

Shi Zhenyi on New Approaches for the Development of Western Minority Areas in China

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Abstract

Professor Shi Zhenyi advocated studying various factors that affected the economic development of western ethnic minorities and proposed accelerating development to promote the economic development of western ethnic minority areas. With the in-depth development of the economy, the gap between the east and the west in China has gradually widened, which is not conducive to economic stability and sustainable development. The economic development gap between the east and the west has existed since ancient times and cannot be changed in the short term. The economy in the western minority areas in China is an integral part of the national economy and the basis for developing the economy in the western minority areas. In the economic development of western minority areas, China should recognize the gap, identify the advantages and achieve stable growth according to the advantages of minority areas.

Keywords

Accelerating Strategy, Economic Development, Minority Regions, Western China, Shi Zhengyi

1. Introduction

Professor Shi Zhenyi (1932-2015) was the initiator of Chinese Ethnologic Economics and one of the most famous economists in Contemporary China. Professor Shi advocated for studying various factors that affected the economic development of western ethnic minorities in China and proposed accelerating development strategies. This article introduces Professor Shi Zhengyi's early theoretical thinking and primary contributions to developing Chinese ethnic minor-

ity economies. The main contents of this article are based on the collected works of Shi (2001), and as such, the theoretical contribution of this article is attributed to Professor Shi Zhengyi. However, we will take responsibility for all our mistakes.

Ethnic minorities and their economic development play a vital role in the overall economic development of China. The ethnic minority economy refers to the social production and economic life of ethnic minorities within a multi-ethnic country. It refers specifically to the economy of ethnic minorities. Its content is pervasive and most frequently used (Tian, 2022). China is a unified multi-ethnic socialist country consisting of Han nationality and 55 ethnic minorities. The western minority areas are located in the west and central regions. Their development level is low due to various natural and historical reasons, which have formed unique characteristics and affected the country's overall economic development to some extent (Shi, 2001).

China's western region contains 12 provinces, accounting for more than 71% of China's land area. It is lagging in economic and social development due to its unique geographical environment, historical foundation and many other reasons (Fan, 2022). In addition, the western minority areas have always been the hardest hit poverty areas. The widening economic gap is not only unfavorable to the economic development of western minority areas, but also unfavorable to the overall economic progress of the country. Therefore, solving the economic gap between regions, especially between the east and the west, has become an urgent problem in China's social and economic development.

China should parallel economic development and environmental protection measures when facing fragile natural ecological factors. At the same time, find our development advantages, see the development landing point, and achieve sustained and rapid growth of the national economy and coordinated economic development and shared prosperity. Based on the above realistic conditions, the western region has a low level of development. The lack of good natural conditions has brought particular challenges to the economic and social development of western minority areas, but the gear of historical development is advancing. With the support of government policies and other parties, the accelerated economic development of western minority areas is just around the corner. Understanding the factors that affect the implementation of the accelerated development strategy is the driving force for accelerated development.

2. The Great Development Requires New Theories

In the spring of 2000, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji discussed the Great Development of the West in a transparent and general way in his government work report. In his speech, he expressed his requirements for strategic priorities at the current and future stages. During the meeting, the representatives warmly discussed various issues in the development of the West and put forward insightful opinions and suggestions. The central government is formulating an overall plan

for the Great Development of the West. We should try our best to carry out in-depth exploration in the direction indicated by the central government to promote the deepening and perfection of new ideas for the development of the west (Shi, 2001).

Whenever a new historical task is proposed, the Communist Party of China always raises the requirement to understand and handle central relations correctly. Mao Zedong published his famous article *On the Ten Major Relations* in 1950s. In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping was required to coordinate the relations between various tasks in the development strategy of “first the east, then the west”. Jiang Zemin clearly emphasized in the 1990s the need to correctly handle (12) major relations in socialist modernization. Xi Jinping proposed “One Belt, One Road” in 2013 to lead the way and increase the opening up of the west. In the new century, based on the great victory in the development strategy of the coastal areas, the central government seized the historic opportunity. It began to implement the new strategy of developing the western region.

China must still recognize and deal with many old and new significant relations in implementing the new strategy. In our opinion, in ethnic work and research on the ethnologic economy, we not only need to continue to study and implement the thought of the three generations of CCP leaders on correctly handling significant relations. We also need to deeply explore how to properly handle new central ties based on the unique situation, problems, and contradictions in the western ethnic areas. The new central ties refer to the unique linkage arising from the development of the western ethnic regions, such as the dialectical relationship between ethnic and economic factors, the relationship between the western region and the central government and the relationship between the provinces in the region of the west, the relationship between developing national culture and advancing modernization, and the relationship between the west and the east. The strategy of the Great Development of the West is a long-term historical task. According to the current assumption, it can be divided into short-term, medium-term and long-term, which will take 10, 20, 50 or even 100 years to complete. In this process, many new central relations are bound to emerge. Through these critical relations, we study the Great Development of the West from the perspective of ethnology economics research (Shi, 2001). Over time and as our practice evolves, we need to keep exploring. We can only conduct analysis and research based on the issue in our practice.

First is the issue of correctly understanding and dealing with the dialectical relationship between ethnic and economic factors. In developing the West, we must attach importance to and handle the close connection and contradiction between ethnic issues and modernization. Since ethnic interest has its peculiarities, it does not always coincide in all conditions with other economic interests. It requires us to coordinate and handle the relationship between the two. The western region is a multi-ethnic region. We must deeply understand, attach great importance to and correctly take the relationship between ethnic and economic fac-

tors. It is a significant relationship that we must adequately deal with.

Second, China must correctly handle the relationship between the western region and the central government and the relationship between the provinces in the region of the West. We must also pay attention to the relationship between ethnic groups in this process. Moreover, this attention must be paid to both inside and outside the western region in the development. West China has the most ethnic groups, with 48 ethnic minorities living in the western provinces and peripheral areas (western Hunan and western Hubei).

Therefore, when dealing with ethnic relations, we should not only continue to handle the relationship between the Han and ethnic minorities correctly. We should also attach great importance to the relationship between ethnic minorities. The distribution of ethnic minorities is not only connected but also overlapping. Several ethnic groups may live in the same province, city, county, township or village. Among various supply relations, ethnic relations are in an exceptionally prominent position. It is an essential difference between the western and eastern regions.

Suppose ethnic relations in the past were mainly a vertical political connection in developing the market economy and the economic exchanges between various ethnic groups. In that case, ethnic relationship has become a regular and frequent horizontal communication. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels profoundly and vividly described the significant changes brought about by developing the capitalist market economy to ethnic relations. With the Great Development of the West and the general development and deepening of the socialist market economy, the mode and content of exchanges between ethnic groups will inevitably undergo profound changes. We must attach importance to the process and characteristics of these changes. It is an essential aspect of the changes in ethnic relations in the West.

Third, it has been the consistent policy of the Communist Party of China and the state to inherit and develop the excellent cultural traditions of all ethnic groups. The development of the West is to promote industrialization, modernization and marketization. They are inevitably required to encourage integration by their nature. It requires us to correctly handle the relationship between developing national culture and advancing modernization. This significant relationship cannot be ignored in the West's research on the Great Development.

Historical experience tells us that since modern times, many countries have been unable to avoid this issue in modernization but have had difficulties handling it well. In the process of modernization, the national culture of some countries has been well preserved and developed. Still, the national culture of other countries has been alienated or semi-alienated in the process. China also faces the same problem. Discussions of Westernization, Europeanization, localization, and Sinitization fall into this category. We have been discussing this issue throughout the 20th century. Based on 100 years of experience, especially the experience in the past 20 years, the state attached great importance to this issue and formu-

lated a series of protection policies. In practice, significant achievements have been made.

Protecting cultural relics, mainly ethnic and cultural tourism development, is good evidence. The ethnic groups in the western region have long histories and splendid traditional cultures. We must study how to coordinate them with modernization and marketization in the excellent development process. The correctness of protecting and developing traditional national culture must be implemented in developing the market economy in the minority areas of the West. Modernization, marketization, localization and nationalization should be combined dialectically. The traditional ethnic culture should be innovated in the process of great development. It is also a significant relationship that needs severe and further exploration.

Under the modernized market economy conditions, we cannot develop the excellent traditional culture of various ethnic groups like the American country. Their practice is to preserve the totem culture of the Indians in museums. Today, there are many famous ancient buildings in Eurasian countries for people to visit, and they are symbols of ethnic culture. This practice is also not the right approach for us. We must make the cultures of all ethnic groups the needs and spiritual pillars of the people of the ethnic groups in their real life. They must be integrated and embodied in all aspects of social life. They must be both internal psychological qualities and external characteristic appearances. Their essential functions must constantly innovate and remain young and full of vitality. In this way, the new Chinese national culture, including the cultures of the ethnic minorities in the western regions, will be prevented from being alienated by “integration” in modernization and development.

Fourth, the disparity issue is a meaningful relationship that reflects the relationship between the West and the east. Researchers have emphasized this issue and have been studying it since the 1980s. It was a key issue discussed in the meeting, and many solutions and suggestions about reducing the disparities have been put forward during the discussions. We have researched this issue and published some articles to express our opinions in the past. Our views can be summed up as follows: First, generally speaking, compared with the east, the ethnic minority areas in the West not only have the national, regional, backward and international characteristics, but also a significant gap in their social and economic development. Second, disparities cannot be equated with differences. Differences reflect the particularity of things and are philosophical concepts.

In contrast, disparities reflect the quantitative relationship between the speed and level of economic development, an important economic concept. Third, because of the fundamental inequalities in the economic development of the western ethnic areas, we put forward the accelerated development strategy and systematically discussed its content and implementation measures. Here, we would like to emphasize another issue: the disparities between ethnic minorities in the West are also a significant relationship that needs to be handled correctly.

1) The ethnic minority areas in the West mainly refer to the regions inhabited by ethnic minorities in the provinces and autonomous territories on the left side of 110 degrees east longitude in China. Its total area accounts for about 60% of China's total area. According to the economic characteristics, it can be divided into the northwest, southwest, and Qinghai-Tibet alpine regions.

2) More than 40 ethnic minorities live in this vast area. They are culturally very different, each having its characteristics. Moreover, there are also different degrees of disparities in the level of economic development between these ethnic minorities.

3) The abovementioned differences and disparities among ethnic groups are intertwined, leading to various specificities and complexities. For example, these ethnic groups have different socio-economic types: the natural ecological type, the socio-historical type, the economic-cultural type, the center-periphery type, etc.

4) Through further analysis, we can see that there are not only different development disparities between the northwest region, the southwest region and the Qinghai-Tibet region but also disparities among different ethnic groups within these three regions. For example, the development disparity between southern Xinjiang and northern Xinjiang, the development disparity between eastern Yunnan and western Yunnan, and the disparity between south Tibet and northern Tibet; different ethnic groups and living environments in west Yunnan and southern Yunnan show noticeable differences and distinctions. There are also apparent disparities between central areas and outlying & border areas.

5) Another disparity is the disparity in the stage of social development of various ethnic groups. Before entering the primary stage of socialism, some ethnic groups were in the last stage of primitive society. Some were in slavery, and some were in the background of serfdom or lordship. But most ethnic groups adopted the feudal landlord economic system. After the democratic reform and the socialist transformation, they all embarked on socialist development. Since the reform and opening up, they have made an excellent economy, culture and education. However, because their starting point was too low and their foundation was too weak, many ethnic minority people still have not eliminated poverty. In this context, long-term social and historical development disparities are still increasing. Eliminating these disparities is a challenging task. These problems cannot be easily solved without taking extraordinary measures and accelerating development by leaps and bounds.

Fifth, in vigorously promoting the development of the market economy, we must correctly handle the relation between the mode of production and the mode of distribution. Reality has told us: that the economy in the east has developed. Still, the polarization has become more serious, and we are further away from the goal of shared prosperity. Some say this is an inevitable feature of the primary stage. We do not want to discuss more on this. We have ideas but are not idealists, and we do not advocate implementing a "perfectly even distribution between the rich

and the poor” at this stage. At this stage, we support “four enough” (namely, enough food, enough soldiers, enough culture, and enough etiquette).

In exploring new ideas for the Great Development of the West, we hope to summarize the experience and lessons of the development of the eastern region to avoid the further widening of the development gap between various ethnic groups in the West. Stopping the widening gap does not mean stopping the accelerated development, much less does it mean immediately eliminating polarization. What we want are more wealthy families and fewer billionaires. This goal is achievable as long as we adopt the right policies. In the long run, it is well known that excessive polarization will harm society, the nation and the whole country. The experience of history deserves our attention! Communists cannot abandon the principle of social justice (Shi, 2001).

3. New Mission for Ethnologic Economics

In the last quarter of 1999, the Central Conference for Ethnic Work was held. It was a meeting of cross-century historical significance. This meeting was an in-depth summary of the achievements and experience of our ethnic work in the 50 years after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. At the same time, it clarified the main tasks and guidelines for China’s ethnic work after entering the 21st century. The meeting conveyed the speeches of President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji. Their speeches systematically expounded the ethnic theory and ethnic policies of the Chinese Communist Party and the state. In addition, the leading spirit of Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping’s Theory on ethnic issues was further developed in them. These two speeches are the guiding documents for our current ethnic work at the beginning of the new century. For a long time, they will chart the way for the normal and sustainable development and prosperity of all ethnic groups.

First, the issue of disparity should be viewed dialectically. Since the 1990s, whenever people talk about the West, they mention distinction and add that the gap is still widening. This issue is grim for western China or some ethnic minority areas. It is necessary and correct to raise this issue, study it, and find countermeasures. This issue is highly significant to the entire country, and our understanding of this issue has gone through an evolutionary process. We first mentioned this issue in 1979. In 1984, we began to study it based on field investigations in some ethnic areas. During the Seventh Five-Year Plan period, we included this issue as a critical national project and implemented a unique project for the research on the ethnologic economy. A series of academic writings were published, including *Research on the Economic Development of Ethnic Areas in Western China*. Based on an analysis of the disparity, they expounded on the Strategy of Accelerated Development.

Since the 1990s, many researchers have continued to study this issue and made significant achievements. For example, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission published a report on the economic development strategies of ethnic areas in the

1990s. Some research achievements were made in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Guangxi provinces. Hu Angang published a research report on Guizhou. Lob-sang Lingzhi Dorje presided over a study on the environment and development of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Lin Chengdong published “China: Out of Poverty”. These studies have all analyzed and explored the issue of disparity. These studies have played an essential role in helping people recognize and attach importance to different problems.

More than 20 years later, we have now entered the 21st century. As we look back, we should reflect and summarize our research on the issue of gaps. In particular, our thinking and research methods should be given special attention. The point of disparity was raised in the 1980s. Its importance was emphasized and linked to ethnic issues. Later, it attracted the attention of concerned parties. In September 1989, in his speech at the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Jiang Zemin proposed the elimination of disparity as a historical task. Knowledge should also deepen and develop as practice evolves and circumstances change. Especially after entering the “Eighth Five-Year Plan” and “Ninth Five-Year Plan” periods, the economy of the western ethnic areas has developed dramatically. Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi and Tibet have changed a lot. Yunnan has also improved its GDP ranking as a once backward multi-ethnic province. In 1998, it ranked 18, close to the middle (Shi, 2001).

First, differences and disparities should be distinguished. Differences between different regions cannot be equated with disparities in regional economic development. Second, any economic process is a dynamic process. Therefore, the economic growth between areas can only be relatively balanced. It is challenging for the level and speed of development to be entirely consistent. Disparities will always exist. But this is a constantly changing process; developed regions will not always remain developed, and less developed areas will not always stay behind other regions. Third, the disparity should not be regarded as a negative thing. Some people get nervous and resentful at the mention of disparity.

Disparities have not only adverse effects but also positive ones. The realization that “those lagging will be beaten” will motivate people to work hard and then surpass the advanced. The disparity can be a driving force. There are many such examples in the history of economic development. We believe that during the implementation of the “Great Development of the West”, the economy of the ethnic minority areas in the West will be rapidly and extensively developed in the next 10-20 years. Some regions, especially key development ones, will catch up with or even exceed the average level of the eastern part and become advanced regions.

Second, the academic circles proposed new ideas since the central government proposed the “Great Development of the West” strategy. This issue is fundamental, and the key is what new ideas are. The term new idea is relative to the existing theories. Which existing ideas exactly? Naturally, it is compared with

the development of comparable regions. The development ideas of the eastern regions of China, the development model of the western region of the United States, the development of the Far East region by the Soviet Union, and the development of the Hokkaido region in Japan are some excellent examples. Too much explanation is unnecessary. The remarkable growth of the western region cannot wholly copy foreign models, nor can it copy the development model of the eastern region of China entirely.

As we all know, the United States adopted the approach of capitalist colonial expansion in developing the West. This model can be called “slavery + capitalist ranch and farm”. The process of the Soviet Union in the development of the Far East was mass immigration and factory relocation. This type of development can be called an “embedding” model. The development of western China can neither copy the American nor the Soviet model. Japan’s development of Hokkaido mainly benefited from the support of the American capital after the war. The economic development of small areas is gradually advancing under the big trend.

We can learn some experience from the development of these regions, but we must not blindly copy their development models. With the development strategy of prioritizing the coastal areas, the development model of China’s eastern region is “reform and opening up + special zone construction + expansion of foreign trade and attracting foreign investment”. Over the past 20 years, we have achieved great success and accumulated valuable experience. In developing the West, we must learn much from the east and get more excellent help. However, the situation in the western and eastern regions is very different. These differences and disparities are reflected in location, ecological environment, resources, social and historical conditions, national structure and economic development. Given this, while learning from the east, we must also find new ideas suiting the requirements and characteristics of the West.

Regarding these new ideas, the two speeches by General Secretary Jiang and Premier Zhu have pointed the direction for us. In his remarks, General Secretary Jiang emphasized that the Great Development of the West is a primary strategic task. It is also a significant historical opportunity for the accelerated development of ethnic areas. We must further clarify the main goals, essential tasks and essential guidelines and policies of development and promote the coordinated development of people, resources, environment, economy and society in ethnic areas in a targeted and phased manner.

In his speech, Premier Zhu comprehensively planned and discussed new ideas for creating the western region and accelerating the development of ethnic areas. The main contents are: strengthening infrastructure construction, accelerating industrial structure adjustment, developing characteristic ethnic economy, building an ecological environment, enhancing poverty alleviation, implementing the strategy of rejuvenating the country through science and education, and creating favorable conditions for development. At the same time, we must unswervingly

implement the strategy of rejuvenating the country through science and education, prioritize education development, and vigorously develop the excellent culture of all ethnic groups. This model is “public projects + characteristic economy + rejuvenating the country through science and education”. It can be seen that this model is significantly different from the strategy of the eastern coastal areas. So, it can be called a new idea.

Third, the significant development of the West will inevitably promote the economic and cultural development of the ethnic areas in the West. Therefore, it will inevitably encourage the considerable growth of ethnologic studies and ethnic science. In his speech, President Jiang called on relevant departments to begin their research on the economic development of the ethnic minority areas in the West. It is an excellent historical opportunity for the growth of ethnology economics. In the late 1970s, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed to shift the focus of work to economic development. It provided the first historical opportunity for ethnology economics. The main achievements of ethnological economics in the past 20 years include establishing the discipline, cultivating talents, and researching the disparity in the economic development of ethnic areas. We held the Academic Symposium on 20 Years of Ethnology Economics. This symposium was a comprehensive and systematic summary of the development of this discipline.

As we enter the 21st century, ethnological economics faces a new mission. Specifically, this mission is to further explore the latest issue in the development of the ethnologic economy based on the strategy of the Great Development of the West in the spirit of the two speeches by the general secretary and the premier. What is development? What will we develop, and how do we develop them? What economic or social form do we aim at development? All these new issues require intensive research. The research on development is essentially a continuation of the study on disparity. Because it is further research on accelerated development strategy, it focuses on developing patterns and eliminating disparities. It no longer focuses on inequalities and their manifestations.

In 1988, the Ethnic Publishing House published *Research on the Economic Development of Ethnic Areas in Western China*. It focuses on the development, exploring how to accelerate growth and reduce disparities. Therefore, we can regard it as work on developing economies in ethnic areas. In 1993, Geological Publishing House published *Introduction to Development Economics* by Pan Zhao-dong; in 1999, Haichao Publishing House published *Development Economics* by Wang Wenchang.

Both books are economic works focusing on the issue of development. These two books have in common that they both advocate the establishment of a discipline devoted to the study of development issues, namely development economics. Today, we are conducting comprehensive research on new ideas for developing the western region. The above academic works have provided forward-looking statements with considerable reference value. In addition to the

above three scholarly works, there are many theoretical works and research on developing the West. We should refer to them when we study this issue. We believe that under the guidance of the two speeches, there will be more and more research on development, with more and more achievements being made in the development of ethnology economics. Therefore, new ideas for significant growth will continuously deepen and improve (Shi, 2001).

4. Strategic Measures for the Economic Development

4.1. First, Economic Development and Environmental Protection

Economic development and environmental protection will always be competitors, with unlimited demand and limited resources, a contradiction that cannot be eradicated in developing the western region. Environmental pollution, especially in the west region, restricts China's sustainable development and utilization of mineral resources (Li et al., 2013). Pessimists believe that economic growth is at the expense of the environment, and the discharge of many pollutants will lead to the deterioration of environmental quality. Optimists believe economic development promotes technological upgrading, which is conducive to transforming and utilizing the ecological environment. Giving up economic growth is unnecessary to reduce carbon emissions (Liu et al., 2021). With the development of the western region, the demand for resources will increase, and the contradiction between the environment and resources will intensify. Therefore, to realize environmental protection and sustainable economic development in the western region, we can vigorously develop a circular economy and put the concept of circular economy through all aspects of western development (Song & Li, 2012). The circular economy has become a national strategy to alleviate the shortage of resources and reduce environmental pollution. However, the implementation of concurrent engineering in China is not balanced (Guo et al., 2017). Developing an energy-based local economy, further aggravating the contradiction between resources and the environment in the west and alleviating the contradiction are necessary conditions for a growing economy in the western minority areas.

4.2. Second, Strengthen Education and Handle Ethnic Issues Well

In accelerating the development strategy, ethnic issues are also prominent factors. We cannot separate the country from the nation because the country and the nation are symbiotic in history and often integrated into reality. We cannot oppose high-tech and nationalization, thinking that high-tech development must eliminate nationalism, which is also an illusion. The strategy of speeding up the western region is better to develop the economy of the western minority areas, narrow the gap and achieve shared prosperity. Development advocates that each region specializes in what it can do (Yang, 1990). Developing the local economy and narrowing the economic gap, but due to limited cognition and asymmetric information, it can easily aggravate internal and external contradictions. The

state runs mines, factories and forest farms in minority areas. Initially, it was to revitalize the economy in minority areas and help people of all ethnic groups get rid of poverty and become rich. However, it has caused conflicts in economic relations between these state-owned enterprises and local people. Sometimes it even directly harms the interests of ethnic minorities and leads to ethnic disputes and disputes (Xia & Tian, 2022). One of the established goals of the western development plan is to narrow the economic gap between regions and ease separatist activities. However, exploitative and profitable development projects are still widespread in Xinjiang, thus forming an insurmountable gap between the Han nationality and other ethnic groups in the region (Chaudhuri, 2010).

The importance and urgency of education implementation lie in improving cognitive thinking and discrimination, distinguishing the nature of problems and alleviating ethnic contradictions. Resource development skills depend primarily on the development of education. It is especially true in western China, where the education level lags behind that in eastern China (Li et al., 2017). Narrowing the gap between the east and the west, the demand for highly skilled personnel is particularly prominent, and western minority areas are trying to attract scarce highly skilled labor (Walcott, 2007). To narrow the talent gap, we should increase investment in scientific and technological innovation and talent training in western minority areas. The low-level and low-ability labor force no longer meets the needs of development. We should attach importance to the development and training of education, communication and talents, speed up the economic growth in the western region, implement the acceleration strategy, and promote the economy to take a big step.

4.3. Third, Deepen Reform and Open Up in Many Directions

Reform and opening-up drive the rapid economic development in the eastern region while deepening reform focuses on the development of western minority areas and is committed to narrowing the development gap between the east and the west. Deepen the reform in western minority areas and implement the two-way opening policy. Professor Shi proposed the comprehensive opening-up approach for ethnic minority areas be an international and domestic two-way opening and circulation (Xia & Tian, 2022). With the new strategy of the Silk Road Economic Belt proposed, the development of the west will be rapidly improved. The construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt can give full play to the issue of resource integration and effective resource allocation, and economic development between countries can be complementary to achieve mutual benefits (Xu, 2015). The Silk Road has increased the economic ties between China and other countries, accelerated economic development in the western region to catch up with the eastern region, and gradually narrowed the gap. It is inextricably and necessarily related to the deepening of reform. The Silk Road is the embodiment of deepening reform, which not only drives the rise of minority regions in the west but also promotes the economic development of the Middle East. We will firmly

implement and improve the deepening reform to promote China's economic growth.

4.4. Fourth, Accelerate the Economic Transformation and Achieve Shared Prosperity

At the tenth Central Finance and Economics Commission meeting on August 17, 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that "we should adhere to the people-centered development ideology and promote common prosperity in high-quality development". Shared prosperity will be achieved by continuously narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas, income and regional disparity, and enhancing people's sense of access, happiness and security (Tangnur & Li, 2022). Only by persisting in taking economic construction as the center can we help ethnic minority areas eliminate poverty and realize the shared prosperity of all ethnic groups. Only by staying in reform and opening up can we accelerate the development of socially productive forces in minority areas and thus realize the development of the national economy (Tian & Li, 2022). Achieving shared prosperity promotes narrowing the economic development gap between the east and the west. For the economic development of the western region, policy-wise, policy inclination should be increased to the western region to give more development opportunities. The supporting policies synchronized the specific policy contents, clarifying the policies' operability increased. Implementing supportive policies is urged to maximize the effect of the policies so that the policies benefit the people.

The transformation of China's economic development mode is urgent. The western region is the most critical area of China's resource-based economy and essential to economic development mode transformation. From the regional composition of China's resource distribution and economic types, the resource-based economy is mainly in the western region, the main concentration area of China's ethnic minorities. 96.1% of China's ethnic autonomous local administrative regions and 86.21% of the minority population are concentrated in the western ethnic regions. Among China's 13 significant mineral resource reserves and resource development, the west ethnic minority regions account for a combined average of 42% and 69% (Hu & Yang, 2016).

In China, mineral resources are mainly distributed in the central and western regions, while the economic and resource consumption centers are in the eastern regions, resulting in a mismatch between the distribution of mineral resources in the east and west and the regional economic layout (Li et al., 2013). The uneven distribution of economic zones and resources has led to the variable utilization of resources, eventually leading to inconsistent resource potential in the east and west. For example, China's total coal resources are about 5.57 trillion tons, of which the west accounts for more than half. The recoverable petroleum resources in the west are estimated to be between 4.08 - 4.91 billion tons. Still, only 20% of the recoverable petroleum resources have been proven in the west.

The unproven recoverable petroleum reserves in the west account for about 40% of the total reserves in the country, so there is great potential for further petroleum exploration in the west (Chen et al., 2010). During the National People's Congress in 2023, member Dang Yan Bao submitted "a report on proposal of building a new national energy storage center in the northwest region". Accelerating the western region's economic development and the western region's economic transformation is crucial. Some scholars believe that China's ethnic economists should seek to explore the basic social structure in ethnic areas and start to transform the rural economic system in ethnic regions. They should establish a model of ethnic and economic development and look for a practical new path to developing an ethnic economy (Tian, 2022). Western ethnic minority regions are rich in resources and energy, and a national new energy storage center should be built in the northwest region of China as soon as possible to transform the potential resource advantages of the western region into real economic advantages (Chang et al., 2010). The resource-based economy is an essential pillar of the national economy in western ethnic regions. Resource-based industries are the key industries for transforming the development mode of western ethnic minority regions.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents Professor Shi Zhenyi on the new development strategies to speed up economic transformation as an essential measure to promote the development of western ethnic minority regions. Those strategies aimed to change the socio-economic backwardness of ethnic minority regions and narrow the regional economic gap. This measure makes full use of favorable conditions. It seizes opportunities to achieve economic transformation and narrows the gap through the transformation of development direction and accelerating development speed, in line with adapting to local conditions. It is suggested that governments should pay more attention to economic development factors to realize the accelerated development strategy for the western minority areas in China. The process should be transformable and multi-directional.

Nevertheless, there are limitations to the strategy. Firstly, the accelerated development strategy exacerbates the contradiction between the natural ecological environment and ecological development. Secondly, the accelerated development strategy could not solve the problems of backward educational resources, scarce talents and insufficient innovation capacity in western minority areas in the short term. Implementing the strategy can introduce capital, talents and technology to a certain extent, but cannot solve the root causes. Thirdly, the western region is dominated by ethnic minorities, and the accelerated development strategy is, to a certain extent, not conducive to maintaining ethnic relations, intensifying the contradictions that ethnic groups will have and leading to the rigidity of ethnic relations. Fourthly, the western region is located in the continent's interior, with strong, available resources but inconvenient transportation, low urbanization,

fewer economic exchanges with the outside world, low degree of openness. Implementing an accelerated development strategy must solve the problem of opening up the west.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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