

From Spatial Interweaving to Institutional Integration: The Logic of Formation and Policy Optimization of Ethnic Commonality in Yunnan

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Abstract: The formation of ethnic commonality in Yunnan is characterized by distinct spatial interweaving. The diversity of its geographical environment, the connectivity of historical transportation corridors, and the rapid urbanization process have jointly shaped an interwoven residential pattern characterized by broad-scale mixed residence, small-scale concentrated settlement, and interlaced cohabitation among multiple ethnic groups. Drawing upon spatial sociology and historical institutionalism as primary analytical frameworks, this paper systematically examines the spatial dynamics underlying the formation of ethnic commonality in Yunnan, reveals the institutional challenges faced in the construction of the interwoven social structure in the new era, and proposes policy optimization paths from "spatial interweaving" to "institutional integration". The analysis reveals that the spatial foundation of ethnic commonality in Yunnan has undergone a transformation from "natural interweaving" to "planned interweaving". However, insufficient flexibility in policy implementation, inadequate interdepartmental information coordination, and the policy inertia stemming from path dependence have posed challenges to the further deepening of the interwoven social structure. In the new era, the transformation of ethnic policies from "physical aggregation" to "social integration" can be achieved through optimizing urban-rural planning, enhancing services for the migrant population, innovating community governance models, and transitioning ethnic policies from "differential inclination" to "inclusive sharing".

Keywords: Spatial interweaving; Institutional integration; Ethnic commonality; Inter-embedded communities; Policy optimization

1. Introduction

Enhancing national commonality is a core proposition for forging a strong sense of the Chinese nation as a community in the new era. In 2021, China's national conference on ethnic affairs identified the consolidation of a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation as the overarching principle guiding ethnic work in the new era. The principle of "enhancing commonality while respecting differences" has since been established as a core tenet, with strengthening commonality serving as the practical orientation for fostering this collective consciousness. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China further emphasizes that we should "take forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation as the main thread and unswervingly follow the correct path of solving ethnic problems with Chinese characteristics". This series of top-level designs has established the fundamental guidelines for ethnic work in the new era. These important policy guidelines later became a key reference for formulating provincial-level ethnic policies.

In terms of the spatial dimension, the Central Conference on Ethnic Work particularly proposed to "actively build interembedded social structures and community environments", this requirement has shifted the cultivation of ethnic commonality from abstract conceptual discourse to concrete spatial practices. Spatially, space is not merely the physical carrier of ethnic interaction, but also an important field for the reproduction of social relations-the distribution of ethnic groups in space, the frequency of interaction, and the depth of embedding directly affect the quality and consolidation of commonality. ^[1] However, existing research has paid insufficient attention to the spatial generation mechanisms of

ethnic commonality, focusing predominantly on non-material aspects such as cultural identity and political integration, while offering relatively limited systematic analysis of material foundations, including geographical interweaving, spatial planning, and community building.^[2] Therefore, this study argues for incorporating the spatial dimension into the core framework of research on ethnic commonality, and to systematically reveal how geographical integration and institutional practices jointly shape the generation and evolution of commonality.

Yunnan, as the border province with the most complex ethnic diversity in China, provides a typical case for observing the relationship between spatial interweaving and ethnic commonality. Of the 25 ethnic minorities officially recognized in the province; 15 are predominantly concentrated in Yunnan, and 16 ethnic groups reside in transborder regions, the ethnic minority population makes up 33.6% of the total population of the province, and the land area of ethnic autonomous areas makes up 70.2% of the total area of the province.^[3] The distribution pattern of "big mixed, small concentrated, interlaced mixed" and the interwoven social structure of "you in me, me in you" make Yunnan a natural laboratory for studying the relationship between spatial interweaving and commonality among ethnic groups. Geographically, mountains and plateaus account for 94% of Yunnan Province's land area, while dam areas make up 6%. The diverse landforms have given rise to a residential pattern characterized by "three-dimensional distribution and vertical differentiation" among various ethnic groups, forming a unique "mountain-dam structure" and inter-ethnic symbiotic space among multiple ethnic groups.^[4] This symbiotic pattern based on geographical conditions provides a natural spatial foundation for the various ethnic groups in Yunnan to develop complementary, interdependent, and integrated relationships over a long historical process.

The central research questions guiding this study are: How did the spatial foundations of ethnic commonality in Yunnan historically emerge? What institutional challenges confront the construction of interwoven social structures amid contemporary urbanization? And how can policy optimization promote the transition of ethnic groups from spatial interembedding to institutional integration? Based on this, this paper attempts to achieve the following breakthroughs: First, introduce the perspective of spatial sociology to reveal the geographical logic and historical context of the formation of the commonality of ethnic groups in Yunnan; Second, propose policy optimization paths for the transition from "differential inclination" to "inclusive sharing" to provide theoretical references for spatial governance in border multi-ethnic areas.

2. Theoretical Framework: An Analytical Perspective of Spatial Inter-embedding and Institutional Integration

2.1 Spatial Sociology: From 'Production in Space' to 'Production of Space'

Henri Lefebvre, a foundational figure in French urban sociology, proposed the theory of "space production," positing that space is not merely a container of social relations but also an active element in the reproduction of social relations—"space is never empty; it always embodies a meaning"^[4] This theory offers critical insights into the spatial dimensions of ethnic commonality: the spatial distribution of ethnic groups is not a naturally given static structure but a social product continually produced and reconstructed through historical processes. The patterns of ethnic interaction, the distribution of resources and the configuration of power relations in space jointly shape the trajectory of the formation of ethnic commonality.

Edward W. Soja, a contemporary postmodern geographer in the United States, further proposed the concept of "Thirdspace", emphasizing that space encompasses three dimensions: the material 'Firstspace' (perceived space), the conceptual 'Secondspace' (conceived space), and the dialectical unity of the two-'Thirdspace' (lived space).^[5] When this framework is applied to the study of ethnic relations, it can be found that the interweaving of spaces among ethnic groups in Yunnan is not only a physical reality shaped by mountains and rivers, but also a conceptual projection of national governance planning, and even more a lived practice of continuous reproduction in the daily interactions of the ethnic groups. The interweaving and interaction of these three spatial dimensions constitute the complex mechanisms underlying the formation of ethnic commonality.

2.2 Historical Institutionalism: Path Dependence and Institutional Change

Historical institutionalism emphasizes the "path dependence" effect in institutional formation, whereby once a certain institutional arrangement is established during the early stages of development,

it generates a self-reinforcing mechanism that renders subsequent changes costly. ^[6] In the field of ethnic policy, this path dependence is manifested as follows: Differentiated policies based on ethnic identity have played a positive role in specific historical stages, but with evolving societal conditions, the path-dependent effect of these policies may inadvertently strengthen perceived ethnic boundaries, and might constrain the organic formation of commonality. ^[7] This gradual evolution calls for adaptive institutional adjustments that better align with contemporary goals of promoting integration and shared development among ethnic groups.

The "policy paradigm shift" theory proposed by the British political scientist Peter Hall suggests that major policy changes often stem from a paradigm crisis triggered by "policy limitations", achieving a leap from the old paradigm to the new through a progressive process of "problem definition - policy learning - institutional reconstruction". ^[8] The current ethnic policy in Yunnan is at a critical juncture of transforming from "differential inclination" to "inclusive sharing". This transformation is not a simple negation of previous policies, but a gradual adjustment within the framework of adhering to the system of regional ethnic autonomy, embodying the dialectical interplay of "path dependence" and "institutional innovation".

2.3 Integration of the analytical framework

This paper integrates spatial sociology with historical institutionalism to construct an analytical framework examining the interaction between space and institutions (see Figure 1). The framework comprises three interconnected levels: the spatial foundation level, which examines how the geographical environment, historical transportation corridors, and urbanization processes shape ethnic distribution patterns; the institutional practice level, which investigates how ethnic policies, community planning, and governance models regulate the depth and quality of spatial interweaving; and the commonality generation level, which reveals how spatial interweaving and institutional integration work in synergy to foster commonality among nations. The three levels are not a linear progression but an organic whole characterized by mutual penetration and dynamic feedback.

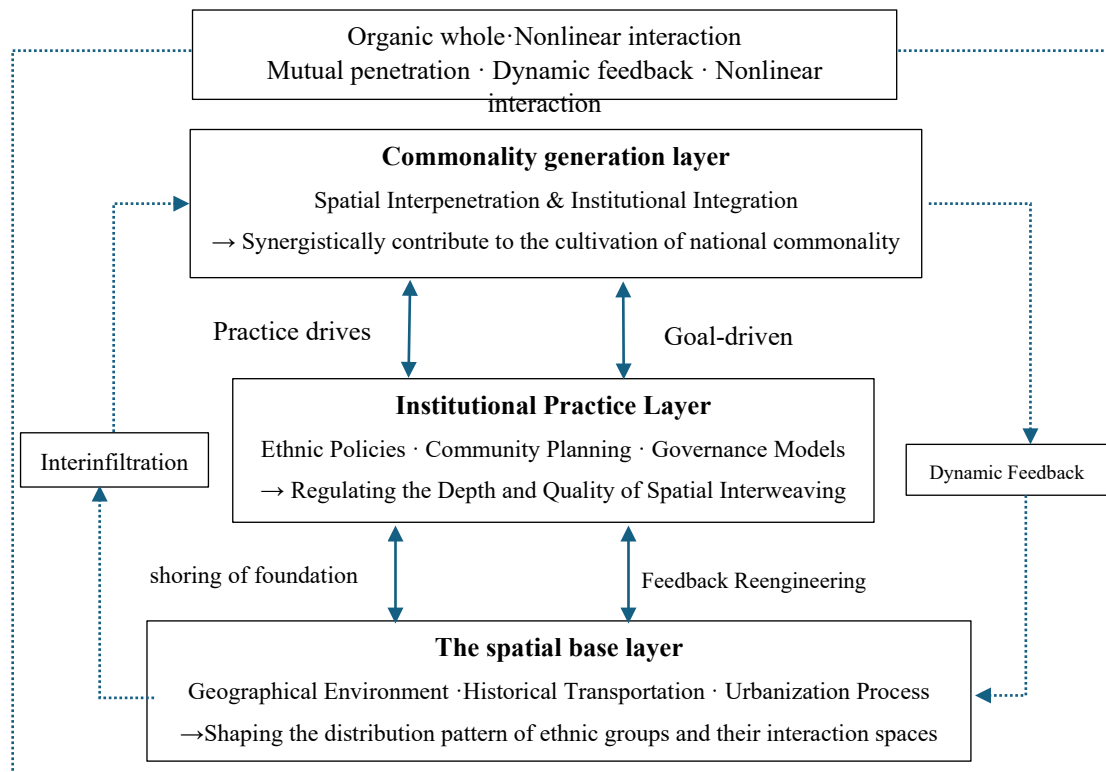


Figure 1. Logical Schematic Diagram of the Formation of Yunnan Ethnic Commonality Based on the Space-institution Interactive Analytical Framework

3. Historical Formation: The Spatial Basis of the Commonality of the Ethnic Groups in Yunnan

3.1 Natural Interweaving: The Geographical Shaping of Ethnic Distribution

Yunnan, a core province in the southwest frontier of China, has a landform dominated by plateaus and mountains, characterized by its rugged and highly dissected terrain. The province's terrain is high in the northwest and low in the southeast. Mountains account for approximately 84% of the terrain, while plateaus and hills comprise roughly 10%, with the remaining 6% consisting of basins and other landforms,^[1] forming a spatial pattern of "mountains and rivers interlaced and dam areas scattered". This unique geographical environment not only shapes the regional adaptation characteristics for the survival and development of all ethnic groups, but also breaks the natural barriers of closed settlements, giving rise to a distribution pattern characterized by "broad-scale mixed residence, small-scale concentrated settlement", and interlaced cohabitation among multiple ethnic groups.

Geographical proximity and complementary resource endowments provide a natural environment for the regular interaction among ethnic groups in production and life, cultural exchange, and other fields. From the central Yunnan dam area to the northwest Yunnan Plateau, from the southern Yunnan river valley to the northeastern Yunnan mountainous area, different ethnic groups have coexisted in adjacent regions for a long time, forming a geographically interconnected region where shared topographical features and hydrological systems have historically facilitated sustained inter-ethnic contact.^[9] The diversity of the geographical environment has preserved the uniqueness of the cultures of all ethnic groups and provided convenient conditions for cross-ethnic interaction, constituting the natural foundation for the formation of ethnic commonality.

Specifically, the distribution of the population of all ethnic groups in Yunnan has long presented a typical spatial pattern of "large mixed living, small concentrated living, and interlaced mixed living". The Han population is mainly concentrated in the central and eastern Yunnan dam areas and towns along major transportation routes; Ethnic minorities are widely distributed along the border, in mountainous areas, semi-mountainous areas, and in areas with a prominent three-dimensional climate, forming a spatial pattern of interlacing, inlaying, and encirclement with Han and other ethnic minorities.^[10] This geographical distribution structure endogenously shapes the quotidian, institutionalized, and scene-based multi-ethnic interaction patterns among Yunnan's various ethnic groups.

3.2 Interwoven Corridors: Historical Transportation Routes and the Promotion of Ethnic Interaction

From the perspective of historical development, the connection and continuation of ancient transportation corridors such as "The Shu-Sindhu Road" (literally, the Sichuan-India route, commonly known as the Southern Silk Road) and the "Tea Horse Road" have become the core carriers of material exchange, cultural dissemination, and ethnic interaction among the various ethnic groups in Yunnan, and have built communication bridges for the interconnection between the southwestern frontier and the Central Plains and South Asia and Southeast Asia.^[11] During the Qin and Han dynasties, successive imperial administrations officially implemented the commandery-county (jun-xian) system in Yunnan, incorporating the entire region of Yunnan into the national unified administrative system and breaking the previous situation of regional isolation and ethnic estrangement. During the Tang and Song dynasties, the regimes of Nanzhao and Dali were established and continued to develop, actively absorbing the essence of Central Plains culture and integrating the cultural characteristics of all ethnic groups in Yunnan, promoting the integrated development of all ethnic groups in terms of political identification, economic cooperation, and cultural symbiosis.^[12] During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the central administration implemented a policy of large-scale migration to the border and reclamation and defense of the border, and a large number of Han people from the Central Plains and other ethnic groups moved into Yunnan and lived together with the local ethnic groups, further breaking down the boundaries of regions and ethnic groups.

The connection of historical transportation corridors and the governance practices of successive dynasties formed a coordinated development pattern, jointly promoting the deep collision, mutual absorption and symbiotic development of the production technology, cultural system and value concept of the Central Plains region with the native civilization of the ethnic groups in Yunnan, and facilitating the historical pattern of "coexistence of diversity and integration of unity" among the ethnic groups.^[13] Indeed, the emergence and persistence of the Shu-Sindhu Road and the Tea Horse Road over historical

time, established not merely a three-dimensional transportation network across regions and ethnic groups in the southwestern frontier but also served as a core nexus facilitating interaction and communication among diverse regions and ethnic groups. The ethnic groups in Yunnan gradually formed a distinctive interaction model of "road as the medium, communication as the bond, and integration as the goal".^[14] This historically embedded spatial interaction pattern laid a foundational pathway for the formation of ethnic commonality in Yunnan, transforming physical connectivity into sustained inter-ethnic interdependence and cultural resonance.

The ethnic groups formed complementary production patterns based on natural conditions, such as the exchange of agricultural and livestock products between ethnic groups in mountainous areas and those in dam areas, and the trade between ethnic groups in coastal areas and those in inland areas, creating an economic symbiotic relationship characterized by mutual indispensability. In the long practice of production, the ethnic groups learned from each other in terms of production techniques and living customs, forming a pattern of coexistence and mutual prosperity. For instance, the rice-growing techniques of the Dai people, the metallurgical techniques of the Yi people, and the architectural skills of the Bai people spread among the ethnic groups,^[15] which exemplifies inter-ethnic exchange, communicative engagement, and integrative practices within the productive sphere.

3.3 Planned Interweaving: The Impetus of Modern Urbanization for Spatial Reconstruction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the coordinated advancement of new urbanization, industrialization, rural revitalization and relocation for poverty alleviation, the spatial distribution of the population of all ethnic groups in Yunnan has accelerated from the traditional "relative settlement" to extensive mixed settlement and deep interweaving. According to the Seventh National Population Census in Yunnan Province, the proportion of urban population of ethnic minorities in Yunnan rose from 22.3% to 31.7% from 2010 to 2020, an increase of 9.4 percentage points over 10 years. Both the scale and range of ethnic population mobility have continued to expand.^[10] This structural change in spatial pattern and population distribution has created preconditions for deep interaction among all ethnic groups in daily life, economic production and social interaction, and has accelerated the transformation of Yunnan's ethnic commonality from traditional "geosymbiosis" to the modern sense of contemporary "inter-embedding and integration."

This spatial reconstruction has a dual effect. On the one hand, the process of urbanization has driven the concentration of ethnic populations in central cities, county towns and key market towns. Cities such as Kunming, Qujing, Yuxi and Dali have rapidly formed multi-ethnic interwoven communities, creating new spatial carriers for the interaction and integration of all ethnic groups.^[16] Yunnan Province has implemented a "scattered-site" (or "interspersed")^① resettlement model for poverty alleviation through relocation. A total of 2,832 centralized resettlement areas have been built, and 1.5 million people of all ethnic groups have been resettled. By breaking the boundaries of ethnic settlement, people of different ethnic groups have been resettled in the same community and the same village, creating a residential pattern of "multi-ethnic cohabitation and multicultural coexistence".^[17] On the other hand, the acceleration of population mobility and urbanization has also impacted the social structure and emotional bonds of traditional ethnic settlements. Some ethnic minorities have faced problems such as language barriers, cultural adaptation difficulties, and broken social networks in the process of integrating into cities. The interaction patterns such as neighborhood mutual assistance and festival sharing in traditional communities have been weakened in the living environment of high-rise buildings in cities. The new interlocking social structure has not yet been fully established.

This dynamic change has three key implications: first, the spatial structure has shifted from vertical stratified distribution to planar and networked integration, breaking the limitations of traditional geographical boundaries on ethnic interaction; second, the social structure has shifted from a relatively closed ethnic community to an open, interwoven social structure, pushing all ethnic groups to break down ethnic barriers in common production and life; third, the psychological structure has shifted from internal ethnic identity to the coordinated strengthening of national identity, ethnic identity and regional identity, gradually fostering a common mentality of "all ethnic groups in China are one family".^[18] It helps promote the development of commonality among Yunnan's ethnic groups.

^① The Chinese term "插花安置" (literally "flower-arrangement placement") refers to a policy of dispersing resettled households across multiple locations rather than concentrating them in single-ethnic settlements.

4. Practical Challenges: Institutional Constraints to the Construction of Interwoven Social Structures

4.1 Insufficient Policy Flexibility: The Scope for Enhanced Local Adaptability

Yunnan's ethnic minority areas encompass diverse geographical and demographic contexts, with significant variation in socioeconomic conditions and policy requirements across regions and ethnic groups. Empirical observations indicate that sometimes, certain policies may not align well with local realities when implemented.^[19] Such misalignment may reduce policy specificity and, consequently, implementation effectiveness.

In the implementation of industrial support policies in ethnic regions, some areas still have room for further optimization in aligning with local resource endowments and industrial foundations. When promoting distinctive industries, there has been a certain degree of convergence in industrial positioning across different regions, which has hindered effective enhancement of industrial competitiveness. This situation has affected the driving force behind local economic development and, to some extent, influenced the public's perception of policy outcomes among various ethnic groups. The emergence of this phenomenon is related to factors such as the depth of research on regional differences during policy formulation and the efficiency of information transmission throughout the policy implementation process. Under these circumstances, a variance exists between policy expectations and actual outcomes, indicating that the goal of fostering common development still requires deeper refinement during policy execution.

4.2 Balancing Commonality and Difference: Adjustments in Policy Orientation

The formulation and implementation of certain ethnic policies have tended to emphasize accommodating the diverse needs of various ethnic groups regarding rights protection and cultural preservation. Nevertheless, further efforts may be directed toward strengthening the shared civic identity orientation across political, economic, cultural, and social domains. As relevant scholarship indicates, ethnic governance in major metropolitan areas reveals challenges such as limited joint participation in public affairs governance, inadequate conditions for constructing shared spiritual spaces, and insufficient all-round integration—all suggesting that the cultivation of collective belonging requires further strengthening, with policy focus requiring reorientation toward enhancing commonality.^[20] In some regional initiatives promoting ethnic cohesion, there has been an emphasis on the cultural particularities and folk customs of specific ethnic groups, while shared cultural elements and common values across ethnic groups have received insufficient attention. This imbalance may lead to an inclination on ethnic distinctiveness among some individuals, potentially diluting broader collective consciousness.

The observed policy orientation patterns may be understood through historical institutional analysis. Differentiated policies based on ethnic identification have historically contributed to minority rights protection and inter-ethnic relational development. Under contemporary social governance conditions, the "path dependence" effect of established policy frameworks has manifested with increased analytical salience—policy practitioners have developed implementation routines aligned with differentiated approaches, while conceptual frameworks emphasizing commonality dimensions appear to be in a transitional phase of institutional adaptation.

4.3 Interdepartmental Coordination and Governance Fragmentation: An Institutional Analysis

The advancement of ethnic commonality represents a complex governance endeavor necessitating multi-departmental engagement. Empirical observation in select Yunnan regions indicates that interdepartmental coordination mechanisms exhibit developmental variances, with inter-agency communication and collaboration presenting opportunities for enhancement. Coordination between policy formulation and implementation phases appears to benefit from additional structural support, while the connectivity and complementarity across policy outcomes suggest potential for improved synergistic effects in ethnic commonality promotion.

Contemporary governance practices exhibit observable fragmentation patterns, primarily manifesting in two dimensions: first, regarding goal-setting processes, departmental work direction definitions frequently align with respective functional mandates, with overall coordination and integration presenting opportunities for refinement; second, concerning resource allocation, fiscal funds

and project arrangements are distributed across multiple departments, with coordination mechanisms offering potential for enhanced centralized deployment and scale effects. These patterns suggest that ethnic commonality advancement may benefit from continued optimization at the interdepartmental collaboration level, warranting gradual exploration of more systematic and coordinated mechanisms building upon existing institutional foundations.

4.4 Modernization Dynamics and Traditional Social Ties: Transformative Pressures

In the course of rapid urbanization, profound changes have taken place in the social structure of traditional ethnic settlements. On the one hand, a considerable outflow of young and middle-aged laborers has led to the "hollowing out" of rural communities and the loss of participants in cultural activities such as traditional festivals and religious ceremonies; On the other hand, Concerning migrant adaptation, new urban migrants encounter cultural adaptation challenges characterized by disruption of established social networks and incomplete establishment of new social support systems,^[21] conditions associated with increased risks of alienation and marginalization experiences.

A deeper issue concerns the need to strengthen the linkage between theoretical interpretation and educational guidance regarding inter-ethnic exchange, communication, and integration. Some individuals still have room for deeper understanding of the concept. Research findings indicate that certain respondents lack sufficient depth in their comprehension of the "three interactions," while others believe current educational campaigns could improve in terms of appeal and emotional resonance. This situation may, to some extent, affect individuals' willingness and behavior in inter-ethnic interactions, potentially leading to incomplete understandings and identifications with their own and other ethnic groups, thereby influencing ethnic interaction. This suggests that there remains room for better coordination between practical implementation and conceptual dissemination in promoting ethnic exchange, communication and integration. It is necessary to continuously refine the content, formats, and narrative approaches of education and outreach efforts from the perspective of enhancing commonalities, so as to more effectively foster a psychological foundation and conscious actions among all ethnic groups toward shared construction and mutual benefit in daily interactions.

5. Path Optimization: From "Spatial Interembedding" to "Institutional Integration"

5.1 Urban-Rural Planning and Spatial Configuration: Infrastructure for Interwoven Communities

Communities are the core venues for the daily interactions of all ethnic groups, and the construction of interwoven communities is the key vehicle to move ethnic interactions from "formal contact" to "substantive interaction". Yunnan's experience suggests potential for advancing model community initiatives through spatial interweaving as an entry point to drive the coordinated development of cultural interweaving, economic interweaving, social interweaving and psychological interweaving.

At the spatial planning level, an "interspersed" resettlement model promoting mixed residence among various ethnic groups can be implemented in the renovation of old residential areas, poverty-alleviation relocation, and the planning of new commercial housing communities, thereby preventing the formation of single-ethnic enclaves. The practice in the Maojiawan resettlement area in Ludian County, Zhaotong City, demonstrates that the scattered lottery and "flower arrangement" resettlement have effectively broken the traditional settlement pattern, enabling 39,100 people of all ethnic groups from 46 towns in 5 counties to transform from "strangers" to "one family" through daily interaction, and the rate of inter-ethnic marriage has increased from 17.3% to 25.6%.^[22] NiuHong Community in Daxing Town, Luchun County, Honghe Prefecture innovatively implemented the "five-dimensional interweaving" model, promoting the all-round integration of people of all ethnic groups from the five dimensions of space, culture, economy, society and psychology. More than 300 families rented houses to accommodate more than 2,000 migrant residents and organized special activities such as long street banquets,^[23] comprehensively built a harmonious situation where all ethnic groups of China are one family.

At the governance mechanism level, a multi-stakeholder community governance model can be established with consultation platforms such as "ethnic unity councils" and "building councils", and representatives of all ethnic groups can be involved in community affairs decision-making. At the level of activity organization, interactive activities such as neighborhood festivals, community feasts (hundred-family banquets), and shared cultural celebrations can be held regularly to bring people closer psychologically and foster a sense of community through collective ceremonies such as singing the

same song, dancing the same dance, and eating the same table. ^[24] Through institutionalized consultation mechanisms and regular engagement activities, neighborhood relationships are transformed from superficial coexistence to deep integration laying a microfoundation in daily life for strengthening ethnic commonality.

5.2 Improve services for the floating population: Promote cross-regional two-way integration

Cross-regional population mobility constitutes a significant mechanism for expanding ethnic interaction spaces. Yunnan's policy experience indicates ongoing efforts to enhance migrant population service and management systems, advance household registration system reforms, develop mechanisms for social security transferability across regions, and address institutional factors that may constrain population mobility.

Yunnan has established a cross-regional coordination mechanism for the service and management of ethnic minority migrant population with 15 provinces across the country. Through the establishment of employment service stations such as the "Honghe Family" (Honghe River Family) ^② service center and the Wenshan Labor Service Station, services such as employment guidance, rights protection and cultural adaptation are provided for people of all ethnic groups to move across regions, promoting the formation of a virtuous pattern of two-way flow, two-way integration and two-way empowerment. At the provincial level, activities such as mutual visits and exchanges, paired assistance and on-the-job learning can be organized between ethnic minority areas and developed areas in central Yunnan, so that people in remote ethnic minority areas have the opportunity to leave the mountains, broaden their horizons and enhance their identification with the broader Chinese national community.

It is worth noting that cross-regional interaction is not only an extension of physical space, but also a breakthrough of psychological space-when people of all ethnic groups establish new social relationship networks in foreign lands, their sense of belonging to the Chinese national community is constantly consolidated and deepened in practice, ^[25] thereby reinforcing inter-ethnic solidarity.

5.3 Innovating Community Governance: Micro-Mechanisms for Cultivating Affective Communities

Effective grassroots governance can be mobilized through activities such as community co-construction and volunteer services to cultivate a sense of neighborhood watch and brotherly affection. The experience of Chuxiong Prefecture shows that by building a "multi-network integration" grid-based service management system and promoting the "ten-household integration" micro-grid model, the "last mile" of serving people of all ethnic groups can be effectively bridged, and the community can truly become the "key venue" for the interaction and integration of all ethnic groups. ^[26] This approach not only enhances the efficiency and responsiveness of community governance but also fosters a shared sense of belonging and mutual responsibility among all ethnic groups, thereby strengthening the everyday social foundations of ethnic commonality.

With the deepening of exchanges and interactions, inter-ethnic marriages, neighborhood mutual assistance, and community co-construction have become increasingly common, reflecting the enhanced commonality of Yunnan society. According to official statistics, the number of inter-ethnic marriages in Yunnan has increased significantly in recent years, with particularly high proportions observed in border areas and poverty-alleviation resettlement zones. Research indicates that inter-ethnic marriage rates among Yunnan's floating population rose by 7.21 percentage points between 2011 and 2018, exceeding the national average by 8.18 percentage points. ^[27] Through marriage, people of all ethnic groups have further broken down ethnic boundaries and enhanced emotional identity. In daily life and production, people of all ethnic groups help each other and move forward together. Han people help ethnic minorities learn the national common language and characters and master production skills, and ethnic minorities teach Han people ethnic culture and traditional skills. This reflects a deep sense of mutual dependence and solidarity, where all ethnic groups recognize their shared interests and collective destiny.

5.4 Policy Orientation Evolution: From "Differentiated Approaches" to "Inclusive Frameworks"

Policy optimization is an important mechanism in the transition from spatial inter-embeddedness to

^② "Honghe" (Red River) is a major river in Yunnan, and "Honghe Family" is a branded service initiative for migrant workers.

institutional integration. In recent years, Yunnan's ethnic policies have been guided by the framework of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, and there has been a noticeable shift in policy orientation toward fostering ethnic commonality.

Recent policy developments in Yunnan have increasingly prioritized commonality construction as a central objective of ethnic governance. Concurrently, ethnic legislation has undergone revision to align with this commonality-enhancing orientation. By early 2026, 37 autonomous regulations and 27 separate regulations had been revised, establishing a more robust policy support framework. This analysis suggests that through such policy optimization, collective ethnic belonging can be further consolidated across policy orientation, institutional arrangements, and practical implementation.

6. Conclusion

Drawing upon spatial sociology and historical institutionalism as complementary analytical frameworks, this study systematically examines the spatial generation dynamics and policy orientation patterns of ethnic commonality in Yunnan. The analysis yields the following principal findings:

First, the spatial basis of Yunnan's ethnic commonality has undergone a triple evolution from "natural interlocking" to "channel interlocking" and then to "planning interlocking". The diversity of the geographical environment shaped the natural conditions for interethnic symbiosis, the connection of historical transportation corridors promoted the economic and cultural interaction across regions, and the accelerated advancement of modern urbanization achieved the conscious construction of spatial interweaving through planning means such as the "scattered-site" resettlement model and interwoven community construction. The superimposition of the three logics constitutes a unique spatial mechanism for the generation of ethnic commonality in Yunnan.

Second, to promote the transformation from "spatial interweaving" to "institutional integration", it is necessary to coordinate and optimize four paths: urban and rural planning, improving services for the floating population, innovating community governance, and promoting policy transformation. These four paths are not parallel but have a progressive logic: spatial planning provides the physical carrier, migrant population services expand the range of interaction, community governance nurtures emotional bonds, and policy transformation solidifies the system. The four work together to bring about a qualitative change from "physical aggregation" to "social integration" among all ethnic groups.

Third, the Yunnan case illustrates the synergistic potential of spatial interweaving and institutional integration convergence, navigating the relationship between commonality enhancement and difference recognition, alongside integration processes and ethnic rights considerations, within the context of coordinated regional development. This case offers analytical insights potentially applicable to spatial governance and ethnic affairs governance in multi-ethnic border regions. These practical experiences can also serve as theoretical references for handling harmonious relations among multiple ethnic groups.

Looking ahead, the spatial construction of ethnic commonality in Yunnan could be further explored in the following aspects: First, inter-embedded community development remains an area of sustained relevance. Policy targets aim to establish 1,000 inter-embedded demonstration communities within three years to promote the all-round integration of all ethnic groups in terms of space, culture, economy, society, psychology, etc. Second, it would be beneficial to improve the interdepartmental coordination mechanism, consider establishing a high-level cross-sectoral leading group for enhancing ethnic commonality, and further strengthen interdepartmental coordination. Third, improve the policy evaluation mechanism, regularly considering and reflecting on current policies, and promptly revising outdated policies and provisions that may influence the enhancement of commonalities, so that the policy orientation can better align with practical effects.

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