwest Minzu University's 70 years of national unity and progress

### 3.1. Background and characteristics of Southwest Minzu University

#### 3.1.1. Background of Southwest Minzu University

Founded in July 1950 and officially established on June 1, 1951, Southwest Minzu University is one of the earliest ethnic colleges established after the founding of the People's Republic of China [6]. In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, due to the geographical environment of various ethnic groups and the original social system, most of the ethnic minority areas in the southwest were still in a backward state, and their politics, economy, culture, and education were underdeveloped. In order to publicize the party's ethnic policy, train minority cadres, as well as establish and consolidate democratic political power in ethnic minority areas, at the sixtieth administrative affairs meeting of the government council, the policy of "Training Cadres of All Ethnic Minorities in a Universal and Large Number" was formulated, the "Trial Program for Cultivating Ethnic Minority Cadres" and the "Trial Program of Preparing for the Establishment of Central Ethnic Colleges and Universities" were approved, and a decision

was made to set up the Central Nationalities College in Beijing and the branches of the Central Nationalities College in the northwest, southwest, and central and southern regions.

In an oral account of the background of the school, the Southwest Military and Political Committee and the Southwest Bureau decided that Wang Weizhou would prepare for the establishment of an ethnic college. The reason for establishing the Southwest Institute for Nationalities at that time was the desire to “march” into Yunnan-Guichuan-Tibet in the southwest, which was the place with the highest concentration of ethnic minorities. According to the needs of the country, it was necessary to train a large number of cadres in ethnic minority areas, make preparations for cultivating talents in the southwest ethnic minority areas, and prepare for the liberation and development of the ethnic minority areas in the southwest, thus forming the Southwest Nationalities College, which was established with the goal of serving the minority areas. President Wang Weizhou and several others set out to establish the Southwest Institute for Nationalities in Sichuan. They started by selecting places, raising resources, transferring people, and then organizing students in ethnic minority areas. It was officially declared open on June 1, 1951. After the establishment of the school, every historical period was based on the central tasks of the party’s ethnic work in deciding the policy of running the school and the goal of training. In the early stage, it was mainly cadre training and short-term cadre training; the situation at that time was that the minority areas were in urgent need of talents, and even some cadres were transferred to work in the minority areas before they completed their training. Later, the Southwest Institute for Nationalities gradually shifted toward regularization, and the goal of the school at that time was still to serve the minority areas and inherit the tradition of the Yan’an Nationalities College, which was established during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. Hundreds of ethnic cadres have been trained, all of whom have become backbone figures of the state. After the reform and opening-up, the Southwest Institute for Nationalities ushered in great development. The graduates of Southwest Institute for Nationalities are all over the provinces and autonomous regions of Yunnan-Guichuan. A large number of ethnic backbones were trained for the southwest region, and it is conceivable that the contributions of the Southwest Institute for Nationalities not only included the cultivation of talents in party and government organs or the training of professional talents and professional cadres, but also the improvement of scientific knowledge, culture, and technical guidance for those ethnic minority areas.

### **3.1.2. Characteristics of Southwest Minzu University**

Through sorting out and studying the interview transcripts, the narrator mainly explained the educational characteristics of Southwest Minzu University from several aspects, such as talent training, school culture, and disciplines.

First of all, the training of talents is mainly reflected in the enrollment and talent training; on the one hand, the school has always adhered to the “two for” purpose of serving ethnic minorities and ethnic minority areas as well as the national strategy. The goal of Southwest College for Nationalities is to serve ethnic minority areas, and it has clear differences from other colleges and universities in terms of its characteristics. It has constantly adjusted its talent training plans according to the actual needs and conditions of ethnic minority areas in different periods. Compared with other colleges and universities, it emphasizes the implementation of ethnic policies and attaches great importance to national unity. The school has been taking care of ethnic minority students in terms of enrollment, and for a long time, the proportion of ethnic minorities in the school has accounted for about 60%. Moreover, after the enrollment of students nationwide, the ethnic composition increased to 56 ethnic groups, which has further promoted ethnic unity.

Secondly, campus culture is one of the important carriers to highlight the characteristics of the school. Taking the school motto, “Harmony and Harmony Practice, Self-Confidence and Self-Improvement,” the

average person understands that “Harmony and Harmony Practice” refers to mutual learning, while “Harmony and Cooperation Practice” has a deeper meaning. At the same time, as the core of the teaching concept, “Harmony and Cooperation” is not referring to the harmony in mutual relations, but also all aspects of education and training. “Xi” not only refers to learning, but also a mutual all-round understanding. Having attained the state of harmony, no force can defeat us or overwhelm us! This is the tradition and educational characteristics of Southwest Minzu University.

School culture is not only reflected in the school motto, but also in all aspects of campus activities. School culture has the background of national unity and progress. The oral narrator mentioned, “The 70th anniversary of the founding of Southwest Minzu University has always been held as a big family of all ethnic groups, no matter which ethnic group comes to the school, they are a part of the family – a united family. The unity of people is therefore regarded as the lifeblood. The unity between teachers and students of all nationalities should be cherished as the eyes; unity is as important as the air we breathe; one cannot feel it, but one will suffocate without it.”

Finally, the characteristics of the disciplines are important aspects of the characteristics of the school. Southwest Minzu University has grown from a small university to a large one, and the construction of its disciplines is also a similar process. According to the oral account, “There are not many professional settings in the early days of the establishment of the school; there are mainly five departments and one preparatory department – the Department of Politics, the Department of Language and Literature, the Department of Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Medicine, the Department of Cadre Training, and the Preparatory Department. With the development of the times, the school started to offer new courses according to the needs of the society and ethnic minority areas, such as the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Research Institute, the Southwest Institute of Nationalities, the School of Pharmacy, the School of Philosophy, and others. These professional disciplines all reflect the characteristics and uniqueness of Southwest Minzu University.”

### **3.2. Contribution of Southwest Minzu University in the education on national unity and progress**

The contribution of Southwest Minzu University in the education on national unity and progress can be discussed from the theoretical level and the practical level.

#### **3.2.1. Theoretical contributions of Southwest Minzu University**

The theoretical contribution is reflected in the research results of discipline leaders and scholars on national unity and progress in the 70 years since the establishment of Southwest Minzu University, which enrich and improve the theoretical basis of the education and provide intellectual support for the further development of this education theory. Founded in 1979 by Southwest Minzu University, the Journal of Southwest Minzu University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition) provides a platform for learning national unity and progress. The oral narrator mentioned, “The school also comprehensively improves the quality of the journal and strives to enhance the popularity of the journal. Since the beginning of the new century, the Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences has been selected as the source journal of the Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) of the China Social Science Research Evaluation Center of Nanjing University for two consecutive times, and it ranked second among the journals of ethnic disciplines; it was the core journal of Peking University’s National Chinese and the Chinese Literature and Social Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences for five consecutive times; and the social science journal of the top 100 national universities for two consecutive years.”

In addition, outstanding scholars from Southwest Minzu University have put forward opinions on the future development of the disciplines. Professor Chen Dayun pointed out, “The basic principles of ethnology should be used in combination with China’s reality to build our own ethnology, along with our

own discourse system, disciplinary system, and other systems, as well as to have the right to speak and discourse in the world with vivid, practical, and solved concrete examples. This is what ethnology should do, otherwise ethnology will always remain stagnant in the previous conceptual category.”

### **3.2.2. Practical contributions of Southwest Minzu University**

The practical contributions of Southwest Minzu University mainly refer to the relevant achievements made by Southwest Minzu University in promoting the development of ethnic minority areas throughout the 70 years since its establishment. The first is to train a large number of ethnic cadres and professional and technical personnel for ethnic minority areas. For example, the first Doctor of Qiang (Liu Guoen) graduated from the Department of Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry at Southwest Minzu University and is now the leading expert of the national medical and health security. The first Doctor of Tibetans and the first Doctor of Anthropology, Geller is an expert in the Tibetan Research Center. Wang Ying’s National Discipline Inspection Department has obtained “100 Chinese objects that have touched since the founding of New China.” The chess master (Liu Shilan) was a student from the school. Hence, it can be said that the talents nurtured by Southwest Minzu University are brilliant, and heroes are born from the school.

Second, ethnic minorities provide intellectual support for winning the battle against poverty. It was mentioned, “The contribution of Southwest Minzu University to ethnic minority areas is not only manifested in the nurturing of talents, but also in providing intellectual guarantees for the economic and social development of ethnic minority areas, including the establishment of strategic cooperative relations with 21 prefectures and counties, in addition to seven provinces and municipalities (Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Hunan, Qinghai, Tibet, and Chongqing), as well as the establishment of industry-university-research collaboration with a number of enterprises, institutions, and scientific research institutions. In its active participation in poverty alleviation in Wuling Mountain Area and in helping Hongyuan County, Ruoerge County, Liangshan Prefecture, and Yanyuan County of Liangshan Prefecture, it was designated as the advance poverty alleviation unit in Sichuan Province.”

Third, Southwest Minzu University itself is a typical case of national unity and progress education. “In the 70 years since the school was established, the teaching staff were not all ethnic minorities, but strong ethnic feelings did develop between different fraternal nationalities, teachers and students, as well as between colleagues. The school is a banner, and national colleges and universities are the foundations for cultivating talents, scientific research bases, and cultural legacy, as well as the window for displaying national unity and national family affinity.”

### **3.3. A summary of Southwest Minzu University’s 70 years of development experience**

Ethnic colleges and universities gather students from different nationalities to form a harmonious family. Students of all nationalities learn from each other and make progress together. The vigorous development of ethnic colleges and universities itself is a window and brand to highlight the Chinese national community. The experience of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Southwest Minzu University can be summarized into three points.

#### **3.3.1. Firmly grasp the lifeline of national unity and progress**

Integrating national unity and progress into all aspects of teaching about life in schools, the oral narrator mentioned, “In daily life and work, unity as a main line has always been present in all aspects of the school, because the school is a unit for educating people, which involves the staff and the entire process. Education is not only a matter significant to teachers and cadres, but also the logistics team; I have told the logistics staff, students attend school, but they do not know whom to call teachers, so we must pay attention to their behaviors, especially in the unity of the nationalities; not to say that it is not conducive to unity and not to

do things that are not conducive to unity. In that way, Southwest Minzu University has won several national unity and progress awards and demonstration units in Sichuan Province.”

In addition, the narrator also said, “Ethnic colleges and universities are like multi-ethnic gathering, which is a symbol of national community. It is important to pay attention to national unity and build a national homeland. The focus is mutual unity and fraternity, and the purpose of ethnic academies and universities is to unite all kinds of people into a harmonious environment. Southwest Minzu University itself is a national community, where all ethnic groups live together, help each other, and are equal with common psychological characteristics.”

### **3.3.2. Inherit the red gene of running schools**

Southwest Minzu University will firmly grasp the direction of socialist education, strengthen political leadership, and consolidate the political foundation of forging a solid sense of the Chinese national community; it will also strengthen political belief, use the great party-building spirit to continue the red gene, and draw strength from the century-old party history. Although the school continues to grow, it is very important to talk about the history of the school and gauge the school’s conditions to understand how the school has gone through 70 years of struggle and inherit valuable school-running experience. In order to inherit the red gene of running schools, students are required to have firm ideals and beliefs, listen to the party’s advocates, and be reliable successors to the party’s cause; at the same time, students must also have the entrepreneurial spirit of struggling and keep in mind the truth that “hard work can rejuvenate the country.”

### **3.3.3. Maintain a campus culture of beauty and coexistence**

It is necessary to respect traditional festivals, customs, and habits of various ethnic minorities, so that all ethnic groups will live in harmony and share the beauty. In it, students can imperceptibly come to know other cultures and cultivate their own sentiments, while ethnic colleges and universities can maximize their own multi-ethnic characteristics and multicultural advantages to carry out ethnic unity education through various contents and diverse forms of campus culture.

## **4. Conclusion**

History, reality, and the future are all interconnected. History is the reality of the past, and reality is the history of the future. The reform and development of Southwest Minzu University has always been closely linked to the future of the country and the nation, and the struggle of Yanlu Lanyi is a “microcosm” of the development of national higher education in New China.

### **4.1. Adhere to the leadership of the Communist Party of China**

In Fei Xiaotong’s “Pattern of Pluralism and Unity of the Chinese Nation”<sup>[7]</sup>, he mentioned, “The evolution process of a nation is composed of a plurality to one, and the development process between various nationalities to the Chinese nation is also a process of pluralism to unity; the relationship between the Chinese nation and all nationalities is not the relationship between who replaces whom, but the interdependent relationship between all nationalities that cannot be separated, thus eventually forming a national entity of common solidarity, coexistence and death, common glory and disgrace, as well as common destiny.” In the five thousand years of the Chinese nation’s history, every era has been marked by the mutual exchanges and blending of various nationalities<sup>[8]</sup>. The Communist Party of China conforms to the trend of history, and from the day of its founding, it has attached great importance to the national problem; on the basis of analyzing China’s national conditions, it has pioneered the path of resolving the national problem with Chinese characteristics.

Upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China is the fundamental guarantee for realizing the great rejuvenation of the nation. In the instructions, declarations, resolutions, and other historical documents of the Communist Party of China, the reports, treatises, and speeches of great leaders and other generations of central leaders, as well as the laws and regulations formulated by the people's governments at all levels under the leadership of the party, a large number of theoretical viewpoints, principles, policies, laws, and regulations on national unity and progress have been included, and they have been implemented with unprecedented achievements made. Practice has proven that the CPC is the true protector of national unity and progress, and without the strong leadership of the CPC and a series of scientific and ethnic policies, there would be no economic and cultural prosperity in minority areas today.

#### **4.2. Recall the original intention and forge ahead**

Southwest Minzu University is a national university with red genes, intertwined with glory and dreams. At the beginning of the establishment of Southwest Minzu University, it has held on to the purpose of “two for” running the school and has cultivated a large number of outstanding cadres, teachers, and other professional talents who can “stay and go down” for ethnic minorities and ethnic minority areas, providing talent guarantee for the economic and social development of southwest China. Entering a new era, Southwest Minzu University needs to recall its original intention, forge ahead, inherit the red gene, and make greater contributions to cultivating new people of the times who are responsible for national rejuvenation <sup>[9]</sup>.

Against the background of the great changes in the world that have not occurred over a hundred years and the major era of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, China needs national unity more than ever. National academies and universities have always held on to the direction of running schools under socialism, persisted in taking the road of socialist education development with Chinese characteristics, adhered to the road of self-confidence <sup>[10]</sup>, including theoretical self-confidence, institutional self-confidence, and cultural self-confidence, run education that the country and the people are satisfied with, as well as profoundly answered the fundamental question of “what kind of people to cultivate, how to train people, and for whom to train people.” However, ethnic colleges and universities should make efforts to strengthen students' ideals and convictions, cultivate patriotic feelings, strengthen moral cultivation, increase knowledge and insight, cultivate the spirit of struggle, enhance comprehensive quality, integrate moral virtue into the entire process of education, guide teachers and students to actively cultivate and practice core socialist values, as well as firmly establish the ideology of safeguarding national unity.

#### **4.3. Create advantageous disciplines and strive for “double first-class”**

In 2020, China's higher education has entered the stage of popularization, and connotative development and high-quality development have become the theme of the times for the development of education in the new era. If ethnic colleges and universities want to stand out in the new round of competition, they must concentrate on creating a number of first-class disciplines with distinctive characteristics and competitive advantages. The country's “double first-class” construction provides opportunities for the innovative development of national colleges and universities; the key to whether they can seize these opportunities to advance lies in national colleges and universities themselves. Ethnic colleges and universities must actively seize these opportunities, work together to seek common development, adapt to the new norm, enhance their spirit, scientific positioning, and policies, take advantage of the “double first-class” construction, effectively improve their quality and level, maximize the advantages of disciplines and their irreplaceability, make up for the lack of their strengths, discipline resources, first-class team, and talents, as well as break through the bottleneck of development of disciplines. We must closely consider the needs of the development of minority nationalities and ethnic minority areas as well as seize and make good use of

opportunities by planning in response to situations, moving according to situations, and acting in accordance with situations. It is necessary to maximize our advantages, display our characteristics, and stand out from the ordinary<sup>[11]</sup>. Continuously recall the original intention and maintain focus, sincerity, and firm purpose. According to the development prospects of the industry in ethnic minority areas, give full play to the advantages of characteristic disciplines, and provide strong support for the rural revitalization strategy and innovative development of ethnic minority areas.

### **Acknowledgements**

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor for his careful guidance and assistance with this project and thesis. Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude to the eight interviewees, who were extremely welcoming of our intentions for the project; we were greatly inspired after each interview session as we have gained a lot from it. Finally, I would like to thank the teachers from the Faculty of Education and Psychology for guiding and providing audio recorders, video cameras, and other electronic devices for the smooth execution of the interviews.

### **Funding**

The 2021 Special Fund for Basic Scientific Research Business Expenses of Central Universities “Special Project for Serving the Society” (Grant Number: 2021SYYXSS55)

### **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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