

Strengthening the Consciousness of the Chinese National Community to Promote High-Quality Development in Ethnic Regions

-- Based on Fieldwork in 12 Villages in the Ruorgai Region

Xunhua Wang¹, Jiayuan Wu², Yang Yang^{3, *}

¹School of Community for the Chinese Nation, Southwest Minzu University, Chengdu 610041, China

²School of Public Administration, Southwest Minzu University, Chengdu 610041, China

³School of Marxism, Xichang Minzu Preschool Normal College, Xichang 615000, China

*Corresponding Author

Abstract: The formation and development of the consciousness of the Chinese national community cannot be separated from the great power of all ethnic groups bravely moving forward and closely uniting. Promoting high-quality development in ethnic regions cannot be separated from the spiritual support of all ethnic groups striving together and steadily moving forward. To implement the spirit of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and respond to the call of the country for rural revitalization, we formed a research team to understand the basic situation in the Ruorgai area and the living conditions of local farmers and herdsmen. We visited and communicated with the local communities, deeply understanding the changes in the Ruorgai region in terms of economic development, environmental changes, and social harmony. We also gained insight into the contributions made in the region towards solidifying the consciousness of the Chinese national community, as well as the efforts made to promote high-quality development in the ethnic regions.

Keywords: Ethnic Regions, Strengthening the Consciousness of the Chinese National Community, High-Quality Development.

1. Introduction

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out at the National Ethnic Unity and Progress Commendation Conference: To realize the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we must take the strengthening of the Chinese national community as the main line, and grasp the cause of ethnic unity and progress as a fundamental task[1]. In the long history of more than 5,000 years of the Chinese nation, people of all ethnic groups in our country have always managed to be inclusive in culture, interdependent in economy, and close to each other emotionally, continuously blending into a colorful yet unified Chinese nation. People of all ethnic groups have actively made their due contributions to the country's comprehensive move into a moderately prosperous society and contributed to the high-quality economic and social development in ethnic regions.

The Ruorgai region, a significant agricultural and pastoral area on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau in China, boasts 12.12 million acres of natural grassland, of which 9.78 million acres are usable, making it one of the three largest grassland pasturing regions in China. Its livestock industry relies on raising or grazing yaks, sheep, horses and their by-products. The western part of Ruorgai is a semi-agricultural and semi-pastoral region with 80,000 acres of cultivated land, suitable for planting short-growth barley. Notably, the Yellow River and the Yangtze River divide the entire county of Ruorgai into two distinct geographic units and natural economic areas, effectively unifying social, economic, and ecological aspects.

In recent years, Ruorgai County has consistently adhered to the guidance of Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, with the fundamental principle of

solidifying the awareness of the Chinese national community, leading to the blooming of ethnic unity and progress in the grand grasslands of Ruorgai County and achieving high-quality economic and social development in the area.

To better understand the economic, a research group went to four towns in Ruorgai County: Axizhen, Tangketown, Baxi town, and Jiangzha Township. Each township selected 3-4 villages, totaling 12 villages. Among them, there were 8 pure pastoral areas, 2 semi-agricultural and semi-pastoral areas, and 2 pure agricultural areas. They conducted in-depth visits and research in local pastoral areas and villages, carried out a tracking survey of livelihood and family development in the agricultural and pastoral areas of Ruorgai County, and learned about the local level of economic and social development.

People's livelihood is the foundation of a country and a critical aspect of governance. This research, through on-site interviews and household surveys on the livelihood and family development of farmers and herdsmen in the Ruorgai region, meticulously studied how to scientifically evaluate and improve the current state of livelihood development. It aimed to comprehensively and accurately display the differences and causes in family income and expenditure, individual development capabilities, life satisfaction, and health development status among farmers and herdsmen in the Ruorgai region. The report adopted a social survey method of questionnaire design, mainly combining comprehensive analysis modules of village-level surveys with thematic analysis modules of individual pastoralist surveys, striving for both breadth and depth in social survey research. This will provide a scientific basis and replicable policy recommendations for formulating and evaluating

livelihood policies in the agricultural and pastoral areas of the Ruoergai region.

2. Basic Situation of the Ruoergai Region

Across the vast territory of the People's Republic of China, on the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau, lies a beautiful wetland, one of the three major wetlands in the country, and recognized as the 'most beautiful wetland in China' by the National Geographic magazine - the Ruoergai Prairie. As an important part of the ethnic region in northwestern Sichuan, Ruoergai's geographical location, regional advantages, and the population and ethnic groups within its jurisdiction are all critical aspects worth considering.

(1) Geographic Location of Ruoergai County

Ruoergai County is located in the northwest of Sichuan Province, on the northeast edge of the Tibetan Plateau. It borders Jiuzhaigou County, Songpan County, Hongyuan County, and Aba County in the south, and adjoins Maqu County, Luqu County, Zhuoni County, and Diebu County of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province. As the county with the largest area in the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, it spans a total of 10.62 million square kilometers, with an average altitude of 3500 meters. This place nurtures the ancient and colorful Han-Tibetan-Qiang culture, making it a 'confluence of cultures' in northwestern Sichuan, and a 'corridor of ethnic groups' connecting Sichuan, Qinghai, and Gansu.

(2) Population and Ethnicities in Ruoergai County

Ruoergai County governs 7 towns, 6 townships, 88 villages, and 1 provincial ranch, with 101 remote pastures. According to the seventh population census data, the county has a total population of 80.5 thousand people. The area is home to 12 ethnic groups including Tibetan, Han, Hui, Qiang, Yi, etc., with the Tibetan population amounting to 75.6 thousand people, accounting for 93.89% of the total population. The residents of the county are mainly Tibetans, and other ethnicities are scattered throughout the county. All ethnicities have worked together, strived and achieved high-quality development of ethnic work in the Ruoergai region, with the 80 thousand sons and daughters of all ethnicities in the county vigorously promoting the construction of 'ecological, vibrant, unimpeded, harmonious, and happy' Ruoergai, striving to create a model area for ethnic unity and progress.

(3) Regional Advantages of Ruoergai County

The Ruoergai region is located in the vital throat zone from Sichuan to the northwest provinces and enjoys extremely strong locational advantages. These advantages are mainly manifested in the following three characteristics. First, it is located at the junction of Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces. Since ancient times, this place has been in the golden triangle position of the Tea Horse Ancient Road, making it an important port for goods transshipment. Even today, remnants of the Tea Horse Ancient Road can still be found in many places within the county. Second, the region boasts three special route airports. As a major tourist county, within a two-hour drive centered on Ruoergai county, it has Jiu Huang Airport, Hongyuan Airport, and Xiahe Airport, which power the booming tourism economy in the Ruoergai area. Third, there are three convenient ways to enter and leave the county. In addition to the three major special route airports, there are also three national highways - 213, 248, and 345 - and the under-construction Chengdu-Xining High-Speed

Railway running through the whole territory, facilitating the entry and exit for residents and tourists to and from the Ruoergai region. Such excellent regional advantages and unique geographical location have crafted today's Ruoergai, which is beautiful, prosperous, and picturesque.

3. Ruoergai Region's Practice in Cementing the Consciousness of the Chinese National Community

(1) Cementing the consciousness of the Chinese national community through enhancing the "Five Identifications"

The "Five Identifications" mainly refer to the identification with the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China, and socialism with Chinese characteristics. As the core content of the consciousness of the Chinese national community, it has a deep and firm historical foundation. The formation of the consciousness of the Chinese national community is mainly based on the existence of the "Five Identifications". Ruoergai County places great emphasis on the ethnic work of the Party in the new era, guiding people of all ethnic groups in the county to solidify the consciousness of the Chinese national community in the process of enhancing the "Five Identifications", aiming to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The first of the "Five Identifications" is the identification with the great motherland. As a member of the Chinese nation, loving the motherland and caring for the land are the most basic emotional identification and responsibility for every citizen.[2] Farmers and herdsmen in the Ruoergai region express their identification with the great motherland in every detail of daily life. As the concrete manifestation of the motherland, farmers and herdsmen in the Ruoergai region always maintain absolute loyalty and trust to the state. Numerous touching red stories left on this land have laid the foundation for the local residents' love for the great motherland. In August 1935, the Red Army arrived at the Ruoergai grassland after enduring great hardships, where they composed the tragic song of life. Today, the local elders can still recount touching Long March stories such as the "Golden Fishhook", the "Seven Matches", and the "Night March across the Grassland". Peace is hard-won, and national unity is even more so. The People's Republic of China is our common motherland. Farmers and herdsmen in the Ruoergai region always regard maintaining national unity as their sacred duty, resolutely defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and loving the great motherland.

Identification with the Chinese nation primarily manifests in recognizing the basic fact that the Chinese nation is a community composed of 56 ethnic groups. Ruoergai County is home to 12 ethnic minorities. People of different ethnic groups live together on this beautiful grassland, maintaining political equality, mutual economic support, harmonious coexistence, and mutual cultural respect and coexistence. This has formed an inseparable close relationship among ethnic groups. All ethnic groups identify themselves as important components of the Chinese nation, always putting the common interests of the Chinese nation first, and deeply understanding the concept that the Chinese nation is a community with a shared destiny.

Cultural identification plays a long-term and fundamental role, and it is the deepest level of identification. Identification with Chinese culture includes three aspects: first is the

identification with the culture of one's own ethnic group. To identify with Chinese culture and other ethnic cultures, one must first identify with the culture of their own ethnicity[3]. Every ethnic group in Ruoergai County, especially the Tibetans, strongly identify with their own culture. Only on the basis of identifying with their own ethnic culture can we talk about the next level of identification, that is, mutual recognition between ethnic groups. All ethnic groups have a high degree of identification with their own culture and are able to understand and respect the customs and cultural heritage of other ethnic groups, understanding the differences between the cultures of each ethnic group. The different ethnic groups coexist harmoniously on this land, jointly creating the rich and brilliant Chinese culture. Finally, there is identification with the unity of the Chinese nation, respecting the commonality of Chinese culture, emphasizing identification with the common aspects of Chinese culture, and enhancing the recognition of the commonality of Chinese culture among ethnic groups.

The leadership of the Party is the most essential characteristic of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Farmers and herdsmen in the Ruoergai region have strengthened their identification with socialism with Chinese characteristics. In the face of the complex and changing international situation and the repeated impact of the epidemic, the farmers and herdsmen in the Ruoergai region resolutely obey the leadership of the Party, constantly integrating Marxism with the current specific conditions in China, solving current practical problems under the leadership of the Party, fighting hard against the epidemic, improving grassroots social governance, enhancing the quality of economic development, and seeking happiness for the people.

(2) Consolidating the sense of the Chinese national community through ethnic interaction, exchange, and integration

Our country is a unified multi-ethnic state. The Chinese nation has been continuously interacting, exchanging, and integrating since ancient times, forming the splendid and colorful Chinese nation we see today. A history of the Chinese nation is a history of extensive interaction, exchange, and integration among various ethnic groups. As a county where multiple ethnic groups coexist, this interaction, exchange, and integration can be seen in various aspects of life in Ruoergai County.

First, ethnic interaction, exchange, and integration come from tourism development and population mobility. In recent years, tourism in Ruoergai County has developed rapidly. The county has uniformly formulated the "Ruoergai County Ecological Tourism Plan," to cultivate more characteristic cultural industries as pillar industries. By implementing the "Tourism+" strategy, the county has invested more than a trillion funds to improve the basic infrastructure around famous scenic spots such as the First Bend of the Yellow River and Flower Lake, build the Bazhong Conference Memorial Hall and the Victory Dawn Exhibition Hall, and develop 171 rural tourism spots. This has promoted Ruoergai's transition from a "resource-rich county" to a "tourism powerhouse." Many herdsmen have also started their own agri-tainment and Tibetan home-stay businesses. As a strong tourism county, Ruoergai County received more than 3 million visitors from other places in 2021. These visitors understand the life and culture of the herdsmen through tourism, play, and sightseeing, while also bringing fresh

culture from the outside world to the local residents of Ruoergai. Some tourists have even stayed to run restaurants and hotels due to various reasons, living and operating locally[4]. Research has found that many people who go there for tourism or business not only learn the local language but even study the local culture and understand the past and history. This promotes the integration of Tibetan and Han cultures through cultural interaction and exchange. The local Tibetans, due to the arrival and settlement of Han people, have started to speak Chinese and understand the customs and cultural heritage of the Han people. They seek commonalities and differences between cultures, respect differences, embrace diversity, and create social conditions for ethnic groups to live, learn, work, and enjoy together.

Second, interaction, exchange, and integration brought about by interethnic marriages. Various ethnic groups living in Ruoergai County have different modes of production and lifestyle. The Han people mainly live in the county town and various townships, the Tibetans follow their herds for nomadic life, moving three to four times a year on the vast grasslands, and there are also a large number of Qiang and Hui residents scattered throughout the county. Stories of young men and women of Tibetan, Han, Hui, Qiang, and other ethnic groups forming families here are common, and residents of all ethnic groups interact, exchange, and integrate in life, economy, and culture. In the original Tibetan families, few people spoke Chinese, but through intermarriage with Han residents, their children generally speak both Chinese and Tibetan. Language, as a necessary tool to understand a nation, plays an important role in cultural interaction, exchange, and integration.

In addition, education brings about cultural communication and integration. The county has a total of 31 primary and secondary schools, as well as kindergartens, divided into ethnic schools and mainstream schools. In the mainstream primary and secondary schools, teachers generally prefer to teach in Chinese, while in ethnic schools, education is conducted in both Tibetan and Chinese. Through educating nearly twenty thousand middle school students, students of different ethnicities can receive the latest education, understand different ethnic customs, habits, and cultural beliefs in school. With the popularization of nine-year compulsory education, more and more students are admitted to universities outside their hometowns, even at the graduate level. They take their ethnic culture to various parts of the country and even the whole world. At the same time, they learn many outside ideas and bring them back to their hometowns, promoting the richness and development of cultural diversity in the Ruoergai region. Education cultivates the seeds of ethnic communication and integration in the campus, and blooms the flowers of each ethnic group's culture that is beautiful in its own way and the beauty of all people; sharing the beauty and universal unity.

(3) Cementing the Awareness of a Shared Spiritual Home among All Ethnic Groups in Constructing a Shared Spiritual Homeland

The spiritual homeland serves as the spiritual pillar, emotional sustenance, and soul's destination for people [5]. It reflects people's spiritual and cultural identification with the meaning of life and the value of existence. For individuals, the spiritual homeland is where they seek what they deem valuable and meaningful. For an ethnic group, it is the unique traditions, culture, customs, and beliefs that the ethnic group has accumulated over hundreds of years of history.

Building a shared spiritual homeland for the Chinese nation, passing down the national spirit is crucial. The Chinese nation has been able to survive and develop continuously in the long river of history. The primary reason is that we have always insisted on the national spirit centered on patriotism and pursued consistent values. A large number of farmers and herders live on the vast grassland of Ruorgai. Farmers living in agricultural areas have been leading a farming life, preserving the simple and hard-working nature of agricultural civilization, being industrious and thrifty; Tibetan herders have been leading a pastoral life for thousands of years, being passionate, brave and strong. These two different lifestyles together constitute the unique cultural connotation of the Ruorgai area, as diverse parts of the Chinese nation, and an indispensable part. The concept of "One Big Family of the Chinese Nation" is increasingly deep-rooted, with people of all ethnic groups jointly cultivating, inheriting and developing the great national spirit, collectively constituting the valuable wealth of a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation.

Constructing a shared spiritual homeland for the Chinese nation also involves promoting excellent traditional culture. Culture is the soul of a nation and a country. The traditional and excellent Tibetan culture, as an important part of Chinese culture, has rich connotations and far-reaching influence that continues to renew over time. The traditional Tibetan culture of the Ruorgai region has experienced a long history of accumulation, continuous development, and innovation. It was created by Tibetan ancestors while also absorbing multiple ethnic cultures such as Han, Qiang, and Hui. The excellent traditional Tibetan culture involves all aspects, including customs and ethical morals. For a long time, the excellent traditional Tibetan culture has constantly collided, interacted, and integrated with the Chinese national culture, keeping pace with the times and influencing the values and behaviors of Tibetans. It provides an important spiritual force and value source for the development of Chinese national culture.

4. High-quality Economic and Social Development in the Ruorgai Region

(1) Continuous Improvement of Grassroots Governance Level in the Ruorgai Region

Grassroots governance is the cornerstone of national governance, and the leadership of party building is the fundamental guarantee for improving the level of grassroots governance[6]. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out the need to continuously strengthen the construction of the community governance system and promote the center of social governance to move downward to the grassroots. To give full play to the vanguard and leading role of party members and the fortress role of grassroots party organizations, Ruorgai County adheres to the leadership of party building based on grassroots governance objectives, fully leveraging the role of party members in grassroots governance. For instance, in promoting targeted poverty alleviation work, Ruorgai County actively plays the role of the First Secretary, with more than forty First Secretaries going to the countryside, taking the initiative, based on the actual situation, implementing measures, planning for development, and promoting the harmonious and stable development of impoverished villages.

In addition to party-led leadership, Ruorgai County also actively stimulates the role of the masses, especially ethnic

minority groups, in grassroots social governance, providing ample power support for grassroots social co-governance. As an ethnic region, the principal status of ethnic minorities in Ruorgai must be emphasized. In the past interactions among villagers, conflicts and disputes have occurred. After active exploration, many villages have innovatively proposed various mediation methods such as "legal restraint, village committee mediation, elder mediation, and temple mediation," achieving good results in practice. The involvement of the law has also effectively protected the rights and interests of many vulnerable groups in Ruorgai County, and the trust level of many Tibetans in the state and law has significantly improved.

The role of village rules and folk agreements in grassroots social governance in the Ruorgai region has been actively highlighted. Many villages have developed their own village rules and folk agreements, with the specific contents of these agreements even posted on the walls of houses along village roads, and many villagers also display these rules and agreements in their homes. During our research, it was found that when some herders violate grassland management and grazing quotas, villagers will culturally punish them based on village rules and folk agreements, either ostracizing them from the social circle or making them swear never to break the management rules again.

With continuous innovation in management methods, the ways of grassroots social governance in the Ruorgai region have been continuously improved, and the level of grassroots governance has significantly increased compared to the past. By focusing on the innovation of grassroots social governance systems and capacity-building, the construction of social governance systems is advanced, guiding the farmers and herders in the Ruorgai region to actively participate in and support grassroots social governance, striving to construct a well-governed grassroots social governance situation of joint construction, joint management, and shared benefits in Ruorgai County.

(2) Continuous Improvement of Economic Development in the Ruorgai Region

To assist the stable development of the national economy, fully build a moderately prosperous society, and achieve the goal of striving for a modern socialist country, Ruorgai County has accurately grasped the new normal of current economic development, promoting economic transformation and high-quality development throughout the county[7]. In the face of the complex international environment, the sudden COVID-19 epidemic, and the arduous and heavy tasks of reform and development, Ruorgai County has always firmly grasped the initiative in economic development. In 2021, the county achieved a gross domestic product of 3.2 billion yuan, a general economic budget of 75.25 million yuan, a steady increase in per capita disposable income in urban and rural areas, and steady progress in economic development.

During our research, we found that many herders not only operate breeding businesses, but also run their own farm stays and Tibetan homestays, while the village develops collective tourism, etc., to increase herders' income. Farmers in agricultural areas lease their land to outside merchants for large-scale planting of asparagus, rhubarb, Fritillaria, etc., while local farmers find employment nearby to increase their income. In addition, some villagers start their own businesses, running long-distance transport or going out to work. In recent years, the income of local residents has significantly increased. Although most people still have relatively small

savings, almost every household lives in a brick-tile house and owns a car or motorcycle. People's living standards have significantly improved compared to before.

Take Geji Village in Jiangza Township as an example. The village is located in the northern part of Ruorgai County, 84 kilometers away from the county town of Ruorgai and at an average altitude of over 3000 meters. It is a very typical half-farming, half-pastoral village in the Ruorgai region. Due to restrictive factors such as inconvenient transportation and a single agricultural structure, the village has always been relatively poor, backward, and closed. Advanced development concepts from the outside cannot enter, and traditional crops inside cannot be sold out[8]. The majority of young people increase their income by working outside the village. Large areas of land in the village have been left fallow due to no one tending to them. After investigation and research, due to the local natural climate conditions and good soil environment, the round radishes grown in this village are superior in both yield and quality compared to other places. Moreover, the traditional Tibetan delicacy—sauerkraut made from these radishes is unique in flavor and widely loved. Based on these reasons, the government has decided to invest 700,000 yuan in building a sauerkraut processing plant. Similar examples are quietly happening in many villages in Ruorgai, and more and more villagers are leasing their land to outside developers, while farmers find employment nearby to increase productivity and income. This "cooperative + base + farmer" model not only solves economic issues such as income and employment, but also solves social problems such as elderly care and livelihood.

(3) Continuous Improvement of Infrastructure in the Ruorgai Region

In recent years, with the tourism boom in Western Sichuan, Ruorgai County, as a major tourist county, has continuously improved the infrastructure within the county, enhancing the travel experience of foreign tourists while also improving the happiness index of local residents[9]. The author visited Ruorgai County for tourism seven years ago, when the roads were still muddy, hotels did not have 24-hour hot water supply, and toilets were hard to find, with many places only having "open-air toilets". The settlement points of the herders were mostly small mud houses. Not to mention the basic facilities such as basketball courts, libraries, and tap water at the settlements.

The changes observed during this visit were particularly significant. After visiting 4 townships and 12 villages, it was found that the living environment of the farmers and herders in these places had undergone dramatic changes. Not only is every village and every household accessible by cement roads, even the remote summer pastures are almost all connected by highways, facilitating the travel and transportation of herders. Many villages also have solar water heaters and tap water supply, presenting a new village appearance. Almost every settlement point has a tea house for farmers and herders' daily entertainment, and there are also basketball courts and reading rooms in the villages, with many locals sweating on the basketball court and reading and studying in the reading room. The villages even have public restrooms to solve the villagers' living problems. Many villages also have public broadcasts, which usually play music or announce important village activities and affairs. Internet problems have been properly solved, with almost every household in the settlement having WiFi, and many herders on the pastures also carry portable WiFi, maintaining

contact with the outside world.

Another place we researched was Tangke Town. As a major tourist town in Ruorgai County, it attracts a large number of tourists every year due to its proximity to famous scenic spots such as the First Bend of the Yellow River and Flower Lake. In the past, the "water supply problem" was an important issue that hindered local development[10]. In 2019, Deyang assisted in the construction of Tangke Town, renovating and expanding its water plant, solving the water supply problems of more than 8,000 farmers and herders in Tangke Town. Similar cases are numerous in the Ruorgai area, with many places improving their infrastructure day by day. The living standards of farmers and herders are also on the rise, leading to a moderately prosperous life.

5. Conclusion

The two-week research activity provided us with the opportunity to delve deep into the agricultural and pastoral areas of Ruorgai, to observe the lives of farmers and herders at close quarters for the first time, to understand the living conditions of residents in these areas and the state of their livelihoods, and to gain a new understanding and insight into rural revitalization. We collected a total of more than 800 questionnaires, each of which was of great value and the result of collaboration by the entire team. The research enabled us to gain a deep understanding of the differences between pastoral and agricultural development, a real sense of what a pastoral area is, an understanding of the living habits of herders, and the economic composition of their lives, from which we benefited greatly. In addition, through in-depth interviews, we gained an understanding of the different characteristics of each village's development, which can be compared and analyzed. This research brought us thinking in both learning and spiritual aspects. We fully understood the true meaning of "measuring the rural land with our feet", and hope to promote better development in agricultural and pastoral areas. We realized that seeking fish from trees and exhausting the water to catch fish are not feasible. By measuring the living environment of farmers and herders in the Ruorgai region with our steps, we deeply felt the harmonious development of man and nature in the Ruorgai region and gained a deeper understanding and insight.

The standard of living of farmers and herders in Ruorgai has improved significantly, and the lives of the people have undergone great changes. However, there are still some problems that we did not have the time to elaborate on in detail in this article, which is a regret. If given the opportunity, after organizing the research data and interview content, the author will write a detailed paper on this subject.

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