

An Analysis of Pathways for Ethnic Social Work Intervention in Rural Industrial Development: Based on a Fieldwork on the Sheep Industry in Jingyuan County

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Abstract: Ethnic unity is closely related to the economic symbiosis and industrial collaboration of multi-ethnic areas. Based on the chain of the sheep industry, the Hui and Han ethnic groups in Jingyuan County have formed a symbiotic pattern of economic cooperation. However, there are many problems with this symbiosis: the distribution of benefits is uneven, market information is not symmetrical, trust among parties is low, and government support for industrial upgrading and inter-ethnic cooperation is weak. Based on the above, ethnic social work can build an interest-negotiation platform, construct a multi-channel information-sharing system, establish a cross-ethnic trust network, and connect policy resources for empowerment in the industry. The purpose of the above measures is to promote the development of deep synergy between the Hui and Han ethnic groups, not labour division; thus, it is an excellent case of coordinating industrial revitalisation and ethnic unity and progress in multi-ethnic areas.

Keywords: Ethnic social work, industrial development, Hui-Han cooperation, economic symbiosis.

1. Problem Introduction

Where many ethnic groups live together, economic development can be a way to promote contact among the different groups and their integration over time. Division of labour, cooperation and economic symbiosis among all parts of the industrial sector have also strengthened the sense of ethnic identity and built a community spirit. Although there have been some achievements in the economic and social development of ethnic areas in China in recent years, some multi-ethnic areas are still facing practical difficulties in industrial collaboration. These problems will not only harm the high-quality development of the regional economy but may also damage the foundation of ethnic unity.

As a professional force for improving the lives of the people, resolving social conflicts and promoting social harmony, ethnic social work has played a crucial role in building inter-ethnic communication bridges and solving problems in industrial cooperation. Recently, it has been applied to solve problems in economic symbiosis and promote coordinated industrial development and social harmony among ethnic groups. However, the present studies have not fully addressed the problems of multi-ethnic economic symbiosis, and design ideas for industrial intervention are still lacking. Therefore, this is not the end of this paper^[1].

The sheep industry in Jingyuan County, Gansu Province, is an important part of the economy of the area, and according to the division of labour in the industrial chain, a complementary relationship has been established between the Hui and Han ethnic groups. The Hui people are mainly responsible for the parts of sheep procurement, slaughtering and processing, and terminal sales; the Han people provide basic support in the form of sheep breeding and forage supply. Economically, these countries should be more integrated to promote ethnic harmony. However, a field investigation has found that there are many problems with this symbiotic system, and therefore it cannot promote industrial upgrading or build trust among the Hui and Han ethnic groups. Therefore, the research place of this paper is Jingyuan County. Based on the examination of the production, operation, interaction and participation of the Hui and Han ethnic groups in the local sheep industry chain, this paper presents effective ways to carry out ethnic social work intervention in industrial development from the perspective of economic symbiosis. To offer a reference for the harmonious development of multi-ethnic regions is the aim.

2. Current Situation of Economic Symbiosis between the Hui and Han Ethnic Groups in the Sheep Industry Chain of Jingyuan County

The three main links of the sheep industry chain are production, distribution and sales; based on these links, we can systematically study the division of labour and cooperation among the Hui and Han ethnic groups. By showing that these groups form a functionally complementary system and use the resources in this area, this section will explain how cooperation among them can promote industrial development and foster inter-ethnic communication, and then it will be used as the basis for studying the actual problems of this symbiotic system in the following sections.

2.1 Division of Labour and Collaboration in the Production Link

First of all, in terms of the basic supply and demand, the Han ethnic group in the sheep breeding industry of Jingyuan County uses its own cultivated land resources for family-based breeding and obtains a supply of lambs. At the same time, the Hui people are employing their experience in livestock trade to run a lamb-buying and value-added-service business. Together, they have formed a lasting system of supply and demand and mutual trust. Therefore, a stable and long-lasting supply-demand relationship has been formed between the two groups: the Han people have depended on the Hui for sales problems, and the Hui people have been reliant on the Han for a stable supply of lambs. Therefore, the risk to the livelihoods of both sides will be reduced and an atmosphere for cooperation will be created.

Second, there is demand-pull breeding. To meet the specific needs of the Hui people for sheep breeds, Han farmers have intentionally bred and raised some kinds of breeding sheep. Scientific breeding will ensure that the breed and quality of the next generation of lambs meet the demands of the trading market, thus improving the supply-demand balance. In addition to small-scale family farming, some Han people have also joined forces to set up breeding cooperatives. The cooperatives will increase the scale of breeding and, at the same time, introduce standardised management to expand the batch size and stabilise the supply of lambs. Therefore, it will be more convenient for the Hui people to make a large-scale purchase ^[2].

Third, there is a guarantee of forage quality. The Hui people have certain demands for the quality of feed for sheep. Therefore, Han farmers use special straw that they have grown themselves on their farms as the primary feed for sheep to ensure good quality and flavour of the meat. If they cannot produce enough straw themselves, they have to purchase the same type of good straw from neighbouring farmers. Therefore, we will have a continuous supply of fodder, and at the same time, we will also make full use of local straw resources. Adjusting the breeding plan according to the real needs of both sides will enhance cooperation among the parties, improve the accuracy of supply-and-demand matching, and thus provide a solid foundation for quality enhancement in the sheep industry chain.

2.2 Complementarity and Interaction in the Circulation Segment

First, the coordination of procurement will be optimised. Hui purchasers have gained a long-term understanding of the market through their extensive experience and participation, so they are now well aware of price changes for sheep in nearby areas, such as Baiyin and Lanzhou, as well as the quality requirements of end-customers, and have also learned about the current inventory and growth situation of sheep at different farms in both Hui and Han villages. Thus, they have been able to build an efficient purchasing coordination system. As a small-scale farm, the Han family does not have a fixed purchase time for Hui tea. Be on the road proactively to collect the sheep door-to-door, arrange the purchase time in advance according to the farmers' circumstances, and provide other services for small-scale farmers, such as bulk orders and consolidated small shipments. In this way, the sales and transportation costs for the Han farmers will be reduced to the minimum. Han farmers do not need to expend energy learning how to operate the new market; they only need to prepare their sheep for sale according to the agreement and then sell them easily.

Second, there is the guarantee of transport and distribution. By combining resources from all over the country, Hui purchasers have built a good network of transport and distribution to cover many cities and some faraway places. According to the number of sheep and the distance to be travelled, a scientific transport plan will be developed to guarantee the quality of the sheep at the terminal market. At the same time, the Hui buyers have also established good relations with slaughtering and processing units along the transportation route to form an integrated chain of purchase-transportation and delivery.

This will help the Jingyuan lambs reach the outside market in a timely manner and reduce the circulation risk of market fluctuations^[3].

Thirdly, there is the sharing of experiences. Han people who wish to enhance their own capabilities in the circulation sector can learn by doing and grow through cooperation with Hui purchasers in an open manner. The Han people can accompany the Hui purchasers to the wholesale market and terminal retail outlet to learn about trade through observation. As the Han people gradually learn the necessary skills in the circulation process, some are able to connect with local, small-scale customers independently and even help Hui buyers expand procurement channels in the surrounding villages. This close cooperation can improve the living standards of the Han people and deepen the relationship of trust and understanding between the Hui and Han ethnic groups by creating a shared experience; together, they will achieve mutual benefit in the circulation sector.

2.3 Interest Linkage in the Sales Segment

First, there is the link of dining scenarios. Based on the generational inheritance of slaughtering techniques and secret recipes for cooking lamb, the Hui people have established special restaurants in Jingyuan County and the surrounding area. These restaurants can provide good food and ensure that the meat is clean and safe. The Han people often go to these Hui restaurants to try the local specialty of lamb during informal family gatherings or social outings with friends. Hui restaurants are also chosen as the venues for banquets due to various reasons, such as festivals, weddings and funerals. The dining link in which the Hui people prepare the food and the Han people enjoy it has continuously expanded the occasions for consumption of Jingyuan lamb and formed a stable local consumption loop.

Second, there is the inheritance of skills. Many Han people have keenly observed the market potential of Jingyuan lamb in the catering industry and have taken the initiative to formally apprentice at Hui restaurants. The Hui Masters are good-tempered and kind; they will happily teach us the basic skills. After learning the traditional skills mentioned above, many of the Han apprentices have opened their own lamb restaurants. The model of skill inheritance will help the Han people start their own businesses, increase their income, expand the sales channels for Jingyuan Lamb, and so on.

Third, it is a trust-based transaction form. Hui operators offer a credit service for the retail and bulk purchase of mutton and do not require collateral or a guarantor to help Han people solve problems of temporary cash-flow shortages or the need to buy a large quantity of mutton during festivals. The system is usually only a verbal agreement or a simple record, and it is "consume first, pay later". The repayment period will be in line with the income cycle of the Han people, and the specific terms will vary from one another. This transaction model is based on ethnic trust; it can solve the temporary financial shortage of the Han people and help Hui operators retain their main customer base and reduce customer attrition, thereby gaining a different kind of advantage in the market. Therefore, both sides will have a long-lasting and stable sales cooperation relationship in the future.

3. Problems in the Economic Symbiosis of the Hui and Han Ethnic Groups

Based on the analysis of the current situation of symbiosis in the Hui-Han sheep industry chain, this paper will focus on the structural problems that have arisen during the large-scale development of the industry. Based on the fieldwork data, this section will examine the problems in the current symbiotic relationship from the four main aspects: the pattern of benefit distribution, the flow of market information, the construction of inter-ethnic trust, and the provision of policy support. These problems will not only hinder the modernisation of the sheep industry in terms of standardisation and high efficiency, but will also harm the deepening of cooperative trust among the Hui and Han ethnic groups.

3.1 Uneven Benefit Distribution

With many years of experience in purchasing and sales, Hui purchasers have built a stable network of suppliers for many parts of the industry. After working with many parties over a long period, we have obtained good prices for both purchase and sale. Han farmers are generally composed of dispersed family units and are limited to the upper part of the industry chain. Without information channels and with weak collective bargaining power, they are forced to accept the prices offered. This shows that there is an unstated competitive boundary in the distribution of industrial benefits between the two ethnic groups; the Hui people are in the higher-profit middle and downstream segments, and the Han people bear the costs and risks of production but receive lower returns. The various interests of these

groups will result in ethnic psychological barriers and distrust^[4].

3.2 Asymmetric Market Information

Hui buyers and sellers have been in the industry for a long time, are well-informed about the latest order requirements of major clients in places such as Lanzhou, and can also foresee price fluctuations through the support network of the intra-ethnic industry. Han farmers in their areas are still using old-style breeding methods and do not know of the new breeds. To promote the speed of transactions, these intermediaries do not always disclose the final market price. Therefore, the Han farmers do not have good ways of obtaining market information directly. Therefore, although Han farmers have Hui buyers for their lambs, they lack information on the end-market price and must accept the quoted price during negotiations; thus, they cannot avoid the risk of their prices being undervalued. Lack of information will reduce the profits for the Han farmers and may lead to misunderstandings in the Hui-Han cooperation due to information asymmetry.

3.3 Imperfect Trust Mechanism

The basis for trust in the economic cooperation between the Hui and Han ethnic groups is still relatively weak, and thus the cooperation has not gone deeper. Although there are some cases of long-term cooperation between individuals from the two groups, most of the interactions are still shallow, one-off transactions, and lack a stable bond of trust. Han farmers are concerned that the Hui buyers have too much power in the market and will use this advantage to drive down prices. Conversely, the Hui people are also wary of large-scale Han entry into the sheep business, fearing that the Han may pool resources through collective action to obtain wholesale and retail channels and thus undermine the market advantages the Hui have accumulated over the past few decades. The above is due to the uncertainty of what the other side will do. An unclear rule of transaction will also make people lose faith. Han customers can use the credit facilities provided by Hui-owned stores, but there is no unified credit evaluation system for both groups. Therefore, if a Han person has cash-flow problems due to increased feed costs and delays a payment, the Hui person involved may be quick to believe that it is a breach of trust by an ethnic group and thus easily develop an inter-ethnic trust crisis^[5].

3.4 Insufficient Policy Support

The development of the sheep industry chain has not been adequately promoted by policies, so cooperation between the Hui and Han ethnic groups has not deepened. Han farmers generally have two financial problems when they wish to expand the scale of breeding or improve sheep breeds: a shortage of credit and insufficient special funds. Most farmers do not have fixed assets to use as collateral and are therefore unable to obtain low-interest breeding loans from banks. Most of the subsidies for sheep breeding from local governments go to large-scale enterprises and farms, and do not reach the scattered family-based farmers. Although the establishment of cooperatives can be supported by government funds, many of these organisations have become mere shells that fail to operate due to issues such as a lack of a place for business or the high cost of taxes each year. As a result, they have failed to achieve the goal of coordinating the resources of the Hui and Han peoples. The Market Side has not yet introduced any general rules for the industry. For example, in the purchasing stage, weighing and setting prices are still based on the experience of the purchasing staff. Both Hui and Han have indicated that if the standards are not the same, there will be disputes. In short, without the support of policies, the entire chain of the sheep industry cannot be developed broadly and uniformly, and the cooperative efforts of the Hui and Han ethnic groups will also lack institutional guarantees. Therefore, it is difficult to establish common and stable symbiotic rules and build a close cooperative relationship^[6].

4. Pathways for Ethnic Social Work Intervention in Industrial Development

In light of the problems that have arisen due to the joint development of the Hui and Han ethnic groups in the sheep industry, the author will design specific plans based on the professional orientation of ethnic social work to promote social integration, solve development conflicts, and link resources for empowerment. The four kinds of channels are interest coordination, information dissemination, trust building and policy linkage. This way can meet the actual needs of Hui and Han practitioners and provide some practical ideas for promoting the joint development of industrial revitalisation and ethnic unity in multi-ethnic areas.

4.1 Build Communication Platforms to Promote Interest Negotiation

Ethnic social workers can lead the construction of a cooperative system for the Hui-Han sheep industry and promote close cooperation among practitioners at all levels. First, collaboration teams should be formed. Organised at the village level, these teams will consist of Han farmers, Hui merchants and traders, be supported by two or three social worker coordinators, and have a technical advisor from the township livestock station. The three sub-groups will be Production Coordination, Circulation Supervision and Benefit Calculation under this structure. With the balanced participation of representatives from the Hui and Han villages, the demands will be effectively conveyed. Second, we should establish a benefits negotiation system. At the end of each quarter, there will be quarterly negotiation meetings. Before each meeting, the cost and profit data of all divisions will be released. Based on the average profit margin of the industry and adjusting the distribution ratio according to changes in the market, a written agreement will be drawn up and registered. Add Discussion Topics at the village level for industry. Idle village collective buildings will be used as these places to have social workers and representatives of the Hui and Han groups on rotation. They will take on the tasks of information synchronisation, mediation of small disputes and collection of needs. Through regular contact, we can help promote the common interests of the Hui and Han peoples.

4.2 Build an All-Weather Information Dissemination System

Social workers can coordinate the resources of the Jingyuan County Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the local sheep industry association, e-commerce platforms, etc., to build an integrated online and offline information-sharing platform for the Jingyuan sheep industry, such as the Jingyuan Agricultural Specialty Mall. The first three functions of the online WeChat Mini Programs will be live prices, technical services and supply-demand matching. Two to five offline information service stations will be set up in the service areas of Hui-Han villages. These stations will be staffed by part-time information officers from both ethnic groups in equal numbers; they will print the main information from the platform daily, post it on the public bulletin board, and spread it through village WeChat groups to reach middle-aged and elderly practitioners who do not use the mini-program. At the same time, there will be monthly tiered training sessions, and we will avoid the two months before the Spring Festival and the peak summer epidemic season. Staff from the county agricultural bureau will conduct the first course to teach the Han participants how to read price curves, and Hui buyers will provide customer demand information from the slaughterhouses. E-commerce companies will organise special classes to explain how changes in the number of terminal sales affect purchase prices. A Jingyuan Sheep Industry Information Handbook will also be distributed for practitioners' reference. Quarterly joint inspection tours will be organised, and after informing the market management and supermarket procurement departments in advance, we will visit places such as the Baiyin Agricultural Wholesale Market. Merchants from Jingyuan will inform us of the profit distribution at all times in the procurement and sales stages. After the trip, a debriefing meeting will be organised to have the participants share their thoughts, and a summary of the tour will be collected and posted on the platform. The above measures will help to spread the news in a timely and accurate way. It will also motivate Hui and Han practitioners to work together to obtain, interpret and use information, break the information monopoly, improve the overall understanding of both sides in the industry chain, and provide an information basis for deeper cooperation.

4.3 Building an Interethnic Trust Network

To carry out a trust cultivation project for the Hui and Han ethnic groups based on embedded interaction, ethnic social workers need to build good cooperation channels with all links in the industrial chain. In accordance with the concept of complementary skills and matched scales, Hui farmers with purchasing experience will be paired with Han farmers skilled in corn planting and straw silage production at the production stage. According to the field guidance provided by Hui participants in fattening and the sharing of feed crop cultivation knowledge by Han participants, in addition to daily Q&A in the mutual-aid WeChat group and semi-annual effectiveness evaluations, mutual learning of skills and mutual understanding will also be promoted. A joint supervision team of two or three people will be established at the township level for sales, and the proportion of Hui and Han members will be 1:1. The team will weigh the goods at the time of purchase, set a reference price range based on the average prices in the main sales areas, and handle any disputes in the transaction. Monthly debriefing meetings will be held, and the reports will be submitted to the township office for record-keeping and to prevent suspicion. A sharing platform will be set up in the customer resource area, and there will be

both an online WeChat mini-program and offline township service points. The Rules for Referral Rewards will be published, and quarterly joint meetings will be held with the main clients. Credit ratings will be based on how satisfied the customers are. At the same time, a project working group will be established under the township government, and this group will have several departments. Publicity and Organisation will be carried out via village broadcasts and representative forums. Special Funds for Ethnic Affairs will be used to support the construction of platforms, subsidies, etc. The above measures will help all the participants, whether Hui or Han, move from knowing the strengths of others to sharing what has been learned and building a stable relationship of trust.

4.4 Linking Policy Resources to Promote Industrial Development

To promote the development of industry, social workers can help Hui and Han professionals connect with government resources to build a closed-loop system that can promptly address problems, guarantee the fair allocation of resources, and provide sustained support. Based on the interviews with the householders and focus groups of over 80% of Hui and Han farming families, further details on their demands for sheep-breeding subsidies will be collected in the next two weeks. Gather all the demands and then divide them into different categories, such as small-scale feed subsidies for spread-out Han families and large-scale facility subsidies for joint Hui-Han farms, and create an organised list of needs. Then, the social worker will contact the County Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, create a tracking log for each subsidy application, and inform us of the approval status every week. One week after the funds are released, a follow-up meeting will be organised to gather any problems that have arisen.

At the same time, to address the operational problems of cooperatives and social workers, coordination will be established with the local agricultural economic office to investigate the reasons for insufficient operating space, lack of management knowledge and high tax burdens. Therefore, the university team will be appointed to set up an advisory group and hold quarterly training sessions on the formulation of bylaws and financial compliance. Negotiate with the township government to arrange for the temporary free use of idle village collective buildings by social workers. At the same time, we will also arrange meetings with the tax office to clarify the preferential policies and provide assistance for small cooperatives with annual revenues under 100,000 yuan in applying for relevant tax reductions and exemptions.

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