

Exploring the Path of Education Development in Border Ethnic Areas in the Context of the New Era

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Abstract: In the context of the new era, the development of education in border ethnic areas can help stimulate the awareness of self-development of border ethnic groups, enhance endogenous development, promote the transformation of old and new dynamics of economic development, and achieve the goal of high-quality development in the new era. A long-term national strategy, the “Enrich the Borders and the People of the Borders Action” has effectively improved the infrastructure construction and living standards of people living in China’s border areas over the past 20 years. It has immensely promoted industrial restructuring, advanced the construction of the “Chinese national community,” and laid a solid foundation for poverty eradication and the overall actualization of a well-off society. However, we also clearly understand that the border areas are passively performing “blood transfusion” to alleviate poverty. Most of the border areas in China are ethnic areas and relatively poor. This paper attempts to explore the education for the ethnic minorities in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics to actualize the development of border areas from passive “blood transfusion” to active “blood creation” development to stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty and promote the sustainable development and modernization of China’s border areas, and ultimately achieve the goal of high-quality development of border ethnic areas.

Keywords: New era; Rural revitalization; Developing borders and enriching people; Ethnic education; Fostering will and wisdom

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1. Introduction

China has the largest number of land neighbors, bordering more than 10 countries, with 22,000 kilometers of land borders, 19,000 kilometers of which are in ethnic areas, and about 50 percent of people who live along the borderlines are ethnic minorities^[1]. The stability and prosperity of the border areas not only affect the consolidation of China’s border defense and national unity, but also have a bearing on the high-quality development of the “Five-in-One” in the new era. With the promotion of rural revitalization, the Central Government has repeatedly emphasized the “five major revitalizations,” namely industry, talent, culture, ecology, and organization as the specific action direction and realization path^[2]. The Central Document No. 1 of 2021 points out that “to revive the nation, the countryside must be revitalized.” The border areas of China are plagued with geographic variations, harsh natural environment and insufficient resource endowment, and ethnic areas are the focus and difficulty of rural revitalization in China.

In 2000, the Party Central Committee launched campaign named the “Enrich the Borders and the People of the Borders Action” with the goal of “enriching the people, promoting the borders, strengthening the country and establishing good relations with the neighbors.” This is to promote the development of China’s border areas, upgrade the areas, and narrow the gap between the economic and social development

of China's border areas and those of the southeastern coastal areas. Over the past 20 years, the Action has achieved tremendous success, effectively improving the social and economic development environment in the border areas. The industrial structure has been developed in a positive way, significantly raising the living standards and disposable personal income of people living in China's border areas (hereinafter referred to as border people) and promoting the cause of national unity. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve modern development in the border areas, and the problem of the relative lagging of economic and social development in the border areas has not yet been fundamentally changed, owing to a number of subjective and objective factors, including geographical constraints, uneven economic development, low average number of years of education, insufficient knowledge of professional and technical skills, and low market awareness.

In the report of the 19th Party Congress, the Central Government clearly proposed: "Adhering to the poverty alleviation pattern, focusing on the combination of poverty alleviation with helping the will and wisdom, and deeply implementing the East-West poverty alleviation collaboration"^[3]. As a major tool for poverty alleviation and poverty eradication in border areas, the "Action for Promoting the Border and Enriching the People" has successfully alleviated material poverty. However, in order to "treat the root causes" instead of "treating the symptoms," the people in border areas needs to be motivated, using education as the guide to achieve "spiritual poverty alleviation." To achieve "spiritual poverty alleviation" in the light of the aforementioned issues, this paper intends to explore the path of education development in border ethnic areas in the context of the new era.

2. Literature review

In an article by Xu Zidong and Guo Ying, "Fostering Will and Wisdom in the Action of Promoting the Border and Enriching the People: the Current Situation, Problems and Countermeasures," they believe that in the action of promoting the border and enriching the people, we should establish and strengthen the willpower, and increase, promote, and use wisdom appropriately in the process of promoting the border and enriching the people through the development of education for ethnic minorities^[4]. The border areas in China are mostly relatively poor areas, so Zuo Mingzhang, Xiang Lei, and Ma Yunpeng proposed in their article "Helping the Will, Helping the Wisdom, and Helping the Learning: the Construction of the 'Trinity' Model of Information Technology for Precise Poverty Alleviation in Education" that by clarifying the objects and effects of "fostering willpower and wisdom, and increasing learning abilities," we can alleviate poverty through education. In the same way, the endogenous logic of "trinity" and the realistic purpose of "one matching and two combining," a "trinity" model and action framework of education informatization for poverty alleviation through education can be constructed. The "trinity" model and action framework for education informatization for precise poverty alleviation^[5]. The border areas are mostly ethnic areas, and Song Caifa and Pan Shanbin mentioned in their "Legal Discussion on Improving the Poverty Governance System in Ethnic Areas" that in order to achieve economic and social revitalization in ethnic areas, we should attach great importance to the development of education in ethnic areas and improve the quality of education in ethnic areas^[6]. Zhang Lijun and Su Lanxin in "Research on the Construction of Cultural Industry in Southwest Land Border Crossings" proposed that border crossings should develop a targeted talent construction mechanism of "talent attraction + local training + skill training" and build a joint training mechanism of "government + university"^[7]. The above literature provides important inspiration and ideas for the writing of this paper.

3. The brilliant achievements of 20 years of the "Enrich the Borders and the People of the Borders Action" lay the foundation for the development of education in border ethnic areas in the new era

In 2000, the "Enrich the Borders and the People of the Borders Action" came into being as a national

strategy to realize the common prosperity and development of border areas. Over the past 20 years, the movement has been implemented in conjunction with industrial poverty alleviation, education, and cultural poverty alleviation, as well as a series of development strategies such as the “B & R” strategy and the “Western Development Strategy.” It has been closely integrated with a series of development strategies such as the “B&R” strategy and the “Western Development Strategy,” forming a policy synergy that has led to the revitalization of China’s border areas in terms of infrastructure, economic construction, ecological construction, culture and education, social construction, and other aspects, and has substantially realized the enrichment of people in China’s border areas.

In terms of infrastructure, the initial formation of a transportation network in the border areas and the improvement of traffic and road conditions in Yanbian towns and villages have made travelling easier for the people and the borders and to lay the foundations for economic development. In terms of economic construction, firstly, the rich ethnic cultural resources are used to vigorously develop the tertiary industry, mainly cultural industry, to broaden the income channels of the border people and ease the pressure of employment. Secondly, the resources can be integrated to promote the development of special agriculture, animal husbandry and fishery according to local conditions, and optimize the structure of the primary industry, so that the border people can increase their income. Thirdly, with the “Western Development Strategy” and “B & R” strategy, the advantages of the border can be maximized and the trade with neighboring countries can be strengthened. Besides, with the support of policies, the establishment of border economic cooperation zones and overseas economic and trade cooperation zones will provide new “growth points” for the economic development of China’s border areas. In terms of social construction, the level of livelihood protection in the border areas has been continuously improved. The civil affairs projects under the “Enrich the Borders and the People of the Borders Action” have improved the social environment in the border areas in terms of culture, entertainment and medical care, and the establishment of libraries, museums, cultural centers, and medical clinics has solved the problem of difficulties in accessing medical care for the border people and enriched the spiritual world of the border people^[8]. In terms of culture and education, the border areas have increased expenditure on education and adopted a project-oriented model, in line with the “Outline of the National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020),” the “Outline of China’s Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development (2011-2020),” and the “National Development Plan for Rural Areas (2011-2020),” “the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for Education to Fight Poverty,” and the “Implementation Plan for Education to Fight Poverty in Deeply Impoverished Areas (2018-2020),” increasing the number of schools in border areas, improving the environment of school facilities in border counties and towns, and raised the number of teachers per student. The biggest shortcomings constraining the balanced development of education in border areas have been gradually resolved, laying an important foundation for the development of education in border ethnic areas.

In 2020, China has achieved a victory to break the circle of poverty and has built a moderately prosperous society. China has entered a new era of socialism with unique characteristics. At the intersection of the two centuries of history, the “Enrich the Borders and the People of the Borders Action,” as an important vehicle for the national governance of border areas, will uproot the backwardness of border areas, ensure permanent poverty eradication, and promote the comprehensive high-quality sustainable development of border areas. The development of education in border ethnic areas is an important support for the sustainable development of border ethnic areas in the new era.

4. The significance of developing education in border ethnic areas in the new era

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory is well-known^[9], the 5-level model of human needs from the bottom to the highest level are: physiological needs, safety, love and belonging needs, esteem, and self-actualization. 20 years of implementation of the “Enrich the Borders and the People of the Borders Action,”

has helped the people in the border areas to meet their physiological needs, security needs and belonging needs, i.e. the material aspect of prosperity of the border and enrichment of the people has been achieved. But there is still a need to realize the spiritual aspect of enriching the people, that is, the need for esteem and self-actualization. Together with the material aspect, it constitutes the complete prosperity of the border. The essential difference between the material and spiritual aspects of enriching the people is that the spiritual aspect of enriching the people needs to be realized by cultivating the endogenous driving force, and the enrichment of the people in the new era needs to be realized from “blood transfusion to poverty alleviation” to “blood creation to poverty alleviation” by “fostering willpower and wisdom.” In the new era, it is necessary to transform from “blood transfusion to poverty alleviation” to “blood creation to poverty alleviation” by “cultivating will and wisdom,” and to stimulate the endogenous driving force of “self-reliance, striving for improvement, and hardworking” attitude of the border people.

The basic lesson of the world’s poverty alleviation is that “lack of education is a deeper form of poverty than economic poverty and is the main cause of intergenerational poverty transmission”^[10]. While further consolidating the existing achievements in enriching the people, it is necessary to break the constraint of raising the border due to weak educational resources. In the new era, it is necessary to take “fostering willpower and wisdom” as the guide and develop education as the support. The development of ethnic education has been used to block the intergenerational transmission of poverty in border areas and to promote the formation of “a firm sense of Chinese national community among people in border areas”.

5. Exploring the path of education development in border ethnic areas in the new era

The Central Government pointed out in the report of the 19th Party Congress that China has entered a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and that the main social contradiction is no longer “the contradiction between the people’s growing material and cultural needs and backward social production,” but “the contradiction between the people’s growing need for a better life and unbalanced and insufficient development”^[3]. The fundamental change in the main social contradiction represents a change in the fundamental task of governance in the border areas and the way of thinking in solving problems. By establishing a “precise” education system that provides education services according to the needs of the people in the border areas, the awareness of self-development of the people in the border areas can be cultivated, the internal development momentum of the border groups can be enhanced, and new “growth points” can be explored for the development of the border areas. In turn, it will drive the sustainable development of the economy, society, industry and national unity in the border areas and realize the “development of the border and enrichment of the people.” This is a new task and a new idea of the action to develop the border and enrich the people in the new era.

5.1. Increase the proportion of children at the border areas receiving education

According to the article “Analysis of the Causes of Cross-Border Ethnic Education Problems in Guangxi and Ways to Solve Them,” the consolidation rate of nine-year compulsory education in Yunnan-Guizhou-Guizhou rocky desertification area was 9.8% lower than the national average in 2017^[11], and according to “Research on the mechanism and path of precise poverty eradication in ethnic areas with special industries,” the national average of illiteracy in 2016 was 5.28% of the population over 15 years old, while the eight ethnic provinces and regions were 11.79% , with Tibet as high as 41.12%^[12]. While children are the future of the motherland, compulsory education is an important cornerstone of national revitalization, social progress and national unity. Efforts to enable every child in the border areas to enjoy fair and quality compulsory education is the backbone of development for the prosperity of the border and the people. The 14th Five-Year Plan for Education mentions that by 2025, the enrollment rate of primary school and junior high school-age children is expected to reach 100 percent, and the consolidation rate of nine-year

compulsory education is expected to reach more than 98 percent^[13]. Border areas should make full use of policy synergies to bring more border children into schools and increase the proportion of children in border areas receiving compulsory education.

5.2. Ethnic-specific vocational education to help the sound development of special industries in border areas

“High-quality development” has replaced “high-speed growth” as the direction of China’s economic development in the new era. Using ethnic, cultural and natural resources in border areas, cultivating and developing high-quality special agriculture, animal husbandry and fishery industries and special cultural industries is a high-quality choice to achieve sustainable economic growth and poverty alleviation in border areas. However, the lack of cultural consciousness, professional skill talents, management knowledge, and market concept lead to the lack of motivation for the sustainable development of special industries in border areas. Most of the border areas in China are ethnic areas, and ethnic areas are characterized by different cultures, resources and customs. Vocational education, especially higher vocational education, as one of the main carriers of education for poverty alleviation, plays a role of intellectual support in China’s economic and social development. Since 2020, higher vocational colleges and universities have started to implement a “million expansion plan” to nurture 2 million students in two years through the implementation of classified examinations, and priority is given to students from poor families^[14]. With a long-term perspective, vocational education in border areas should be developed by integrating the culture and industries with ethnic characteristics of the region and adopting the training method of “professional skills + ethnic culture.” Make full use of the National Implementation Plan for Vocational Education Reform to “strengthen the foundation for students’ sustainable development, encourage students in vocational colleges to obtain multiple vocational skills certificates while obtaining academic certificates, and expand their skills for employment and entrepreneurship”^[15], and adopt the joint cooperation model of “local universities + local enterprises + government.” The cooperation model of “local universities + local enterprises + government,” with the local government promoting school-enterprise cooperation and establishing a 1+X certificate training platform, realizes the cultivation of skilled talents “according to ethnicity”^[16], and achieves the goal of “creating blood to alleviate poverty”.

5.3. Establishing a system for further education and training in collaboration with local universities according to the needs of working staffs

Some cadres and border people in border areas have different degrees of knowledge and skills shortage. This lack of knowledge and skills has led to old-fashioned ideology, misunderstanding and low awareness of development among some cadres and people in the border areas, and even the idea that some poor people are “proud of being poor” and are waiting for government assistance^[6]. These situations largely affect the enthusiasm of the border people to participate in economic and social development and build a better homeland. At the same time, it also concerns the stability of China’s border defense, and more importantly, the common prosperity of the majority of border people. The governments of border areas should make full use of the continuing education resources of regional universities, adopt the cooperation model of “government + university” and jointly establish a mechanism for continuing education and training. Taking into account the development needs and cultural characteristics of the border areas, training and lectures on professional skills, management knowledge and national unity should be conducted on a regular or irregular basis according to the needs of the border areas. This is to supplement the professional skills and management knowledge urgently needed by some cadres and border people, and at the same time to promote the formation of “a firm sense of Chinese national community among the people of the border areas.”

5.4. Improving the quality of facilities and making use of various preferential policies and establish a framework to attract more staffs

From the perspective of the number of teachers and the structure of teaching, schools in border areas have long had a weak and unstable teaching force, and at the same time, it has been difficult to retain capable staffs [17]. This has led to a reduction in the sustainability of education. In the new era, the governments of border areas should adopt various preferential policies and create various positive conditions to open various channels for the introduction of talents and stimulate and guide the flow of various professional talents to border areas through various channels such as teaching support, border support, schools and border units. Colleges and universities should encourage university graduates to join the “border-raising” team. In addition, to give full play to the synergy of policies, the 14th Five-Year Plan for Education has made efforts to strengthen the construction of teachers, as stated in its key projects and major issues: optimizing the allocation of teacher resources and alleviating the contradiction of teacher shortage in rural areas. In December 2021, when the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education introduced the revitalization of higher education in central and western China, it was pointed out that in the future, a comprehensive platform for higher education innovation will be built in the three regions of northwest, southwest and central China to share high-quality education, research, and talent resources. A platform for mutual support from universities in the east, central, and west will be established to implement counterpart support precisely. In this way, the endogenous power and development vitality of higher education in central and western China will be stimulated. The northwestern and southwestern provinces are mostly border provinces and regions, and these policies and measures will provide strong talent support for economic revitalization and social revitalization in border areas.

5.5. Making the most out of the opportunities offered by digital technology and new infrastructure development to develop education in border ethnic areas

The new technological revolution led by digital technologies such as the Internet, 5G, big data and artificial intelligence differs from previous technological revolutions in that digital technologies are not the change of a single technology, but the convergence and development of a series of technologies. By breaking time isolation and spatial division, digital technology in turn gives rise to new industries, new models and new production. With the integration of digital technology and industry, border ethnic areas should put more effort in introducing various types of technical talents that are in short supply in local digital construction, and on the other hand, cultivate a team of local digital talents. At the same time, the “Internet+ education” should be actively promoted to accelerate the construction of education informatization. Using the unique advantages of education informatization, such as breaking through time and spatial restrictions, rapid replication and dissemination, and various means of presentation, we will promote the equitable and balanced development of education in border ethnic areas and effectively improve the quality of education [18].

6. Conclusion

The implementation of the “Enrich the Borders and the People of the Borders Action” has been effective in promoting the economic and social development of our border areas, significantly improved the living conditions of the people in the border areas, enhanced the people’s sense of national unity, and laid a solid foundation for the overall building of a well-off society. While rejoicing in the great achievements that have been made, the problems of unbalanced and insufficient development in the border areas are still prominent. In the new historical development period, the “Enrich the Borders and the People of the Borders Action” should focus on improving the education system that varies from industry to industry, from culture to culture, and from nationality to nationality as it continues to promote economic development, social

development, development of special industries, and development of ethnic culture in the border areas and strengthen the sense of national unity. Through the construction of an education system tailored to local conditions, the shortcomings that limit the unbalanced and inadequate development of border areas due to the lack of endogenous motivation will be made up. Education can be used to “build willpower and gain wisdom,” to stimulate the border people to “seek willpower and wisdom,” to achieve self-development of the border people, and ultimately to truly realize the high-quality development of China’s border areas in the new era, and to achieve prosperity and stability of China’s border areas as well as the whole country.

Disclosure statement

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