The Dilemma of Hindering the Development of Chinese National Community Consciousness in the Post-Truth Era and Proposed Countermeasures

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Abstract: The formation of Chinese national community consciousness requires both the accumulation of individual perceptual understanding and the deepening of rational comprehension. In the post-truth era, the gradual infiltration of various erroneous ideologies into the social sphere, coupled with the rise of national public opinion, has led to a shift towards extremism in individuals' perceptual and rational understanding of the existence, development, and evolution of ethnic groups within a communal framework. This trend obstructs the cultivation of a positive, proactive, and healthy sense of Chinese national community. The root cause of this challenge lies in the "weak facts, strong emotions" environment of public opinion, which has facilitated the spread of historical nihilism, network populism, cyber-nationalism, and postmodernism, undermining the cognitive foundation required for fostering a shared consciousness of the Chinese national community. To address this issue, the Party and the government must resolutely uphold the authority to interpret historical truths, promote the narrative power of the Chinese national story, and simultaneously build a more comprehensive emotional recognition mechanism within the public opinion sphere. Additionally, they should establish a broader ideological network to enhance the ideological influence of the Chinese

national community, curbing the spread of harmful national public opinion and countering the erosion caused by the "post-truth" phenomenon.

Keywords: post-truth; Historical nihilism; Online populism; postmodernism

1. Introduction

"The advent of the Internet and social media has ushered in a 'post-truth' era" (Jiang, 2018). In this era, objective truth is frequently obscured, systematically filtered, and repeatedly reconstructed in the process of dissemination. As a result, the traditional notion of *"truth in images"* has lost its absoluteness, and the pursuit of truth has become increasingly ambiguous and confusing. The so-called *"post-truth"* does not equate to objective reality, nor is it entirely illusory. Instead, it refers to *"a third reality based on truth, but processed through personal emotions and purposeful influence"* (Luo & Kong, 2022). This phenomenon is evident in how strong expressions of personal feelings and beliefs often outweigh objective facts in shaping public opinion. In today's open, media-driven public discourse environment, the Internet enables the widespread circulation of *"lies, rumors, and scandals under the guise of truth"* (Ruan & Du, 2017). This has led to the proliferation of false or one-sided representations of "truth." In a digital landscape saturated with information—much of which is difficult to verify—the public is often left with only emotional judgment, ideological alignment, and positional bias as the primary standards for distinguishing right from wrong. Consequently, irrational discourse, emotional outbursts, and confrontational attitudes are more likely to gain public support and influence. In this post-truth context, efforts to cultivate a strong sense of Chinese national community are increasingly challenged by ethnic-related public opinion phenomena, such as ethnic division, discrimination, and the infiltration of religious extremism. This is largely because the once-prevailing principle of *"truth in images"*, which served as a foundation for building national community consciousness, has been gradually eroded. The public now questions the belief that *"truth becomes clearer through debate"* and instead becomes entangled in opinion narratives that cater to personal biases and emotional inclinations. The resulting tension between *emotion* and *fact* places the project of forging a strong sense of national community under dual pressures from both international and domestic public opinion spheres.

In the international arena, due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultural patterns and political systems, the international community's perception of China has become one-sided.Some biased international media outlets, without clearly establishing the facts, disseminate biased narratives and distorted interpretations of China's policies, development strategies, and social governance principles, thereby tarnishing China's image and reinforcing international misperceptions. On a deeper level, this persistent bias and stereotyping in international discourse weakens the global effectiveness of the Chinese national community narrative and undermines the legitimacy of its dissemination.

In the domestic sphere, due to longstanding cultural differences, overlapping interests, and historical grievances among ethnic groups, discussions surrounding ethnic-related public opinion often descend into confrontation, fueled by intense emotional bias. Under the influence of *"weak facts and strong*

emotions", individuals tend to stereotype and label ethnic groups other than their own (Lei & Jia, 2017). Misunderstandings and prejudices deepen psychological and cultural divisions between groups, leading to an intensification of national sentiment and emotional extremism. As ultra-nationalist sentiment spreads, xenophobic and hostile populist behaviors have emerged in the public discourse. Inter-ethnic relations, once characterized by mutual respect and harmony, have deteriorated into conflict and division, severely undermining the broader goal of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

In both international and domestic arenas, ethnic-related public opinion is eroding the ideological foundations of the Chinese national community. It also hinders the public's ability to develop a shared national belief rooted in collective consciousness. Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is to analyze the challenges that hinder the formation of Chinese national community consciousness in the post-truth era. It further seeks to explore effective countermeasures, with the ultimate goal of advancing the forging of a strong and unified Chinese national community.

2. Examining the Forms of Obstruction to the Formation of Chinese National Community Consciousness in the Post-Truth Era

Consciousness represents the reflection and comprehension within the human mind of external phenomena. It is a complex psychological and cognitive process that encompasses both perceptual and rational awareness.

From the perspective of perceptual awareness, Chinese national community consciousness refers to individuals' intuitive perception and emotional experience of the objective existence of the Chinese national community. Rooted in the deep historical legacy and real-life interactions resulting from ethnic exchanges and integration, it reflects the emotional attachment and identity-based self-awareness that individuals can sense at the perceptual level as members of the Chinese nation. In terms of rational understanding, Chinese national community consciousness entails a comprehensive and systematic cognition of the ontology of the Chinese national community. This involves not only a theoretical interpretation of the concept itself but also an in-depth understanding of its object—the Chinese nation. Such understanding is informed by the multidimensional relationships embedded within the Chinese national community, including *"history and reality, internal and external, subjective and objective, macro and micro, nature and society"* (He, 2019). It represents both a judgment of the historical transformations experienced by the Chinese nation and an understanding of the essence of its continued existence.

The cultivation of a strong sense of community among the Chinese people relies not only on the emotional resonance derived from perceptual awareness but also on a rational recognition of the factual reality that all ethnic groups constitute an organically unified national community. For individuals, only when perceptual and rational awareness exhibit a positive, active, and healthy complementary relationship can they develop an accurate and reasonable understanding of the concept of the Chinese national community, thereby facilitating the effective formation of national community consciousness. In the post-truth era, one of the most damaging consequences of the frequent emergence of ethnic-related public opinion is that it pulls both perceptual and rational understandings—essential for cultivating a sense of national community—into the quagmire of extremism.

2.1 The Polarization of Perceptual Awareness

Perceptual awareness is the process through which an individual perceives people, events, and phenomena based on their own subjective emotional inclinations. The polarization of perceptual

awareness typically occurs when an individual develops an extreme sentiment—either intense fondness or intense aversion—toward a particular thing or phenomenon, rather than maintaining a neutral or balanced perspective.

In the context of ethnic-related public opinion, the polarization of perceptual awareness regarding the Chinese national community often manifests in emotional biases, leading to extreme identification with or rejection of elements such as national identity, cultural traditions, and historical memories. While extreme identification can, to some extent, foster emotional cohesion within the Chinese nation, it also gives rise to a narrow-minded national consciousness. In this scenario, individuals may use their preference for their own ethnic group as a means of xenophobia and confrontation, rather than as a driving force for unity and self-improvement. The public's irrational defense of their ethnic group's image can cause patriotic behavior to deviate from a rational path, transforming into blind and radical actions. Once the public's national sentiment is manipulated by ethnic separatist elements, it can turn into a dissenting force, severely damaging national interests and the national image. On the other hand, extreme rejection in emotional biases is demonstrated by the public's sharp division of patriotism and national love from support for the Party and the government.

With the infiltration of religious extremist ideologies, Populist trends into public discourse, a significant volume of negative public opinion about China and distortions of its system have proliferated in internet media. Consequently, the public, having been long influenced by the rhetoric of ethnic separatism, has gradually "lost its correct political beliefs, and patriotism has become abstract." (Zhou, 2018). In particular, the Government of the United States has consistently denied the core values that should underpin a nation, straying further from its true national identity.

2.2 The Distortion of Rational Awareness

"The evolution of consciousness inevitably requires transcending the stage of perceptual cognition and ascending to rational cognition." (Li, 2004) Rational awareness represents the higher echelon of cognition. A correct rational awareness provides the core impetus for members of the Chinese national community to transition from individual self-consciousness to collective community consciousness. During the shared experiences of production and life among all ethnic groups, this impetus manifests in multiple dimensions. Politically, it is reflected in the policies and systems that safeguard the unity and stability of the Chinese ethnic community; legally, in the laws and regulations that protect the legitimate rights and interests of all ethnic groups and promote harmonious coexistence; and morally, in the ethical norms that guide the behavior of individuals and groups within the community. It is also evident in the rational thinking that steers the common trajectory of the existence, development, and evolution of all ethnic groups. The endurance of Chinese civilization has resulted in the forging of a national identity and sense of community that transcend the identity of any single ethnic group. This achievement is firmly grounded in rational thinking, which has facilitated the integration of diverse ethnic cultures and values over time, becoming the foundation for the continuous development and prosperity of the Chinese nation (Li, 2023a). On one hand, correct rational understanding can promote behaviors that foster a sense of community. On the other hand, an erroneous rational understanding distorts the knowledge and judgment of members of the Chinese national community regarding the essence of the Chinese national community. This distortion causes individuals to question national culture, national policies, laws and regulations, and socialist core values, leading them astray from the path of the Chinese national community.

For example, certain ultra-nationalists promote ethnic discrimination and incite ethnic hatred through violent acts such as beating, smashing, robbing, and burning, driven by anger. They overlook the fundamental interests of ethnic unity and national development. On the contrary, such actions exacerbate social contradictions and separatist ideologies, potentially hindering the country's long-

term development.The cognitive distortion resulting from their adherence to such erroneous concepts inevitably undermines the vision of the common development of all ethnic groups. As history has shown without exception, *"when the moral foundations upon which civilization is built lose their strength, unconscious barbaric groups will ultimately be compelled to disintegrate or be eradicated through various forms of violent revolution"* (Le Bon, 2019).

Consequently, the rational understanding that fosters a sense of community within the Chinese nation must be accurate. This accuracy is firmly grounded in two key aspects. Firstly, it draws from the experiences and theoretical investigations accumulated during the socialist construction efforts that have unfolded since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Secondly, it is deeply rooted in the national wisdom of the Chinese nation, which has been transmitted across generations throughout history. Only when a rational understanding is firmly established within the context of the Chinese nation can the nation be internally invigorated and propelled forward from its very core.

3.Exploring the Causes of the Stagnation in Chinese National Community Consciousness in the Post-Truth Era

"Post-truth" has become deeply intertwined with historical nihilism, internet populism, cyber-nationalism, and postmodernism. This complex amalgamation is continuously eroding the very foundation of "truth" that underpins people's perceptual and rational understanding of the Chinese national community. It simultaneously weakens emotional identification and undermines the social consensus embedded within the collective consciousness of the Chinese people. Over time, it even threatens to disintegrate the ideals and faith that support the grand vision of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

3.1 The Disruptive Impact of Historical Nihilism on the Collective Memory of the Chinese Nation

"Collective memory serves as the fundamental foundation for ethnic identity and is a crucial source of the legitimacy of a community" (Hu, 2014). The collective memory of the Chinese nation is the process through which all ethnic groups share their historical experiences—it represents an "internalized history." By recollecting their shared past, people consolidate and reinforce collective memory, thereby contributing to the construction of a "national community." This act of recalling the histories of individual ethnic groups serves to deepen and unify the collective memory of the Chinese nation as a whole, facilitating the formation of a cohesive national identity (Ma, 2017).

Historical events, heroic figures, and the shared hardships experienced by the people are given symbolic meaning through narrative. These recalled events and figures play a pivotal role in every stage of the Chinese nation's development and form the foundation for its historical continuity. Thus, the collective memory of the Chinese nation is a dynamic and evolving process, continuously shaped by changing historical narratives and understandings. It is, in essence, *"a cumulative construction of the past"* (Qin & Cao, 2004), reflecting the enduring common consciousness shared by all ethnic groups. However, in the post-truth era, the infiltration of historical nihilism has fragmented the collective memory of the Chinese nation. This fragmentation is driven by fictional, fabricated, and distorted historical narratives, resulting in a collection of disjointed fragments that lack authenticity and coherence.

Specifically, historical nihilism deconstructs collective memory in two major ways: **First**, it manifests as the *post-truth* paradigm enveloping historical nihilism, pulling historical understanding from the domain of rational cognition into the realm of subjective, emotional perception. Emotionalized narratives—such as those framed as *"shocking revelations," "hidden truths,"* or *"unexpected*

historical discoveries"—are crafted to match the emotional preferences of the public. While these narratives entertain and excite, they also suppress objective, rational analysis of history by catering to secular emotional desires. This emotionally charged storytelling dilutes the public's pursuit of historical truth, replacing it with alternative imaginations that deviate from orthodox interpretations. As a result, personal interpretations based on imagined facts begin to replace collective memory, thereby eroding the capacity for realistic and critical reflection on history. **Second**, historical nihilism couples with the post-truth logic of *"eloquence over facts."* Under the guise of objectivity and academic inquiry, it promotes the reinterpretation of controversial events in modern Chinese history through speculative hypotheticals and counterfactual scenarios. Arguments framed around ideas like *"There should be no forbidden areas in research," "Positions should be objective,"* and *"Perspectives should be novel"* (Li, 2020), though seemingly academic, are often used to advance fictional premises that distort historical truth. Examples include: *"What if the May Fourth Movement had never occurred?" "What if China had not participated in the Korean War?" "What if the Communist Party had never come to power?"* (Wei & Qin, 2020). These speculative narratives not only negate the progressive nature of history but also erect ideological barriers that mislead public understanding. Their underlying aim is to *"deconstruct and nullify national memory and value identity."* It can thus be argued that the post-truth era has intensified the one-sidedness and deceitfulness of historical nihilism, leading individuals to overlook the collective journey of all ethnic groups as portrayed in historical narratives—narratives that are presented in a way that renders them neither verifiably true nor false. Once collective memory dissolves, the spiritual beliefs and values rooted in that memory—the very essence of national cohesion—lose their most vital source of strength.

3.2 The Polarization of National Ideologies Caused by the 'Emotion-First' Doctrine

In the post-truth era, "objective statements of fact are often less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and incitements to belief" (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017). When public opinion events involve national factors, the group's criterion for judging facts tends to be emotional. Those influenced by the group's emotions "have their feelings and thoughts aligned in the same direction, with their conscious individuality fading away, replaced by a collective mentality" (Wang, 2019). According to Le Bon (2019), the collective psyche is attached solely to simple and extreme emotions, expressing the basest aspects of humanity to the fullest extent under the influence of highly exaggerated feelings. The emergence of national public opinion is essentially an external expression of the people's emotional tendencies. When public opinion is dominated by emotional outbursts, the result is the unchecked expansion of "bad subjectivity." In other words, when human subjectivity is governed by irrational thinking, no matter how much one's personal concepts expand, they can never approach or substitute real objectivity. In the dialogues and discussions surrounding national public opinion, individuals swayed by extreme emotions tend to imagine facts through "bad subjectivity," conflating the illusions created by their imagination with objective facts. This emotional, subjective imagination fosters a biased consensus that diverges from the mainstream ideology, exhibiting a polarized tendency towards cyber-populism and cyber-nationalism within the realm of national ideology.

Cyber-populism simplifies national issues into an *"us versus them"* dichotomy, positioning the ruling class as the antithesis of *"the people."* It constructs an extreme adversarial paradigm between the populace and power structures, based on the mentality of *"whatever you support, I oppose; whatever you oppose, I support."* This mindset fosters a paradigm of extreme confrontation between the people and power organizations. Those influenced by online populism fundamentally distrust institutional figures, perceiving them as not only corrupt but also lacking wisdom. They believe that true wisdom resides with the people, and that politics is only legitimate when political institutions align with, rather than merely represent, the will of the people (Taggart, 2005). Populists consider themselves to be the

true representatives of the *"people's"* will and exalt their actions as a movement on behalf of the *"people,"* while denouncing or even rejecting any presentation of facts that do not align with the *"people's"* will. Any facts that contradict the *"people's"* will are subject to severe criticism or outright dismissal. In essence, from the populist perspective, *"the people"* have become a sacrosanct entity, immune to criticism (Chen, 2011). The sole individuals at fault are those in power—the bureaucrats—who oppose the *"people."* This binary mode of thought has exacerbated class conflict and fragmented the consensus initially fostered by the social order.

In contrast to the extreme ideology of cyber-populism, which uses *"the people"* as a rallying cry for class struggle, cyber-nationalism manifests in the individual's national consciousness, which excessively favors their own ethnicity. This fervent nationalism leads to irrational opposition against others in defense of one's ethnic image and interests, rooted in the belief that *"personal loyalty to the national regime surpasses all else"* (Xiong & Yan, 2006). The political principle of *"patriotism"*, imbued with the people's profound love for their nation, has led to a prejudiced attitude, where individuals scrutinize other ethnic groups with antagonism. This prejudiced perception is evident in the blind xenophobia some exhibit under the guise of *"patriotism,"* as well as in the ethnic hatred that arises from ethnic identity segregation. In the post-truth era, the national sentiment, amplified by the interplay of cyber-nationalism and cyber-populism, is described as *"the outcome of the proliferation of a narrow, self-centered national consciousness"* (Yan & Ping, 2018). Extreme nationalists often incite nationalist sentiments, create ethnic conflicts, and pursue national secession by promoting theories of national superiority and emotionally exaggerating the threat posed by the enemy. In the long term, this kind of *"nationalism, which perpetually expands through self-aggrandizement and vilification, will be entirely detrimental to China"* (Luo & Ma, 2006). The Chinese nation will only find itself led into a predicament of self-enclosure and isolation.

3.3 The Challenge of Postmodern Thought to the Idealized Conceptions of the Chinese National Community

Unlike modernism, which employs purely substantive thinking to arrive at fixed answers, postmodernism prides itself on utilizing uncertainty, complexity, and discontinuity to challenge the veracity of presumed theories such as the "absolute foundation," "sole center," and "single perspective" (Wang, 1995). In this sense, the concept of "post-truth" aligns almost perfectly with the postmodernist allegory of challenging and subverting the authority of established centers, becoming a redefinition of the "post-" change in the landscape of reality, truth, and knowledge dissemination within the context of postmodernism (Li, 2023b).

In other words, the traditional view of truth—originally characterized by objectivity, universality, and absoluteness—has evolved into a post-truth paradigm that places greater emphasis on subjectivity, plurality, and emotion. In a communication environment where everyone holds their own version of "truth," human cognition is steadily shifting towards "anti-fundamentalism," "irrationalism," "subjectivism," and similar ideologies. As a result, truths, values, and beliefs grounded in social consensus are being completely deconstructed due to cognitive biases. For a community, social consensus forms the foundation for "the convergence of people's minds toward shared beliefs" (Zhao, 2017). In the context of the Chinese national community, the infiltration of postmodernist thinking continually undermines the general consensus that was originally nurtured by the traditional social order. The foundation of political civilization, developed through a community of all nationalities, is also facing disintegration under the postmodern spirit of rebellion against tradition.

In this context, the public raises banners of "freedom and liberation" and "individuality," critically engaging with the central discourse from various perspectives, at multiple levels, and in diverse directions. This creates a defensive mode that consciously distances itself from the central narrative

(Qu, 2007). The central narrative of the Chinese national community, as constructed by the power discourse system, is reinterpreted and imaginatively reconstructed through a reflective and critical lens. In this process, numerous individual wills subvert common values, clashing perspectives to establish a new central discourse based on subjective sentiments and personal judgments.

As the Chinese national community evolves, national public opinion, often confusing to the public, continues to erode, dissolve, and impact the central narrative of political authority. Individuals become caught in a rebellion against tradition and the myth of its inability to be confirmed. They perceive all ideals, beliefs, opinions, and doctrines shaped by political authority as oppressive to marginalized voices, and as traditions deserving scorn and criticism. It can be argued that, as a force of extreme individualization, the public—enveloped in postmodernist thought—articulates its critique of the Chinese national community's conceptual world through "reflection," thereby overriding factual truth by constructing its own subjective "ideal state." In the communication landscape shaped by "post-truth," the essence of this behavior is that people blindly follow a capitalized "truth" amidst layers of conflicting "truths," unable to discern what is true or false. This superficial and one-sided interpretation of "truth" has led individuals to diverge from the national beliefs they once held in esteem, ultimately dissolving their connection to the Chinese national community.

4.Addressing the Stagnation in the Development of Chinese National Community Consciousness in the Post-Truth Era

In response to the stagnation in the development of Chinese national community consciousness—further exacerbated by the spread of various erroneous ideologies in the post-truth era—the Party and the government must continue to promote Marxist theory as the guiding force in shaping a strong sense of national identity. It is essential for them to firmly maintain the right to interpret historical truth and to take the lead in ideological discourse.

As stated in the policy directive, they must "fully implement the responsibility system for ideological work, consolidate and strengthen mainstream ideological and public opinion in the new era, enhance the construction of an all-media communication system, and foster the development of a healthy online environment" (Wang, 2022). This comprehensive approach is vital for countering the influence of misinformation and cultivating a robust, unified ideological foundation for the Chinese national community.

4.1 Strengthening the Discursive Authority of Historical Narrators for the Effective Dissemination of Historical Truth

The erroneous views perpetuated by the conspiracy of "post-truth" narratives and historical nihilism have undermined the objectivity of historical truth as perceived by the public. This growing skepticism towards historical truth stems largely from a crisis in the capacity of interpreters to exercise their intellectual authority in organizing ideological discourse, which is itself linked to the diminishing reliability of factual materials necessary for restoring historical authenticity. For any country, *"the path to realizing ideological leadership lies in the power of discourse"* (Hou, 2014). Losing the right to shape and control ideological discourse makes it impossible to achieve such leadership. In the context of the Chinese national community, realizing the goal of fostering a strong sense of national identity under the Party's leadership requires that interpreters firmly maintain the right to disseminate historical truth and construct a healthy, constructive public opinion environment. This ensures that the "truth of history" remains deeply embedded in people's consciousness as society advances. To improve the effectiveness of interpreters in this role, the Party and the government must begin by ensuring the objectivity of historical education content and reinforcing the authority of official media in historical interpretation. The efforts must be made to establish a historical discourse

system grounded in Marxist theory. The objectivity of this system is essential to ensuring that educators and interpreters accurately convey historical truths. Upholding the guiding role of Marxism in historical research requires adherence to three fundamental principles. The first is **historical materialism**, which emphasizes class and interest analysis as the core value position. This principle requires historians to adopt the standpoint of the general public and truthfully record the contributions and roles—positive or negative—of different social classes and interest groups throughout history. The second is **dialectical materialism**, centered on the principle of "seeking truth from facts." This principle urges historians to guide the public in objectively analyzing and evaluating historical phenomena through dialectical reasoning, thereby combating the various false ideas prevalent in the post-truth era. The third principle is **scientific socialism**, which promotes a practical perspective rooted in adapting to and transforming the world. This principle insists that *"practice is the sole criterion for testing truth"* and that scientific methods must be applied in historical research to eliminate myth-making, speculation, and subjective interpretation (Li, 2023).

In short, in the post-truth era, preserving the objectivity of historical truth requires that the Party and the government approach history through Marxist perspectives, positions, and methodologies. This ensures that historical knowledge is communicated in a scholarly, credible, and authoritative manner. It is crucial to enhance the authority of government agencies and mainstream media in interpreting and disseminating historical truths. As Hilbeck and Grier (2016) note, *"each historical narrative represents a perspective shaped by prior thought."* Every historical perspective is underpinned by ideological assumptions; thus, those who control the interpretation of history also guide the direction of ideological development.

In the post-truth era, the rise of digital media has given birth to a new discourse paradigm that fosters a diversity of historical narratives. However, it also complicates the public's ability to identify and assess historical facts. In this environment, where truth is obscured and reality blurred, *"the authority of interpreters and disseminators plays a significant, preconceived role in the cognitive process, shaping a form of anticipatory thinking in the public's consciousness"* (Li, 2020). Therefore, government departments and official media outlets—responsible for interpreting and spreading historical truths—must strengthen their authority. They must incorporate accurate and fact-based perspectives into the public consciousness to effectively guide public opinion and cultivate a rational, forward-looking social atmosphere. To do so, government bodies should enhance their credibility by engaging with the public, listening to diverse voices, and ensuring that policy formulation and implementation reflect the core interests of the people.

At the same time, mainstream media must remain objective and impartial, committed to uncovering historical truths and correcting misinformation. They should resist the temptation to draw attention through sensationalist or emotionally charged headlines. Instead, they should aim to guide the public toward a clear and correct understanding of history, fostering a healthy historical perspective and value system.

4.2 Implementing Emotion Recognition Technologies to Contain Ethnic-Related Public Opinion Risks

Ethnic Western sociology emphasizes that the public is inherently emotional: *"without emotion, the commitment of the public to culture and social structures is impossible"* (Turner, 2009). Emotions—especially intense ones—serve as a powerful driving force behind individuals' efforts to enact structural change within society. As Le Bon (2019) states, *"group action is incited and governed by emotions, the intensity of which directly influences the group's ability to act."* Emotional and instinctive feelings are more contagious within groups than rational and calm emotions (Le Bon,

2019). As a result, highly suggestive groups are more likely to replace objective facts with emotional imagery and engage in group polarization.

In China, the emergence of national public opinion has been significantly influenced by media dissemination of elements such as *"stigmatization, rumor-mongering, sadness, homophobia, spoofs, and jokes"* (Guo & Zhu, 2015). Such emotionally charged texts have fostered distrust and created identity barriers between ethnic groups, exacerbating the emotional reactions of ethnic minority compatriots through polarizing discourse. In the post-truth era, *"discourse expression pursues emotional catharsis more than factual truth"* (Li, 2021).

Given this context, public opinion monitoring authorities must enhance the development and application of digital media technologies. It is necessary to establish intelligent identification mechanisms that can filter inflammatory comments and polarizing sentiments, thereby reducing the presence of ethnic-related public opinion in the public discourse space.

First, it is essential to analyze and regulate the tendencies of public accounts—such as prominent bloggers, opinion leaders, and media organizations on platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin (Shake)—to express national sentiment. These accounts possess significant influence, and their comments often align with the emotional needs of so-called "truth-seekers," generating strong emotional resonance among the public. As receivers of information, when the general public derives emotional and cognitive satisfaction from an opinion leader, they tend to imagine facts based on that information, granting the leader perceived authority and thus becoming followers of their views. If these accounts, particularly those lacking official verification, are emotionally manipulative or misleading in their dissemination of information, they may induce public emotional contagion and irrational fanaticism.

Therefore, regulatory bodies should utilize sentiment analysis algorithms in conjunction with content identification techniques to assess the emotional tone of textual content. This includes determining the emotional polarity (positive, negative, or neutral) and intensity (strong or mild). Such tools will enable effective monitoring and identification of problematic content that may trigger emotional volatility among the public.

Second, there must be efforts to predict the risk of group polarization within social circles involved in ethnic public discourse. Within such circles, interpersonal trust often outweighs the importance of information accuracy and objectivity. Even when information is flawed or biased, it may still be accepted and shared if it aligns with group beliefs and expectations. This phenomenon is particularly prominent when addressing sensitive issues, especially those related to ethnicity. For instance, the July 5th incident in Xinjiang exemplifies group polarization fueled by separatists who exploited ethnic tensions, using emotionally charged language online to manipulate public sentiment and rally support within their ethnic group.

To accurately identify tipping points where cognitive bias escalates into group polarization, internet monitoring departments must adopt comprehensive and continuous tracking mechanisms. These should not only monitor the emergence and spread of ethnic-related public opinion in real time but also conduct in-depth analyses of the emotional tendencies and behavioral patterns of individuals involved in discussions. Such analysis enables authorities to uncover key issues, trigger points, and dynamic pathways of information dissemination. These insights can inform the development of timely and targeted intervention strategies aimed at curbing the spread of negative emotions and prejudice, thereby preserving national unity and promoting social harmony.

Finally, vigilance is needed regarding the emotional contagion effect within rumor chains. Rumor propagation is often fueled by skepticism toward authoritative sources, reflecting a broader crisis of public trust. The repeated spread of rumors can gradually erode confidence in institutions such as the government, the media, and experts, thereby weakening the overall social trust system.

To combat rumor-spreading, particularly on ethnic issues in cyberspace, authorities should promote the active participation of civil society organizations, professional institutions, and individuals in verifying information. This will foster a pluralistic verification network, reducing reliance on a single source and improving overall credibility. Meanwhile, educational institutions should encourage cross-cultural exchanges and mutual understanding among ethnic groups. Such initiatives will help prevent ethnic-related rumors from damaging public sentiment, ultimately safeguarding the system of social trust and maintaining ethnic unity.

4.3 Enhancing the Promotion of the Ideology of the Chinese National Community

The Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams summarized the concept of ideology as essentially "the overall process of meaning production," with the collection of meaning elements constituting "the belief system of a particular group" (Zhao, 2017). Realizing the impact of the ideology of the Chinese national community on all Chinese children requires counteracting the erosion of national ideals and beliefs by "post-truth" narratives. This can be achieved by enhancing the quality of symbolic meaning production within the consciousness domain of the Chinese national community, thereby strengthening shared national beliefs. Since the production of symbolic meaning is essentially a projection of the cognitive subject's thoughts through the use of symbols, creating meaning within the symbolic domain that fosters a strong sense of national community involves realizing the symbolic functions that represent the spirit of the Chinese nation. These symbols reflect traditional culture, historical memory, and shared values in social life. This process is not only one of cultural inheritance and value dissemination but also a key part of constructing a collective national identity. Consequently, the Party and the government must enhance the ideological influence of the Chinese national community within the public opinion sphere. This requires further integration of symbols of national spirit, culture, history, and values into everyday life, enabling citizens to participate in the meaningful world of the Chinese national community through their daily symbolic interactions. To achieve this, relevant departments must collaborate with major social media platforms to build a transparent public opinion environment and reinforce the centrality of Chinese national community ideology. On one hand, these departments should maintain a strong presence across various platforms, offering professional and authoritative responses to ethnic public opinion issues and asserting leadership over public discourse. At the same time, algorithmic technologies should be employed for early warning and analysis of group polarization.

As Zhang et al. (2017) observed, "If society as a whole is structurally racist and holds negative biases towards a particular minority group, these biases will be mirrored in the data. Big data algorithms will then 'accurately' identify and analyze these biases," thereby reinforcing certain patterns within the public sphere. This can lead to a unidirectional and polarized understanding. In response, relevant departments must cultivate a cadre of opinion leaders across various sectors who possess both a strong grasp of political theory and deep national sentiments. These leaders should serve as influential voices to positively shape post-truth public opinion, integrating into everyday life and cultural exchange, thus stabilizing social consensus and fostering emotional solidarity among ethnic groups.

Additionally, social media platforms should be guided to use digital media technologies to create immersive, scenario-based experiences of ethnic culture. This transforms flat slogans into three-dimensional representations of ethnic customs and landscapes. Immersive cultural experiences allow individuals to engage in entertainment, interaction, leisure, and sharing. They help people appreciate

the richness of Chinese culture, understand the humanistic spirit, local traditions, lifestyles, and values of various regions, reduce social distance, dispel stereotypes and cognitive biases, and strengthen cultural relevance (Mao & Zhang, 2022). The transformation of Chinese humanistic symbols into core elements of individuals' spiritual worlds—realized through digital mapping—enables ethnic groups to expand the symbolic boundaries of a shared spiritual homeland. In a diverse digital cultural ecosystem, the visual impact of cultural landscapes reveals "many hidden institutions, behaviors, ideologies, and values" (Zhou, 2017). Subconsciously, the ideology of the Chinese national community is projected into people's minds, leading to unconscious adaptation and identification.

In essence, reinforcing the ideological influence of the Chinese national community involves deepening emotional and intellectual understanding of Chinese spirit, culture, history, and values. Disseminating symbolic elements strengthens identity and belonging, solidifying a unified national consciousness within individuals. This, in turn, helps resist harmful ideological influences in the post-truth era and establishes the ideology of the Chinese national community as a dominant force in individuals' spiritual worlds.

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