Integrating Industry-Education Integration to Foster a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation in Higher Vocational Colleges: Pathways and Practices

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Abstract: *Industry-education integration represents the core educational model of vocational education, and situated learning theory offers a fresh analytical perspective for higher vocational colleges in cultivating a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. Currently, these institutions face a triple predicament in this educational endeavour: a gap between cognitive depth and the quality of identification, a misalignment between teaching content and student demographic characteristics, and the superficialisation of practical activities. The root causes lie in the interplay of weak stakeholder capacity, fragmented educational provision, and disruptive environmental-ecological factors. From the perspective of industry-education integration, this paper proposes pathways including strengthening the institutional safeguards for school-enterprise collaborative education, restructuring curricula suited to higher vocational student profiles, constructing an immersive practical education system through industry-education integration, and expanding all-time, all-space educational fields both online and offline. These pathways aim to transform authentic production scenarios, industry cultural resources, and cross-ethnic collaborative tasks into effective resources for cultivating a sense of community, thereby facilitating the substantive transformation from cognition to identification.*

Keywords: *industry-education integration; sense of community for the Chinese nation; higher vocational colleges; educational pathways; situated learning*

1. Introduction

Fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation constitutes a core theme of ethnic affairs governance in the new era and a vital component of higher education institutions' mission to foster virtue through education. The Planning Outline for Building a Leading Country in Education (2024–2035) explicitly calls for 'strengthening education to foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation' and incorporates this into the project of fostering virtue through education in the new era. Higher vocational colleges are integral components of both the national education system and the higher education system, serving as critical fronts for implementing education to foster this sense of community. The higher vocational student population is large in scale, diverse in origin, and broad in ethnic composition. These students are at a crucial stage in the formation of their worldviews, life values, and ethical orientations, and the shaping of their sense of community directly bears upon the future of the cause of ethnic unity and progress.

Industry-education integration, the core educational model of vocational education, has expanded from purely technical skill training to whole-person education including value guidance and cultural identification, offering new approaches for higher vocational colleges to foster a sense of community for the Chinese nation.

Situated learning theory holds that knowledge develops in social contexts, and learning builds identity and cultural adaptation through environmental interaction. Industry-education integration integrates enterprise production scenarios and professional culture into education to enable students' occupational experience. For fostering a sense of community for the Chinese nation, production scenarios serve as cognitive carriers, turning the abstract concept into collaborative divisions, norms

and cultural atmospheres. Cross-ethnic tasks break ethnic identity barriers, allowing students of different ethnicities to form cooperation under shared goals. The collectivist spirit and craftsmanship of industry culture connect professional and national identity, guiding students to shift from occupational community belonging to Chinese national community identification.

Current scholarship has accumulated substantial findings in related areas. Regarding the educational functions of industry-education integration, Zhao (2026) proposed that vocational education and industrial systems should construct a four-dimensional pattern of industry-education integration encompassing 'community of vision, community of interests, community of governance, and community of culture'. Song et al. (2026), through empirical research, examined the intrinsic relationships among collaborative education, embedded efficacy, and the sense of community for the Chinese nation, finding that embedded cognition and embedded behaviour are key mediating variables in the transformation from collaborative education to a sense of community. In research on fostering a sense of community for the Chinese nation, Wu and Wu (2026) systematically analysed practical difficulties including fragmented educational content, homogenised methods, and inadequate collaborative education mechanisms. Tan and Chen (2026) constructed a systematic pathway encompassing five dimensions: conceptual guidance, curriculum reform, faculty development, cultural immersion, and practical innovation. Additionally, Ran and Liu (2026) analysed the intrinsic coupling mechanisms between vocational education and the cultivation of a sense of community in ethnic regions from the perspective of coupling mechanisms.

Existing research has laid an important foundation for this paper, yet there remains scope for further expansion. First, in terms of disciplinary perspectives, most existing studies seek improvement solutions from the internal elements of value education (curriculum, faculty, activities), while paying less attention to the unique educational models distinctive to vocational education, thereby insufficiently tapping the unique educational advantages of higher vocational education as distinguished from ordinary undergraduate education. Second, regarding transformation mechanisms, the authentic production scenarios, cross-ethnic collaborative tasks, and industry cultural resources embedded in industry-education integration provide unique conditions for addressing current difficulties such as cognitive disconnection and experiential deficits in cultivating a sense of community. However, how the educational resources of industry-education integration can be transformed into educational effectiveness in fostering this sense of community has not yet been systematically revealed. Accordingly, this paper adopts the perspective of industry-education integration to explore pathways for higher vocational colleges to foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

2. Current Predicaments in Fostering a Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation in Higher Vocational Colleges

Currently, higher vocational colleges' educational practices in fostering a sense of community for the Chinese nation face prominent difficulties at the cognitive, curricular, and practical levels. These three dimensions are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, collectively constituting the deep-seated obstacles constraining educational effectiveness.

2.1 At the Cognitive Level: The Gap Between Cognitive Depth and Quality of Identification

Students' identification with the Chinese national community is positive, but a gap persists between cognitive depth and identification quality. This shows in three aspects. First, conceptual cognition is superficial; students lack systematic grasp of the community's history, culture, and value, and struggle with its formation logics. Second, value identification is disconnected from daily life, perceived as a grand narrative without personal relevance. Third, understanding of ethnic policies is fragmented; some students lack grasp of policy logics and significance, and with limited discernment, are susceptible to misinformation, risking cognitive erosion. The root cause is reliance on rote memorization rather than meaning construction, failing to activate the progression from awareness to identification.

2.2 At the Curricular Level: Structural Misalignment Between Teaching Content and Pedagogical Approaches

Curriculum instruction is key to cultivating Chinese nation community sense, but structural misalignment between curriculum and objectives undermines classroom education effectiveness.

First, teaching content mismatches student demographics. Higher vocational students have weak theoretical interest but strong practical abilities, yet textbooks follow a compressed undergraduate model with high theory and insufficient vocational cases, hindering student relevance and identification. Second, pedagogical approaches are one-way, with lecture-based classes and final exams, limited use of interactive methods like discussion and simulation, leading to passive student engagement and low active thinking. Survey data show many students find courses tedious and irrelevant. Third, assessment emphasizes knowledge reproduction, measuring recall of concepts and policies but lacking means to evaluate value internalization and behavior, so teaching effectiveness is not genuinely reflected and teachers lack improvement bases.

2.3 At the Practical Level: Superficialisation of Cultural Activities and Social Practices

Campus culture and social practice, crucial for turning cognition into identification, have not fully realized their educational functions, exhibiting superficiality.

Cultural activities are formalistic. Despite variety, student participation is limited to “lively spectacles.” There is a shortage of interactive experiences, underuse of new media, and no regular platforms for exchange. Fundamentally, activities lack systematic design and internal cohesion, hindering synergy. Planning is task-driven, not education-oriented, and poorly investigates student needs. Evaluation focuses on explicit metrics like participation and coverage, lacking tracking of student gain.

Practical education is limited in both coverage and depth. Activities are limited to student leaders, with few opportunities for ordinary students. Most are one-off, lacking continuity. They often lack reflection and summarization, so experiences remain perceptual, not rising to rational identification. Projects are poorly integrated with majors, and disciplinary strengths are not embedded in the practice system. Poor coordination between academic, student, and Youth League departments scatters resources, hindering synergy.

In summary, superficial cognition deprives learning of meaning; misaligned curricula fail to correct cognitive deviations; and superficial practices lack emotional and experiential support for identification. These three interconnected and reinforcing predicaments are deep obstacles to educational effectiveness.

3. Analysis of the Causes of Predicaments in Fostering a Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation in Higher Vocational Colleges

The current predicaments in fostering a sense of community for the Chinese nation in higher vocational colleges are not coincidental but result from the combined effects of multiple contributing factors, mainly manifesting in three dimensions: stakeholder capacity, educational provision, and environmental ecology.

3.1 Stakeholder Capacity Dimension: Coexistence of Students' Weak Cognitive Foundations and Teachers' Insufficient Educational Competence

At the student level, cognitive starting points are uneven and meaning-construction abilities are deficient. Higher vocational students have diverse backgrounds with uneven community education at the basic level. Survey shows urban students have higher sense of community than rural ones, reflecting regional cognitive disparities. Students are accustomed to fragmented information and shallow reading, lacking logical connections between grand narratives and personal life. They remember concepts but struggle to transform from awareness to understanding, comprehension, and identification. This deficiency drives the gap between surface memory and deep identification.

At the teacher level, faculty competence has structural deficiencies, particularly in teaching transformation. Some teachers lack systematic training and deep grasp of core concepts' context, connotations, and value, hindering engaging teaching. Others cannot translate abstract policy and theory into student-acceptable content, resulting in one-way instruction and knowledge-reproduction assessment. Classroom teaching thus fails to penetrate cognitive barriers.

3.2 Educational Provision Dimension: Fragmentation of Curriculum Systems and Insufficient Synergy in Educational Mechanisms

The curriculum system exhibits structural misalignment. Textbook content largely follows a compressed undergraduate model, lacking targeted development according to the cognitive characteristics of higher vocational students, resulting in a mismatch between teaching content and student demographics. There are clear boundaries between value education courses and professional courses, and curriculum-based value education remains at the level of slogan-like incorporation, lacking systematic design that deeply integrates the sense of community with professional spirit and craftsmanship ethos. This leads to prominent problems including mismatch between teaching content and student demographics, and insufficient pedagogical appeal.

Educational mechanisms exhibit islandisation. The top-level design of cultural activities and practical education is insufficiently developed, and there is a lack of effective coordination among departments such as academic affairs, student affairs, the Youth League Committee, and the school-enterprise cooperation office. Activity planning is predominantly task-driven rather than education-oriented. Evaluation systems emphasise explicit indicators such as the spectacle of activities and participant numbers, while neglecting deeper effects such as processual experience and value internalisation. This leads to 'activities without experience and participation without transformation' at the cultural and practical levels.

3.3 Environmental Ecology Dimension: Unreleased Educational Potential of Industry-Education Integration and Disruptive Influence of the Online Information Environment

Industry-education integration is a key environmental advantage for vocational education, but its educational potential is underutilized. Workplaces offer educational value in norms and collective consciousness. Industry role models provide guidance through craftsmanship and patriotism. School-enterprise projects in ethnic regions are practices in ethnic unity. However, these resources are not integrated into community education. Resources are confined to schools; projects are disconnected from majors; enterprises are treated as 'internship sites' not 'stakeholders'; and the educational function is narrowed to skills training.

The online information environment and algorithmic recommendations are disruptive. Information heterogeneity and 'cocoons' can mislead students. Some students have fragmented understanding of ethnic policies and lack grasp of their institutional logic, leaving their cognitive foundations vulnerable. Schools have weak online opinion guidance and lack systematic media literacy education. Students lack discernment against erroneous information. This is a key external reason for insufficient policy grasp and an environmental risk to cognition.

In summary, insufficient stakeholder capacity constitutes the subjective root of the predicament; fragmented educational provision constitutes the institutional root; and environmental ecological constraints constitute the systemic root. Weak stakeholder capacity leaves curriculum reform without a foundation for uptake; fragmented provision prevents stakeholder capacity from improving; and environmental disruption further undermines already fragile cognitive foundations. The intertwining and superimposition of multiple factors render the current predicament in fostering a sense of community for the Chinese nation in higher vocational colleges obstinate and systemic in character.

4. Pathways for Fostering a Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation in Higher Vocational Colleges from the Perspective of Industry-Education Integration

Industry-education integration is not merely an educational model but a systematic solution that integrates cognitive deepening, identification construction, curriculum reform, and experiential enhancement. Its core lies in incorporating enterprises' authentic scenarios, industries' professional cultures, and society's multiple stakeholders into the educational system, enabling students to accomplish the transformation from cognition to identification through genuine occupational contexts and social participation. In response to the above predicaments and their contributing factors, coordinated advancement should be pursued across four dimensions: institutional safeguards, curriculum restructuring, practical deepening, and environmental cultivation.

4.1 Strengthening Institutional Safeguards to Establish a Long-Term Mechanism for School-Enterprise Collaborative Education

Institutional safeguards provide organisational, assessment, and resource support for school-enterprise collaborative education, turning industry-education integration advantages into operable arrangements.

Establish a collaborative education organisational structure led by a senior administrator, with heads from publicity, united front, academic affairs, student affairs, Youth League, school-enterprise cooperation, and enterprise HR to form a working committee for fostering community sense. Set up a joint meeting system for planning activities. Enterprises have fixed seats and participate in decision-making, shifting from resource providers to stakeholders.

Incorporate community sense education into secondary colleges' annual assessments. In cooperation agreements, specify enterprises' responsibilities like providing practice positions and curriculum development. Fulfilment should affect tiered evaluation and contract renewal. Enterprise mentors need technical guidance skills and understanding of ethnic theory to avoid actions contrary to unity.

Include community sense education in the annual budget and set up a dedicated fund for curriculum development, activities, base construction, and training. Encourage enterprises to invest via internship positions, funding, equipment, etc., forming a 'institutional fund + enterprise matching + social support' mechanism.

4.2 Restructuring Curriculum Instruction: School-Enterprise Collaborative Development of a Curriculum System Suited to Higher Vocational Student Profiles

Curriculum instruction is key to fostering community awareness. To tackle problems like mismatched content, one-way teaching, and assessment focused on knowledge reproduction, reforms are needed in content, methods, and assessment.

Develop 'modular and project-based' teaching content. For higher vocational students, break from traditional knowledge organisation. Create a foundational theory module with core concepts, history, and logic of the Chinese national community, using key questions like 'Why is the Chinese nation a community?'. The professional integration module, developed by teachers and enterprise experts, embeds community sense into industry awareness, ethics, and skills.

For example, in a Tourism Management Tour Guide Practice course, create a project on 'Cultural Tourism Resources in Ethnic Regions'. Objectives include mastering techniques and understanding ethnic culture's core value. Students research an ethnic region's culture and design a tourism route promoting unity and prosperity. Assessment considers route innovation, market potential, and respect for different cultures. This integrates community sense as an inherent value in professional learning.

Co-construct a digital teaching resource repository with enterprises, managing diverse materials like policy documents and virtual simulations. Schools can initiate virtual simulation projects based on teaching needs, with enterprises providing technical support. Priority should be given to developing immersive resources, such as reconstructions of ethnic interactions and simulations of regional development, to address gaps in students' experiential learning.

Reform assessment methods. Establish a multi-dimensional system covering knowledge, value identification, and behavior. Knowledge assesses core concepts. Value identification evaluates transformation via project participation, collaboration, and reflection. Behavior extends to daily life by documenting ethnic unity engagement in internships and practice.

4.3 Deepening Practical Education: Constructing an Immersive Practical Education System Through Industry-Education Integration

Practice is key to translating cognition into identification. Industry-education integration addresses issues like superficial activities by transforming enterprises' production scenarios and authentic projects into educational resources, allowing students to internalize identification through genuine collaboration.

Create signature activities via industry-education integration. Using school-enterprise platforms, organise cross-ethnic collaboration competitions or activities. Topics come from authentic enterprise needs. Teams must be composed of multi-ethnic students. Enterprise mentors and school teachers

provide joint guidance. Assessment should evaluate both task quality and team collaboration. Use 'shared goals' and 'interdependent structures' to promote competence trust and emotional reciprocity among students.

Establish industry-education integration social practice bases. Each secondary college should establish social practice bases at partner enterprises or relevant units in ethnic regions. Bases should have clear practice themes, basic practice venues and facilities, and dedicated management mechanisms, capable of providing regular practice opportunities for students. Promote daily cross-ethnic interaction. Form study groups considering ethnic composition. Use shared hobbies in interest communities to establish cross-ethnic platforms. Through order-based classes and apprenticeships, organise cross-ethnic collaborative training in enterprises to build trust and identification. Include cross-ethnic collaboration performance in comprehensive assessments.

4.4 Cultivating the Educational Environment: Expanding All-Time, All-Space Educational Fields Online and Offline

The educational environment is an important carrier of implicit education. The current issues of heterogeneous online information, insufficient campus cultural educational function, and inadequate off-campus environmental synergy require higher vocational colleges to take industry-education integration as an opportunity to expand educational fields across three dimensions: cyberspace, campus environment, and social space.

Build a school-enterprise online publicity matrix. Institutions should operate a dedicated platform for publishing relevant content and outcomes. Secondary colleges should disseminate concepts using new media formats. Partner enterprises' platforms should simultaneously promote ethnic unity stories and cooperation achievements, creating coordinated on-and-off-campus publicity.

Strengthen online public opinion monitoring and student media literacy cultivation. Institutions should establish public opinion information sharing and joint analysis mechanisms for prompt response to ethnic unity-related online public opinion. Integrate media literacy education into the student education system, covering online information discernment, cyberspace laws and regulations, and basics of resisting erroneous ideologies. Use case-based teaching to enhance students' information discernment and value judgment capabilities.

Create integrated on- and off-campus physical educational environments. On campus, utilize bulletin boards, cultural walls, and sculpture landscapes, leveraging partner enterprises' design capabilities to create cultural spaces with Chinese heritage and ethnic unity features. Off campus, collaborate with enterprises to set up cultural display areas in locations like internship workshops and canteens, displaying enterprise ethnic unity stories and regional development achievements via illustrated panels. This integrated space construction immerses students in an ethnic unity cultural atmosphere during internships, forming a closed-loop, whole-person virtue development educational environment.

5. Conclusion and Prospects

Industry-education integration is a key institutional advantage of vocational education, distinguishing higher vocational colleges from ordinary undergraduate institutions. Translating this advantage into effectiveness in fostering a sense of community for the Chinese nation is essential for fulfilling education's mission and manifesting vocational education features. Drawing on situated learning theory, this paper reveals how industry-education integration empowers community sense cultivation through spatial production, stakeholder embeddedness, and cultural transformation. It then constructs pathways for fostering community sense in higher vocational colleges driven by industry-education integration.

The effectiveness depends on institutional pathway design and macro factors like regional industrial structure, enterprise willingness, and development in ethnic regions. Questions remain on establishing an evaluation system, incentivizing enterprises to shift from passive to active integration, and generalizing experience into norms.

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