

Supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations: the policies and practices of the Chinese government



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Received: 3 October 2023 / Revised: 9 October 2023 / Accepted: 10 October 2023 /

Published online: 04 November 2023

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Abstract

Development is a fundamental pursuit of human society. When it comes to national governance, there are issues of imbalanced and insufficient development that must be addressed. Since 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded, the Chinese government has adopted a series of ethnic policies to resolve these development issues across ethnic minority areas. Since the late 1970s, Chinese scholars and the government have paid particular attention to the development issues of ethnic groups with smaller populations. This paper examines the relevant literature on this topic and divides China's policies on this issue into three stages: (1) initial exploration, (2) targeted assistance, and (3) specialized planning. It discusses the Chinese government's policy process and its experience empowering ethnic groups with smaller populations. The paper argues that the Chinese government's support for ethnic groups with smaller populations is guided by valid ethnic theories and a comprehensive policy system. In the implementation of policies, the government recognizes "development" as the primary objective. It then formulates, implements, and evaluates policies based on the characteristics of the different ethnic groups with smaller populations. This approach effectively addressed the problems faced by these ethnic groups during different stages of their development and achieved the intended policy goals. Therefore, these policies are practical and sustainable. They

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are a valuable asset, and studying them could be beneficial to any unified multi-ethnic country that wants to tackle the development issues of their ethnic minorities.

Keywords Ethnic groups with smaller populations · Development · Support policies · Chinese practices · Chinese value

Introduction

Development is a fundamental pursuit of human society. Countries differ in their understanding and in the way they govern unbalanced domestic development. Western countries have generally adopted two pathways for the development of ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples, liberalism and communitarianism. Liberalism suggests that the state should respect the ethnic culture of minority citizens. The emphasis is on “neutrality” and non-interference, and the social and economic development of these ethnic minorities is mainly determined by the market. This approach can be summarized as the “free competition model”. On the other hand, communitarianism advocates that group rights take precedence over the rights of individuals within the group. In this model, the state safeguards the development of indigenous peoples through policies and institutions. As argued by Taylor and Bell (2004), the indigenous people of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States have been influenced and protected by resource allocation policies.

There are divergent interpretations of “ethnic groups with smaller populations.” These different interpretations are directly associated with the solutions for ethnic development problems. China has adopted policies and practices to support the development of its ethnic groups with smaller populations. The country is home to 56 different ethnic groups. Some of these groups are more populated than others. To support the groups with smaller populations, the Chinese government has introduced several policies in different stages. It invested in many different areas, such as infrastructure, economic restructuring, social development, improvement of public cultural services, and primary-level organization building. These policies aim to develop all ethnic groups economically, socio-culturally, and ecologically. In China, external support allows ethnic minority areas and ethnic groups with smaller populations to be self-reliant in terms of cultural and economic progress. This helps the ethnic groups with smaller populations join other ethnic groups on the path toward comprehensive modernization. This will help the country build a national community because it fosters equality, unity, mutual assistance, and harmony between all ethnic groups. By adopting these policy measures, the Chinese government aims to build an enabling socio-cultural environment that supports the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. As a result, “ethnic minorities,

ethnic-minority regions, ethnic relations, and the Chinese nation have undergone profound changes” (Xi 2019).

When it comes to the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations, Chinese researchers have focused on both macro and micro perspectives. The macro perspective revolves around China’s policies for supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. It elucidates the entire process of policy formulation, implementation, evaluation, and feedback. This is done to highlight the importance and necessity of these policies. The micro perspective emphasizes the modernization transformation of a particular ethnic group with a small population and their settlement areas. This perspective focuses on the social history, spoken and written language, religion, customs, and other cultural characteristics of those being researched, striving to comprehensively document the cultural features of ethnic minorities through fieldwork, in order to cope with the impact of modernization. Based on previous studies, this paper considers all of China’s previous and current policies and practices for supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. These policies and practices are broken into three stages: 1) initial exploration, 2) targeted assistance, and 3) specialized planning. The paper summarizes the theoretical sources, policy development, and practical experience behind China’s efforts to support these ethnic groups. It documents the Chinese experience and references. The Chinese experience should be a resource for other multi-ethnic countries worldwide that want to address the issue of imbalanced and insufficient ethnic development. Furthermore, China will focus on enhancing the internal growth drivers of ethnic groups with smaller populations. It will promote the high-quality development of areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations by practicing a new development philosophy.

Methods

This paper applies the method of literature research. By reviewing relevant theories, the paper collects, consolidates, and summarizes every document of the central government that concerns the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. These documents include all policies, measures, plans, and principles on this subject since the founding of the People’s Republic of China. Additionally, three policy stages are specified to give a conclusive summary of China’s achievements and practices.

Results and discussion

The evolution of China’s policies for supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations

China’s policies for supporting ethnic groups with smaller populations are a series of measures adopted by the Chinese government to accomplish several

goals. These goals include addressing imbalanced and insufficient development, assisting ethnic groups with smaller populations, and promoting their sustainable development in every domain (political, economic, cultural, social, and ecological). These policies aim to foster internal growth drives and facilitate holistic progress. As an institutional arrangement, these policies are rooted in the governing philosophy of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the inherent requirements of the socialist system. The scope, content, methods, and key conditions of these supportive policies have varied over different periods. This was due to the influence and constraints of the political, economic, and cultural environments (at home and abroad) during those times. Therefore, this paper divides the relevant policies and their implementation into three periods.

Initial exploration (1949–1977)

During the period of initial exploration, the Chinese government had to change a backward situation starting from scratch. They chiefly supported the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations through ethnic identification and mutual visits between the central government and ethnic-minority regions. The visits were made to implement its policy for ethnic equality, improve ethnic relations, and pursue common prosperity for all ethnic groups. This is part of the country's governance philosophy.

Soon after its founding in 1949, the People's Republic of China established the policy of ethnic equality and unity, as well as regional ethnic autonomy. This initiated the exploration of shared prosperity for all ethnic groups. The policy had several important effects on China. First, the 1954 Constitution stipulated that "all ethnic minorities should have an appropriate number of deputies" at the National People's Congress. This provision guaranteed the right of all ethnic minorities (including those with smaller populations) to participate in the administration of state affairs. Many ethnic groups obtained their first deputies in the National People's Congress. Additionally, all discriminatory or derogatory names of ethnicities and regions were changed to eliminate ethnic discrimination. Second, ethnic identification and large-scale Social-historical Surveys were conducted to resolve the confusion around ethnic distribution, ambiguous ethnic names, and unclear ethnic history. These were problems left from the previous era before 1949. Third, mutual visits between the central government and ethnic minority areas were organized. The central government sent delegations to ethnic-minority regions. Ethnic-minority regions residing at China's borders sent representatives to economically advanced parts of China. Fourth, democratic reforms and a socialist transformation were implemented to support the social and economic development of ethnic minorities. These reforms guided those with smaller populations to embark on the path of socialism. Some ethnic groups were still at the later stage of primitive society when the PRC was founded in 1949. These groups¹ leapfrogged into socialism, which was a miracle in the history of human development.

¹ These ethnic groups chiefly include the Jingpo, Lisu, Derung, Nu, Blang, Va, Jino, and De'ang in Yunnan Province; the Oroqen and Ewenke people residing in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang Province, as well as some communities of the Li ethnicity in Hainan Island.

During this period, China faced numerous challenges. The government mobilized ethnic minorities to contribute to the building of a socialist country. For example, Ali Mujiang, who is of Uzbek ethnicity, was appointed as a member of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission (Huang 1993). The Sunan Yugur Autonomous County² was established to promote ethnic unity and the development of stable animal husbandry. Some ethnic minorities leapfrogged from primitive society to socialist society like the Jingpo and De'ang ethnic groups. These ethnic minorities were mobilized to establish mutual aid groups for production (Wang 1999). These policy practices helped to eliminate ethnic barriers, improve ethnic relations, and deepen the sense of national belonging of the Chinese nation. In this stage, China demonstrated the advantages of its political system and governance structure.

Targeted assistance (1978–2000)

During the period of targeted assistance, the Chinese government was committed to promoting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. Specifically, the government focused on developing the social and economic progress of these groups and protecting their rights. China defined its scope and development goals for ethnic groups with smaller populations, laying the foundation for broader development plans.

After China launched the reform and opened up in 1978, the policies and practices to support the economic development of areas inhabited by ethnic groups entered a new stage. The CPC Central Committee and the State Council paid “attention to the 11 ethnic minorities, such as the Hezhen, Russian, and De’ang ethnic groups, that have not implemented Regional Ethnic Autonomy; as these ethnic minorities have a small population.” They wanted to “highlight the implementation of the ethnic equality policy and provide more support in terms of economic, educational and cultural development.”³ Following this approach had three main results.

First, the political rights of ethnic groups with smaller populations were guaranteed. The *Electoral Law of the National People’s Congress and Local People’s Congresses of the People’s Republic of China* (promulgated in 1979) stipulated that “other ethnic minorities with exceptionally small populations inhabiting in concentrated communities shall each have at least one deputy.” In addition to this, in December 1983, the State Council issued the *Notice on the Establishment of Ethnic Townships*. Nine out of the 11 ethnic groups with smaller populations that did not practice regional autonomy established ethnic townships.

Second, efforts were made to promote social and economic development in areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations. China formulated and

² Official website of the People’s Government of Sunan Yugur Autonomous County: http://www.gssn.gov.cn/sngk/sngk/202204/t20220406_822954.html.

³ National Ethnic Affairs Commission. 1997. *Selected Compilation of Ethnic Policies and Regulations of the People’s Republic of China*, 51. Beijing: China Civil Aviation Publishing House.

implemented a series of major policies to support the development of areas with ethnic minorities, such as the paired-up assistance policy introduced in 1979.

In 1986, China introduced a planned, organized, and large-scale poverty alleviation and development program nationwide. By the end of 1992, the number of impoverished rural citizens with unmet basic living needs plunged from 250 million (1978) to 80 million.

In the 1990s, Deng Xiaoping proposed that economically advanced regions should provide more support for the development of the central and western regions. During the Second Central Ethnic Work Conference convened in 1999, it was stated that “the conditions for accelerating the development of the central and western regions, especially concerning the western development drive, have basically matured” (Jiang 1999). This statement clarified the government’s focus on supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. During this time, China worked to resolve the issue of uneven development (left over from history) and minimize the widening social and economic gaps between ethnic groups and between their settlements. Policies such as the strategy of opening up the border areas (1992), the Priority Poverty Alleviation Program (1994–2000), and the Action Plan for Bringing Prosperity to Border Areas and the Residents There (1999) all included support for ethnic groups with smaller populations.

The third thing that resulted from China’s policy approach was active efforts to help ethnic groups pursue social undertakings. Specifically, the government focused on the restoration and improvement of ethnic primary, secondary, and ethnic normal schools. Additionally, they improved bilingual education, strengthened the protection and excavation of ethnic minorities’ cultural relics and historical sites, and increased investment in education, culture, and medical facilities in areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations.

Significant social and economic progress was made by ethnic groups with smaller populations during this period. The remarkable results of Hezhen ethnic groups in Heilongjiang Province are a good example. From 1996 to 2000, the average annual total income of four Hezhen villages, including Jiejinkou Village, reached 35.89 million RMB. This was 75.1% higher than the total income recorded in 1995 and 297% higher than the total income in 1990 (Shu 2001). In 1998, Hezhen became the first ethnic minority in China to complete the nine-year compulsory education task (Xia 2002).

In 1999, Mr. Fei Xiaotong, a distinguished sociologist and anthropologist, advised the National Ethnic Affairs Commission to include assistance for the 22 ethnic groups with a population of less than 100,000 people in China’s “10th Five-Year Plan”. He believed that these ethnic groups had a small population and weak voices, making them easily overlooked. In his opinion, they required special assistance from the central government. Subsequently, the CPC Committee of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission decided to include the survey of China’s ethnic groups with smaller populations in its work plan for the year 2000. It carried out a large-scale survey on the 22 minority groups. Through extensive research and investigation, the National Ethnic Affairs Commission submitted a proposal

to the State Council for supporting the development of the 22 ethnic groups with smaller populations.

Specialized planning (2000–Now)

During this period, the Chinese government defined the scope of ethnic groups with smaller populations and formulated three special plans to support their development, enabling leapfrog development.

For the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the Chinese government has had a singular, crucial governance goal: to build a moderately prosperous society that is of a high standard and can benefit its citizens (well over 1 billion people). The government has emphasized that all 56 ethnic groups should seek shared development and moderate prosperity. They believe that no single ethnic group should be left behind, regardless of their population size. To this end, the state increased its support of ethnic groups with smaller populations both financially and by establishing special planning policies to aid them.

In August 2001, the General Office of the State Council approved the proposal of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission on supporting the development of Ethnic Groups with a population below 100,000. This marked the official implementation of China's policy to support ethnic groups with smaller populations. Subsequently, the relevant departments of the State Council formulated the *Program to Support the Ethnic Minorities with Smaller Populations (2005–2010)*, the *Program to Support the Ethnic Minorities with Smaller Populations (2011–2015)*, and the *Program for Developing Ethnic Minority Areas and Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations during the 13th Five-Year Plan Period*. These were special planning policies designed to support ethnic groups with smaller populations (see Table 1).

During this period, in the areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations, government departments introduced a series of support policies. Yunnan Province implemented the *Yunnan Provincial Program for Supporting the Development of Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations (2006–2010)* and the *Yunnan Provincial Program for Supporting the Development of Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations (2011–2015)*. Longling County in Yunnan Province formulated the *Program of Longshan Town for Supporting the Development of Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations (Achang Ethnic Group)*. During the *12th Five-Year Plan (2011–2015)*, Shidian County developed the *Implementation Plan of Bailang Township and Laoyuan Township for Comprehensively Supporting the Blang Ethnic Group (2015–2017)*. Additionally, the provinces and autonomous regions of Guangxi, Guizhou, Inner Mongolia, and Heilongjiang (among others) recorded progress in the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations.

Between 2005 and 2010, the state invested a total of 3.751 billion RMB (equivalent to about 513 million USD⁴) in support funds and implemented

⁴ The exchange rate is calculated based on the data at 05:00 pm on October 7, 2023. The exchange rate between RMB and USD for other amounts in this article is the same.

Table 1 Three Special Plans to Support the Development of Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations

Year	Name	Issued by	Scope	Objective	Measure
2005	Program to Support the Ethnic Minorities with Smaller Populations (2005–2010)	National Ethnic Affairs Commission, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, People's Bank of China, State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development	The program covers 22 ethnic minorities with a population of less than 100,000 ^a , totaling 630,000. This includes areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations in 86 counties, 238 townships, and 640 administrative villages across 10 provinces (autonomous regions)	Strengthening infrastructure construction, adjusting economic structure, seeking progress in science and technology, education, healthcare, and culture Specific objectives: The four accesses, the five availabilities, and the three reaches ^b	Six dimensions: increasing support in infrastructure construction, fiscal funds, credit funds, and social services; intensifying talent training; strengthening paired-up assistance
2011	Program to Support the Ethnic Minorities with smaller populations (2011–2015)	National Ethnic Affairs Commission, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, People's Bank of China, State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development	The program covers 28 ethnic minorities with a population of less than 300,000 ^c , totaling 1.695 million people. This includes areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations in 2,119 administrative villages, 71 ethnic townships, 16 autonomous counties, and two autonomous prefectures across 13 provinces (autonomous regions) and Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps	Enhancing infrastructure construction, developing distinctive and advantageous industries, promoting social services, strengthening ethnic cultural development, boosting human resource development, and building harmonious homes for ethnic unity Specific objectives: The five accesses and the ten availabilities ^d ; the one reduction, two reaches, and three upgrades ^e	Five dimensions: increasing support in terms of funding, financial services, paired-up assistance, and talent development; intensifying the implementation of existing policies; providing key support in policies, funding, and projects

Table 1 (continued)

Year	Name	Issued by	Scope	Objective	Measure
2016	Program for Developing Ethnic Minority Areas and Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations During the 13 th Five-Year Plan Period	State Council	The program covers 28 ethnic minorities with a population of less than 300,000 ^f totaling 1.89 million ^g . These people reside in the 2,390 administrative villages of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps and 13 provinces (autonomous regions), encompassing approximately 10,000 natural villages	Helping all ethnic groups achieve moderate prosperity in all respects, improving development infrastructure, fostering more robust internal growth drivers, inheriting and promoting ethnic cultures, and strengthening human resource development Specific objectives: The one reach, two deregistrations, three guarantees, four accesses, and eight requirements ^h	Nine aspects: fiscal policy, investment policy, financial policy, industrial policy, land policy, social policy, environmental policy, talent policy, assistance policy

^fThe Maonan, Salar, Blang, Tajik, Achang, Pumi, Ewenki, Nu, Jing, Jino, De'ang, Bonan, Russian, Yugur, Uzbek, Monpa, Oroqen, Derung, Tatar, Hezhen, Gaoshan, and Lhoba

^gThe four accesses: access to roads, electricity, water, and radio and television; the five availabilities: availability of schools, safe drinking water, basic farmland or pastures, affordable housing, and health clinics; the three reaches: net income per capita, output of major agricultural products per capita, and coverage of nine-year compulsory education reaching the national poverty alleviation requirements and "Two Basics;" poverty alleviation plan

^hThe Maonan, Salar, Blang, Tajik, Achang, Pumi, Ewenki, Nu, Jing, Jino, De'ang, Bonan, Russian, Yugur, Uzbek, Monpa, Oroqen, Derung, Tatar, Hezhen, Gaoshan, Lhoba, Jingpo, Daur, Kirgiz, Xibe, Mtlao, and Tu

ⁱThe five accesses: villages inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations should have access to roads, electricity, radio and television signals, information, and biogas; the ten availabilities: availability of safe drinking water, affordable housing, toilets, high-yielding and stable agricultural land or income-increasing industries, preschool education, medical clinics, cultural and agricultural libraries, sports and fitness facilities, venues for ethnic cultural activities, offices, rural supermarkets, and trustworthy agricultural supply stores

^jThe one reduction: reducing the number of impoverished populations in areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations by half or more; the two reaches: the net income per capita of about half of farmers and herdsmen should reach or surpass the national average; the three upgrades: significantly upgrading the level of infrastructure guarantees, livelihood guarantees, and self-development capabilities

^kThe Lhoba, Gaoshan, Hezhen, Tatar, Derung, Oroqen, Monpa, Uzbek, Yugur, Russian, Bonan, De'ang, Jino, Nu, Ewenke, Pumi, Achang, Blang, Salar, Maonan, Jingpo, Daur, Kirgiz, Xibe, Mtlao, and Tu

^lAt the time, these ethnic groups accounted for only 0.14% of the national population and 1.66% of the total ethnic minority population

^mThe one reach: rural residents per capita disposable income growth should reach or exceed the local average; the two deregistrations: deregistering poverty-stricken villages and individuals identified through the poverty registration system; the three guarantees: guarantees should be provided for compulsory education, basic healthcare, and safe housing; the four accesses: access to hardened roads, passenger bus services, broadband internet, and e-commerce; the eight requirements: efforts should be made

Source: Official website of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission: <https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/xxgk/201110/1074078.shtml>, Jan. 19, 2019

11,168 projects through these special planning policies. From 2012 to 2015, the central and local governments together launched 9,356 projects with a total investment of 6.607 billion RMB (equivalent to about 905 million USD).⁵ From 2016 to 2018, the central government allocated 2.1 billion RMB (equivalent to about 288 million USD) in special support funds. The funds and support projects upgraded the infrastructure of areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations. These funds and projects also facilitated long-term social and economic progress, significantly improved public services, and enabled rapid development in these regions.

In 2018, the 2,390 administrative villages inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations recorded an annual net income of 8,387.62 RMB (equivalent to about 1,148 USD) per farmer. Of that income, 370.37 RMB (equivalent to about 51 USD) came from special support programs. This annual net income was 9.49 times their income in 2003. The number of impoverished people was only 122,100. This was a huge drop from 2014 when they numbered 938,000. The incidence of poverty among the targeted ethnic groups dropped to 3.64%, down from 27.5% in 2014. This was 0.34% lower than in other ethnic minority areas. These drops were a result of the government's funding and policies that ensured adequate food and clothing for poor rural households and offered them access to compulsory education, basic medical care, and safe housing.⁶

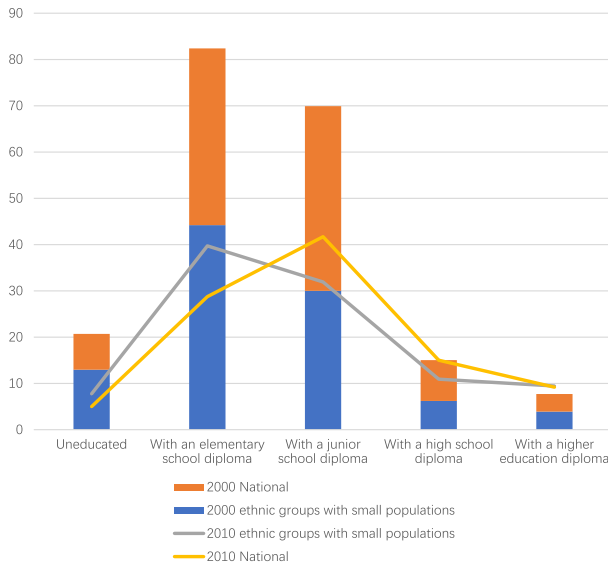
During this time, ethnic groups with smaller populations saw significant progress in terms of access to education. According to the relevant statistics, from 2000 to 2010, the average length of education for those aged six and above continued to increase. Additionally, the number of illiterates and individuals with only elementary education backgrounds decreased. And the number of people holding junior high school and high school diplomas rose. In 2010, on average, 9.44% of people from these 28 ethnic groups with smaller populations received higher education. This was slightly higher than the national average (9.19%). Each of the 28 ethnic groups now has master's and doctoral degree holders among their population. In addition to this, 10 ethnic groups (Jing, Uzbek, Xibe, Daur, Ewenki, Gaoshan, Oroqen, Tatar, Hezhen, and Russian) have recorded an average length of education that's higher than the national average (8.76 years) Fig. 1.^{7,8}

⁵ Economic Development Department of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission and South-Central Minzu University. 2016. *Compilation of Materials from Training Courses for Officials Within the National Ethnic Affairs Commission System on Verification and Statistics Concerning Areas Inhabited by Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations*, 3–22. Dalian Minzu University.

⁶ Source: Documents from the National Ethnic Affairs Commission for supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations.

⁷ Department of Economic Development, National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, 54 55 Department of General Statistics of National Economy, National Bureau of Statistics, ed. 2013. *中国民族统计年鉴 562012* (Chinese Ethnic Statistics Yearbook 2012), 57. Beijing: China Statistics Press.

⁸ *Department of Economic Development, National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China*, 59 *Department of General Statistics of National Economy, National Bureau of Statistics, ed. 2005. 中国民族统计年鉴 2004* (Chinese Ethnic Statistics Yearbook 2004). Beijing: The Ethnic Publishing House.



Source: Economic Development Department of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Department of Comprehensive National Economic Statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). *China's Ethnic Statistical Yearbook 2012* & *China's Ethnic Statistical Yearbook 2004*

Fig. 1 Average Length of Education for Individuals Aged Six and above from Ethnic Groups with smaller populations

Statistics that specifically cover ethnic groups with smaller populations are only available up until 2010. After 2010, due to the overall transformation of national policies and planning, statistics on these 28 ethnic minorities were included in the overall statistics of ethnic minority areas. Specific information is available from the regional development programs and the development plans for supporting ethnic groups with smaller populations. In 2016, the State Council issued the *Program for Developing Ethnic Minority Areas and Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations During the 13th Five-Year Plan Period*. In 2014, 2019, and 2021, China proposed that “speeding up the development of ethnic minority areas represents an essential building block and will guarantee balanced and sustainable development in China”⁹ (National Ethnic Affairs Commission 2015). Additionally, the government stated that “efforts should be made to help ethnic minority areas achieve moderate prosperity and modernization together with the whole country”¹⁰ (National Ethnic Affairs Commission 2021). The country incorporated this new development philosophy concerning ethnic minority areas into its new development trajectory. It aimed to include ethnic minority areas in

⁹ National Ethnic Affairs Commission. 2015. *Handbook on the Guiding Principles of the Central Ethnic Work Conference*, 142. Ethnic Publishing House.

¹⁰ National Ethnic Affairs Commission. *Consolidating the Sense of National Identity: Handbook on the Guiding Principles of the National Commendation Conference on Ethnic Unity and Progress*, 121. Ethnic Publishing House, 2021.

the unified national market, promote ethnic unity and harmony, achieve high-quality development, and enable the integrated development of the eastern, central, and western regions. Overall, these three periods of policy evolution indicate that China's focus on developing ethnic groups with smaller populations has shifted from individual ethnic groups to regional development. Moreover, ethnic minority areas still face natural and historical limitations. They also face several challenges, such as the inadequate development of public services and infrastructure, structural resource shortages, and conflicts between ecological conservation and economic development. Therefore, since China is at a new starting point, it is essential to vigorously support ethnic minority areas and encourage them to adopt the new development paradigm and achieve high-quality development¹¹ (National Ethnic Affairs Commission 2022).

China's practical experience in supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations

Guided by the Marxist theory of ethnicity, the CPC adopted three fundamental principles for managing the ethnic relations of a unified multi-ethnic country. These principles are ethnic equality, ethnic unity, and shared prosperity of all ethnic groups. When compared with where the country started, these principles display a major theoretical innovation in China's national governance.

Furthermore, the three fundamental principles are enshrined in the Constitution. According to the country's Constitution, all ethnic groups of the People's Republic of China are equal. The state shall protect the lawful rights and interests of all ethnic minorities. It shall uphold and promote relations of equality, unity, mutual assistance, and harmony among all ethnic groups. And it shall make every effort to promote the shared prosperity of all the country's ethnic groups. In 2019, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China listed the following principles and practices related to ethnic affairs as one of the 13 major advantages of China's political system and governance structure: "upholding equality between all ethnic groups, creating a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation to work jointly for common prosperity and development".

China's practices (principles, subjects, policies, institutions, driving forces, and development patterns that support the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations) represent the country's concrete efforts toward the goal of shared prosperity for all ethnic groups. The following paragraphs will summarize the experience of China's practices in this regard.

¹¹ The United Front Work Department of CPC Central Committee and National Ethnic Affairs Commission. 2022. *Handbook on the Guiding Principles of the Central Ethnic Work Conference*, 120-121. Ethnic Publishing House.

National governance: pursuing equality, unity, and shared prosperity for all ethnic groups, no matter how big or small

Ethnic groups with smaller populations had long been discriminated against and oppressed in history before 1949, so equal rights for them are invaluable. The CPC upholds equality for all ethnic groups, regardless of their population, history, or level of development. Some of the smaller ethnic groups jumped several stages of social development and directly embarked on the socialist path. In so doing, they completed the most extensive and profound process of social change in Chinese history. Since 2012, China has accelerated the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations with large-scale support, which significantly enhanced these ethnic groups' sense of fulfillment and happiness. The socialist ethnic relations of equality, unity, mutual assistance, and harmony have been constantly consolidated and developed among these groups (Wang 2019).

Establishing a comprehensive policy system with Chinese characteristics for supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations

Supporting the development of the ethnic groups with smaller populations is a long-term and systematic task. But this task fully conforms to the CPC's ethnic priorities, as well as the general laws of ethnic work. Additionally, the country has also built a supportive policy system with Chinese characteristics that takes into account the unique features of the areas inhabited by these ethnic groups. This policy system encompasses both special policies for supporting development and major state policies that provide other support for the ethnic groups with smaller populations (see Table 2).

The policy system demonstrates several unique features. One is that it combines an overarching design with dynamic adjustments. The central government clearly defines the basic values, guidelines, and objectives of these policies. Local governments then actively respond to the requirements from the central government and adopt a cluster of support policies. After that, the content of these policies is promptly adjusted according to the varying conditions of the current historical periods. China formulates a plan for supporting these ethnic groups with smaller populations every five years and conducts mid-term policy evaluations. Another unique feature is that the system pursues holistic progress with target-specific measures. The system regards the 22 (now 28) ethnic groups with smaller populations as a whole when conducting policy implementation. It also adheres to unified standards and comprehensive assessments, and it seeks holistic progress across provinces, autonomous regions, counties, towns, and administrative villages where smaller ethnic groups reside. While doing all this, the system also requires departments and local governments to formulate specific support measures to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

These overall guidelines, policies, and target-specific plans and measures allow China to adopt a unified yet diverse approach that encompasses both macro and micro policies. This kind of system enhances the precision, effectiveness, and

Table 2 Other Major State Policies Providing Support for Smaller Ethnic Groups

Issued year	Name	Issued by	Support Content
2001	<i>Outline of the Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development</i>	State Council	It emphasized the effort to “support the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations” for the first time
2002	<i>Comprehensive Plan for Western Development During the Period of the Tenth Five-Year Plan</i>	National Development and Reform Commission, the Leading Group for Western Region Development of the State Council	It emphasized the effort to support the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations
2002	<i>Proposals for Eliminating Illiteracy in the Course of the Tenth Five-Year Plan</i>	Ministry of Education, the Publicity Department of The CPC Central Committee, the National Ethnic Affairs Commission, etc	It called for the establishment of ethnic minority literacy programs among the 22 ethnic groups with smaller populations
2004	<i>Opinions on Promoting the Action Plan for Bringing Prosperity to Frontier Areas and the Residents There</i>	National Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Ministry of Finance	It determined key counties of the Action Plan for Bringing Prosperity to Frontier Areas and the Residents There. It focused on factors, such as the distribution and population of ethnic groups with smaller populations
2005	<i>Several Provisions for Implementing the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy</i>	State Council	The development of areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations was incorporated into the social and economic development plans. This plan focused on providing targeted support for compulsory education in these areas
2005	<i>Notice on Effectively Promoting Labor Force Training and Employment in Impoverished Areas</i>	Ministry of Labor and Social Security	Encouraged officials to make efforts to create a stronger skills training course for the labor force of ethnic groups with smaller populations. It also encouraged and organized employment transfers of the ethnic groups
2006	<i>The 1st Five-Year Plan for the National Rural Drinking Water Safety Project</i>	Ministry of Water Resources	This plan placed priority on solving the safe drinking water problem of ethnic groups with smaller populations

Table 2 (continued)

Issued year	Name	Issued by	Support Content
2006	<i>Highway and Waterway Transport Development Plan During the Period of the 11th Five-Year Plan</i>	Ministry of Transport	This plan encouraged the continuous effort to support the Action Plan for Bringing Prosperity to Frontier Areas and the Residents There. It also provided road access for the 146 administrative villages inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations
2006	<i>Decision of the Central Committee of the CPC on Several Major Issues Concerning the Building of a Harmonious Socialist Society</i>	CPC Central Committee	Here, the Committee decided that continuous support for ethnic groups with smaller populations should be stepped up
2007	<i>Opinions of the State Council on Establishing and Improving the Policies for Subsidizing Students in Universities of Regular Undergraduate Education, Post-secondary Vocational Schools, and Secondary Vocational Schools from Families with Financial Difficulties</i>	State Council	With this policy, the State Council determined that all financial aid for economically disadvantaged students from ethnic groups with smaller populations would be borne by the central government
2007	<i>Strengthening the Implementation and Operation and management of Rural Drinking Water Safety Projects</i>	National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Health	This set an end date for the government to solve the safe drinking water problem of ethnic groups with smaller populations. The date was the end of the 11 th Five-Year Plan period
2007	<i>Notice on Facilitating Student Loans for Economically Disadvantaged Students</i>	People's Bank of China	This notice communicated that all financial aid for economically disadvantaged students from ethnic groups with smaller populations would be borne by the central government
2009	<i>Several Opinions on Further Developing Ethnic Minority Cultures</i>	State Council	With this, the State Council communicated that the effort to protect the cultural heritage of ethnic groups with smaller populations should be strengthened

Table 2 (continued)

Issued year	Name	Issued by	Support Content
2010	<i>Several Opinions on Further Supporting Economic and Social Development of Gansu Province</i>	General Office of the State Council	Here, the State Council communicated that more efforts should be made to support the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations like the Bonan and the Salar
2011	<i>Several Opinions on Further Promoting the Sound and Rapid Social and Economic Development of Inner Mongolia</i>	State Council	The State Council decided that more effort should be made to support four particular ethnic groups with smaller populations: the Ewenki, Oroqen, Daur, and Russian
2012	<i>Western Development During the Period of the Twelfth Five-year Plan</i>	National Development and Reform Commission	This plan determined that industries with distinctive ethnic characteristics should be developed. Its focus was on ensuring and improving people's livelihoods. Additionally, the plan determined that more support should be provided to ethnic groups with smaller populations
2012	<i>National Land Consolidation Plan (2011–2015)</i>	Ministry of Land and Resources	This plan stated that the sloping farmland regulation campaign should be carried out. Its focus was on areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations
2012	<i>Plan of the Ministry of Culture for Cultural Reform and Development During the Period of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan</i>	Ministry of Culture	This plan determined that the rescue and protection of intangible cultural heritage in western regions and ethnic minority areas should be strengthened. It emphasized strengthening areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations in particular
2012	<i>National Plan for the Development of Education During the Period of the Twelfth Five-year Plan</i>	Ministry of Education	This plan kicked off the effort to develop the education of ethnic groups with smaller populations

Table 2 (continued)

Issued year	Name	Issued by	Support Content
2012	<i>National Plan for Ethnic Minority Languages and Publishing During the Period of the Twelfth Five-year Plan</i>	National Press and Publication Administration	This plan determined the key publishing projects for ethnic minority languages, including <i>The Last Heritage—Native Music of Seven Ethnic Groups with smaller populations in Yunnan</i>
2013	<i>Development Plan for Agriculture and Animal Husbandry in the Southern Foot of the Great Xing'an Mountains (2012–2020)</i>	Ministry of Agriculture	This plan accelerated the development of agriculture and animal husbandry for ethnic groups with smaller populations. The Daur, Xibe, and Kirgiz are good examples as they live on the southern foot of the Great Xing'an Mountains. This plan promoted ethnic unity, progress, and border development/opening up
2013	<i>Plan for the Construction of Bridges to Replace Cableways (2013–2015)</i>	Ministry of Transport and State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development	This plan determined that the cableways of areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations would be replaced. These cableways were the primary source of transportation and would be replaced with safe, convenient, and high-quality bridges
2015	<i>Decision of the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council on Fighting to Win the Tough Battle Against Poverty</i>	CPC Central Committee and State Council	This decision introduced special policy measures for overall poverty alleviation and specifically targeted ethnic groups with smaller populations
2016	<i>Poverty Alleviation Plan for the 13th Five-Year Plan Period</i>	State Council	This plan accelerated the implementation of major infrastructure projects and livelihood projects in ethnic minority areas. It implemented comprehensive poverty alleviation projects for extremely impoverished areas and extremely vulnerable groups among ethnic minorities. It also introduced special policy measures for overall poverty alleviation, targeting ethnic groups with smaller populations

Table 2 (continued)

Issued year	Name	Issued by	Support Content
2018	<i>Guiding Opinions on Further Strengthening the Sports Work of Ethnic Minorities</i>	General Administration of Sport, National Ethnic Affairs Commission	This determined that the inheritance and development of traditional sports culture of ethnic minorities should be promoted
2018	<i>Program for the Reform of Dividing Shared Fiscal Management Powers and Expenditure Responsibilities Between Central and Local Governments in Basic Public Services</i>	General Office of the State Council	This program determined that the central government would fully fund the living allowances for economically disadvantaged students. It also dictated that the central government would provide an additional budget for the sole purpose of offering living allowances to boarding students from ethnic groups with smaller populations
2018	<i>Action Plan for Internet-based Poverty Alleviation</i>	Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, National Development and Reform Commission, etc	This plan decided that special measures and methods for promoting targeted poverty alleviation should be adopted. This poverty alleviation was specifically for impoverished households of ethnic groups with smaller populations
2019	<i>Program for the Reform of Dividing Fiscal Management Powers and Expenditure Responsibilities in the Education Sector</i>	General Office of the State Council	This program established national basic standards for the living allowances of boarding students from ethnic groups with smaller populations. It also stated that the central government would fully bear such allowances

Source: Websites and relevant literature, including www.gov.cn, www.neac.gov.cn, and www.pkulaw.com/law

feasibility of the support policies involved. The last unique feature of this system is that it prioritizes the synergy between multiple state policies. From the initial large-scale ethnic survey, social transformation program to the reform and opening up policies, the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations has always been part of major state policies. This is especially true of policies adopted in the twenty-first century, including paired-up assistance, the Western development drive, the poverty alleviation program, and the action plan for bringing prosperity to border areas and residents. The synergy between the many major policies and special policies provides multiplied support, which has boosted their combined performance.

Building a government-led support system with extensive participation

In the past, government-led initiatives have played a predominant role in supporting ethnic groups with smaller populations. These initiatives had an emphasis on the leadership of the CPC committees and governments at all levels in relevant provinces and autonomous regions. In areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations, the heads of the county governments (or banners, military-administrative organizations of the Man nationality) are primarily responsible for implementing such initiatives.¹² The *Program to Support the Ethnic Minorities with Smaller Populations (2011–2015)* adopted in 2011 stated the following: “We will adopt a government-led approach with extensive participation from non-governmental forces, strengthen the leading role of the government, fully leverage market mechanisms, provide more effective paired-up assistance, encourage the participation of all sectors, and stimulate people of all ethnic groups to unlock their potential and initiative”.¹³ Since then, China has built a government-led support system with extensive participation. Participants in the system include the central government, local governments, enterprises, social organizations, farmers, and herdsmen.

The first and primary role for supporting ethnic groups with smaller populations belongs to the government. Governments at all levels play a major role in policy formulation and implementation. This covers resource allocation, integration of non-governmental forces, platform development, and financial investment. Non-governmental forces are also important participants when it comes to supporting these ethnic groups. Specifically, they are encouraged to leverage their advantages to contribute to the development of the ethnic groups through cooperation, joint development, and procurement. Advantages they may leverage include capital, technology, resources, organization, and manpower. Non-governmental forces offer support in areas like infrastructure, practical technology, industrial cooperation, ecological conservation, culture, education, healthcare

¹² National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People’s Republic of China. 2011. <https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/xxgk/201101/1074078.shtml>. Accessed 19 January 2019.

¹³ National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People’s Republic of China. 2011. <https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/xxgk/201107/1074074.shtml>. Accessed 19 January 2019.

services, employment training, and welfare assistance. Their support provides significant momentum for the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. The last key role in supporting smaller ethnic groups belongs to the diverse participants involved in this process. Positive interactions among all participants enable synergized support. Through effective communication, coordination, and integration mechanisms, participants make well-coordinated efforts to meet the same policy objectives. These efforts have helped to establish a government-led development support system with distinctive Chinese characteristics and extensive participation. This has unlocked innovation and progress for these groups.

Developing institutional support mechanisms with Chinese characteristics

China has endeavored to establish robust institutional mechanisms for supporting the sound development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. The following mechanisms have been established: the leadership mechanism, the implementation mechanism, the project management mechanism, the fund operation mechanism, the publicity mechanism, and the assessment mechanism. The country did this in six distinctive steps.

First, the country established an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism for supporting the development of these ethnic groups. Founded by the National Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Inter-ministerial Joint Meeting for Supporting the Development of Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations leads, organizes, and coordinates the implementation of special plans for supporting the development of smaller ethnic groups.¹⁴ At the local level, Yunnan, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces established joint meeting systems. The relevant prefectures, counties, banners, and townships set up special agencies to ensure the implementation of support policies and measures down to specific villages and households. Second, the government established an implementation mechanism. Under this mechanism it was decided that the central government would provide support, provincial governments would take chief responsibility, local governments would implement the support policies, and villages would deliver the support to all villagers. Third, the country set up a project management mechanism for supporting ethnic groups with smaller populations to ensure the successful implementation of each project. Fourth, a fund operation mechanism was established. Special national funds were appropriately tilted toward areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations. Additionally, more local government funds, especially at the provincial level, were invested in the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. Fifth, a comprehensive publicity mechanism was put into place to extensively publicize the guidelines and policies for supporting the development of these smaller ethnic groups. This mechanism also highlighted the significance of supporting ethnic group development and

¹⁴ National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China. 2011. <https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/xxgk/201107/1074074.shtml>. Accessed 19 January 2019.

promoted exemplary experiences, practices, and achievements when it came to implementation. Sixth, a robust assessment mechanism was developed to strengthen supervision, inspections, and audit oversight. This mechanism also monitored and evaluated the implementation of support plans, assessed the results, and ensured the effective implementation of support policies and fund projects. These support mechanisms embody the institutional advantages of China's approach to supporting smaller ethnic groups. The country is committed to "coordinating all efforts to complete key national undertakings." This philosophy and the resulting approach provide institutional guarantees for the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations.

Fostering growth driver mechanisms that combine external assistance with internal drivers

As pointed out by Carl Marx, "Not only the relation of one nation to others but also the whole internal structure of the nation itself depends on the stage of development reached by its production and its internal and external intercourse." (Marx and Engels 1846) His remark suggests that the development of ethnic groups depends on the interaction between internal and external factors. This is the result of the combined effect of external and internal momentum. When it comes to supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations, central and local government assistance is the most crucial external driving force. Meanwhile, non-government forces act as the propellant for development. The combination of external assistance and internal drivers are the external and internal factors behind the historic leap of China's ethnic groups with smaller populations.

Internal momentum is the fundamental driving force for ethnic development. As emphasized in the *Program to Support the Ethnic Minorities with Smaller Populations (2011–2015)*, the transformation of development patterns and the enhancement of self-development capabilities are the chief priority.¹⁵ The internal drivers for ethnic development include factor inputs, industrial development, cultural impetus, and innovation drive. There are several examples of how internal drivers can be used for ethnic development. The Russian Village in Eerguna City (Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region) has created a model of development that combines folk culture with tourism by exploring internal growth drivers. The Aoluguya Ewenki Township has become China's "township of reindeer culture" (Geng 2019). In Dongxing City (Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), the Jing ethnic group has adopted a development model that combines tourism and traditional handicrafts. The Derung ethnic group in Yunnan province has developed an integrated tourism model combining ecological sightseeing, ethnic cultural experiences, and biodiversity research. The Derung group's model

¹⁵ National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China. 2011. <https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/xxgk/201107/1074074.shtml>. Accessed 19 January 2019.

in particular yielded remarkable results. Establishing a growth driver mechanism allows ethnic groups with smaller populations to explore more internal momentum and stop relying solely on external assistance. This leads to moderate prosperity.

Upgrading the ethnic development patterns for the comprehensive development of ethnic groups with smaller populations

Ethnic development involves the improvement of the conditions for ethnic survival and evolution, both qualitatively and quantitatively (Jin 2007). In this vein, the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations encompasses a wide range of implications and topics. It covers politics, economics, culture, society, and ecology. In light of different natural historical conditions and needs, ethnic groups with smaller populations have upgraded their development patterns to seek shared prosperity and moderate prosperity in all respects. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the development patterns of ethnic groups with smaller populations have seen three upgrades.

The first upgrade they've seen is transformative development. Socialism is the only road for all ethnic groups to thrive and prosper. As Marx and Engels stated, "In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another will also be put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to" (Marx and Engels 2012). Through socialist transformation and democratic reforms, ethnic groups with smaller populations have forged new social norms and embarked on a new path of socialist development. Additionally, these groups have established a new political system, community-level social organizations, and autonomous regions. All of this together led to a remarkable transformation.

The second upgrade that these ethnic groups have seen is the development-oriented approach. Since the reform and opening up in 1978, ethnic groups with smaller populations have followed a path of development centered around economic growth like the rest of the country. They have focused on the development of agriculture, animal husbandry, and related industries by intensifying their exploitation of natural resources. Despite this, gaps between ethnic minority areas and economically advanced regions have widened. This is due to unfavorable production and market conditions, low levels of development, inadequate emphasis on people's livelihoods, and insufficient human capital development.

The third upgrade they've seen is comprehensive development. Since the twenty-first century, the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations has no longer focused solely on economic quantity, speed, and scale. Instead, they have started to prioritize scientific and comprehensive development. This is in response to China's goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. As per the *Program to Support the Ethnic Minorities with Smaller Populations (2011–2015)*, efforts should be made to pursue well-coordinated and comprehensive development. The *Program for Developing Ethnic Minority Areas and Ethnic Groups with Smaller Populations During the 13th Five-Year Plan*

Period stated that the goal of comprehensive development is to achieve a high rate of sustained economic growth, record steady progress in social undertakings, help ethnic cultures thrive, register marked improvement in ecological conditions, and improve ethnic unity.¹⁶ One example, in particular, makes it evident that upgrading development patterns is central to supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations. With 70% of its population residing in Huanjiang County (of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region) the Maonan ethnic group received poverty alleviation support and shifted their development patterns. This helped them improve the net income per capita of impoverished individuals in their region from 3,570.9 RMB (about 489 USD) in 2015 to 11,756.7 RMB (about 1610 USD) in 2019. Moreover, the incidence of poverty plunged from 19.56% in 2015 to 1.48% in 2019. Soon after, the coverage of industries with unique ethnic characteristics reached 100%, and the entire Maonan ethnic group was lifted out of poverty.

Recommendations for supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations after 2020

All 28 ethnic groups with smaller populations shook off absolute poverty by the end of 2020. However, their self-development capabilities remain weak, and narrowing the development gap will be a long-term endeavor. Therefore, the overall stability of existing assistance policies must be maintained,¹⁷ and a comprehensive long-term support policy system needs to be established. Furthermore, efforts should be made to speed up the modernization of rural areas inhabited by ethnic groups with smaller populations. China should foster a new pattern of integrated urban–rural development and improve the modern economic system in areas inhabited by ethnic groups. Additionally, the country needs to explore the coordinated development of new industrialization, informatization, urbanization, agricultural modernization, and ecological conservation. The high-quality cultural development of ethnic groups with smaller populations should be prioritized. The focus should be on the protection and inheritance of outstanding ethnic cultures. First-class ethnic and cultural industries should be fostered. Investment in fundamental cultural domains should be increased, and public cultural services should be enhanced.

¹⁶ The State Council The People's Republic of China. 2017. The 13th Five-Year Plan for Promoting the Development of Ethnic Minority Areas and Ethnic Groups with smaller populations. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-01/24/content_5162950.html

¹⁷ The State Council The People's Republic of China. 2020. *Speech at the Symposium on Securing a Decisive Victory in Poverty Alleviation by Xi Jinping*: http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-03/06/content_5488151.htm.

Conclusion

From initial exploration to targeted assistance to special planning, China's policies of supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations have only grown stronger. In the exploration stage, the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China recognized the existence of ethnic minorities, promoted the improvement of ethnic relations, and formulated policies and systems for ethnic equality, common prosperity, and development. The government also enhanced the sense of identity of various ethnic groups within the country and laid a stable social foundation. In the second stage, through targeted assistance, the 28 ethnic groups with smaller populations witnessed significant improvement at the economic and social development levels. In the third stage, these 28 ethnic groups achieved leapfrog development in terms of economy, society, culture, ecology, and several other aspects.

In this way, China has provided tangible support for ethnic groups with smaller populations through a series of policies and plans, enabling leapfrog development. China's development plans for ethnic groups with smaller populations are formulated based on thorough research. They take into account a variety of factors, such as population size, geographic location, human and ecological conditions, and levels of development. China's support policies have achieved their intended objectives and effectively addressed the development issues of ethnic groups with smaller populations. Extreme poverty was eliminated in all 28 ethnic groups with smaller populations. The ethnic groups achieved moderate prosperity in all respects and are moving toward comprehensive modernization. The Chinese government has achieved its goals of supporting the development of ethnic groups with smaller populations in an orderly manner through several stages, and it should continue to provide support for these ethnic groups. In the future, based on the moderate prosperity goal, the development of these ethnic groups should focus on cultural and ecological aspects. People's desire for a better life should be the motivation and goal of China's modernization drive. China should continue to strive for the high-quality development of ethnic groups with smaller populations and facilitate the holistic progress of ethnic minority areas. Only by doing this can they achieve the "modernization of common prosperity for all".

Acknowledgements Not applicable.

Authors' contributions Yazhou Shi proposed research ideas and formulated overall research goals; Confirm the final submitted version of the paper. Rui Gao wrote the first draft, participated in the revision of the paper, and adjusted the format of the paper. Rui Wang adjusts, revises, and writes parts of the paper, collecting and processing data. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding This paper is a phased achievement of the major research project of philosophy and social science research of the Ministry of Education, "Research on the Practice and Enlightenment of Ethnic Policies in World Multi-ethnic Countries". (Project approval number: 15JZD034).

Availability of data and materials The data used and analyzed in the study are available from the author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Comments

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