



Discussion: A Comparative Analysis

This discussion chapter juxtaposes and synthesizes all themes of TCUs and EMSIs from a comparative perspective to discuss their roles, facilitating factors, challenges and responses, and future development. This section also covers the research question, “What can TCUs and EMSIs learn from each other to address their challenges?” Meanwhile, the analysis process has also provided some insights on the comparability between TCUs and EMSIs.

10.1 ROLES

In the general AIAN and CEM HE contexts, mainstream universities and colleges are the main forces to provide HE opportunities to these two groups of underrepresented students. The mainstream universities and colleges enroll much more AIAN and CEM students than TCUs and EMSIs do. However, it does not mean TCUs and EMSIs are not important. On the contrary, they play significant roles in providing culturally relevant HE to AIAN and CEM students. In addition, they are filling an important role gap that mainstream HEIs cannot play or do not play well, such as tribal nation building for TCUs, ethnic research for EMSIs, and tribal or ethnic community service for both.

Regarding the differences that exist between TCUs/EMSIs and regular HEIs in the United States and China, some reasons are common to both TCUs and EMSIs, and others are unique to each of them. First,

focusing on serving a particular group of the population and cultural preservation is the major difference between TCUs/EMSIs and mainstream HEIs (Rainie and Stull 2015; Ou 2017). Second, TCUs and EMSIs have their specific reasons differentiating them from their public mainstream counterparts. For TCUs, the major difference between them and mainstream HEIs is the chartering body, which is the tribal governments instead of the state governments. Moreover, tribal nations maintain government-to-government relationships with the federal government. For EMSIs, the differences between them and regular HEIs in China come from the national policies, which regulate EMSIs to be a group of institutions to serve CEMs and their communities. Therefore, the serving targets of students and communities make EMSIs different from regular HEIs (Ou 2017; Zhang 2017).

However, among some Chinese scholars, there is a discussion about the role of EMSIs that they should emphasize their role as regular HEIs instead of only serving as ethnic institutions. One rationale underpinning this discussion was referenced by an interviewee's (EMI01) comments on the common misperceptions about EMSIs that they are primarily policy-oriented institutions, and their most important role is to fulfill the policy objectives providing HE to EMs and keeping ethnic unity. This common misperception has contributed to the unbalanced distribution of HE resources between EMSIs and regular HEIs, which has hindered the further development of EMSIs and the fulfillment of their institutional missions. In addition, the current HE trend toward becoming comprehensive universities contributes to this debate because if EMSIs only focus on their ethnic role, it is hard for them to also cover other non-ethnic-related disciplines.

For the specific roles of TCUs and EMSIs, the primary one for them is to serve as institutional agents in accomplishing their dual missions—(1) to provide HE opportunities to AIANs and CEMs, and (2) to preserve their cultures and languages. However, TCUs and EMSIs have different emphases in their respective roles due to the historical, political, and HE systemic reasons, as well as their geographic locations.

First, when talking about the roles of TCUs, tribal nation building has been mentioned by many interviewees who argued it is the most critical role for TCUs. This point has been supported by the literature (Brayboy et al. 2012; Cornell and Kalt 2003; Frickey 1997; Helton 2003/2004; Stull et al. 2015). The emphasis of TCUs on tribal nation building can be traced to their founding and to the Native American Self-Determination

Movement in the 1960s. Being established and operated by tribes creates a strong sense of ownership, recognition, and symbolic power which are reflected as part of Native Americans' self-determination (Cornel and Kalt 2010). For EMSIs, when talking about their roles, interviewees did not emphasize the ethnic group building as a separate mission, but they did talk about the political and economic development of ethnic areas as important contexts for community service. In the current Chinese political system, EM groups are under the full administration of the central government which acutely focuses on ethnic and national unity (Clothey 2005). In this sense, the locus of responsibility of ethnic group building currently resides on the shoulders of the central government instead of the EMSIs.

Second, regarding the specific role of providing HE opportunities, interviewees of TCUs emphasized the access to "culturally relevant HE," which is also called "culturally responsive education" in the literature (Brayboy et al. 2012; Gollnick and Chinn 2009). However, interviewees of EMSIs talked about "HE access," which also refers to general HE. This difference shows the degree of engagement of the cultural aspects in program and curricular designs at TCUs and EMSIs. TCUs generally place more emphasis on integrating their cultures, especially their philosophies of learning and knowing into their programs and curricula, as well as their institutional management. However, for EMSIs, because of the government-curtailed and centralized HE system, program and curricular structure and requirements are similar nationwide. Within EMSIs, ethnic languages and cultures are usually taught as subjects (Lin and Chen 2017). EMSIs are also trying to change this situation and engage more with ethnic cultures and languages, but the centralized governance of HE leaves them minimal space to create enough ethnically or culturally relevant programs and curricula. As one interviewee (EMI01) mentioned, his university opens a university-wide required course on an ethnic theory which has been very popular among students and was awarded by the Chinese government as an exemplary course. This example shows the potential of ethnically relevant courses at EMSIs, but the amount of such courses at present, in reality, is too small to make a significant impact on the overall curriculum.

Third, compared to the relatively stable roles of TCUs—as is reflected in their mission and vision statements—the roles of EMSIs are always influenced by the changes in the general Chinese HE system. As discussed previously, both TCUs and EMSIs first serve the dual missions of

providing HE opportunities and preserving cultures and languages. TCUs also focus on tribal national building and community service. For EMSIs, in addition to serving the dual missions, their roles are also following the traditional three functions of HEIs—talent training, scientific research, and social service—as well as guided by the national policies. For the general missions of HEIs in China, in addition to the traditional three functions listed above, some scholars are discussing new ones such as the transformation of knowledge, promotion of employment, and life-long education (Wang 2012). Meanwhile, internationalization has recently been proposed as the fourth function of HEIs in China. While these new proposed functions or foci of general HEIs are influencing EMSIs, there are also new emphases particularly for them. The newest mission for EMSIs is to serve as “Three Centers and One Window,” which means “EMSIs should serve as the center of cultivating high-quality ethnic talents, the center of conducting research on ethnic theories and policies, and the center of preserving and promoting excellent ethnic cultures, as well as serve as the window of displaying Chinese ethnic policies and strengthening international cooperation” (EMI05). This national directive for EMSIs is rooted in the traditional roles EMSIs have played, as well as emphasizes a new role that EMSIs should strengthen. From a positive perspective, the continually updating roles of EMSIs can help them keep up with the development of Chinese HE and the whole society. However, it may also bring more burdens upon EMSIs. So long as they remain within government policies and guidelines, EMSIs can determine whether the changing roles benefit or hinder them through their efforts. Meanwhile, this mission shift situation in China may provide some insights to TCU administrators that it is significant for their development by continuously scanning their circumstances and updating their mission and vision to meet changing times and circumstances. As one interviewee (CAE11) highlighted, one TCU is doing an excellent job of reviewing and updating its mission and vision statements.

10.2 FACILITATING FACTORS

The interviews show that several facilitating factors help in the establishment and development of TCUs and EMSIs. These factors include the external contexts that provide an enabling environment for TCUs and EMSIs to grow. In addition to the favorable external contexts, the internal factors—or the endeavors of TCUs and EMSIs—play critical roles in this

development process. Regarding the specific external and internal facilitating factors, the interviewees of TCUs and EMSIs gave different emphases, which reflect the different situations that exist between the two country contexts. The discussion of these facilitating factors aims to review and compare the favorable situations and the available resources possessed by TCUs and EMSIs. They need to realize the importance of these factors while taking advantage of them instead of ignoring them or even giving them up.

Regarding the external facilitating factors for TCUs and EMSIs, many interviewees discussed the factors related to the political or policy context. For TCUs, the political factor is the tribally controlled status; and for EMSIs, it is the national policies on EM HE. As discussed previously and in the literature, TCUs are the products of the Native American Self-Determination Movement (Cornell and Kalt 2010). A relatively few of the largest AIAN tribes took control of their own HE. In addition, a series of assistance acts provide continued policy support to the growth of TUCs. Just as one interviewee said, “tribal colleges exist because they were allowed to exist, and at least they are not opposed” (CAE11). For EMSIs, the favorable political environment is founded on a series of national laws and policies on EM issues, especially on EM HE, including the creation of EM colleges and universities in the 1950s, and the preferential policies for EM students in HE access. A significant body of Chinese literature has treated the national policies as the most important reason for the development of EMSIs (Clothey 2005; Zhang 2011; Zhang and Qu 2009), which is also reflected in the responses of interviewees.

As to the second external facilitating factors for TCUs and EMSIs, interviewees presented a big difference between the two groups of institutions. For TCUs, many interviewees argued that the available funding sources are both a significant facilitating and hindering factor for the establishment and growth of TCUs. Funding has been discussed a lot as a hindering factor since the foundation of TCUs (Stein 2009; Stull et al. 2015). However, as interviewees explained, after considering the condition of poverty on American Indian reservations, especially back to the 1960s and 1970s, the available funding promised by the federal government through assistance acts and supported by the tribal governments was vital to the creation and existence of TCUs. Even today, available funding sources are still important factors for TCUs. For EMSIs, the second external facilitating factor is the favorable social context, which is partially coming from the national policies on ethnic issues that promote ethnic unity

while recognizing diversity (Gan and Peng 2012; Ma 2006). Moreover, the favorable social context comes from the Chinese historical traditions on creating harmonious relationships among ethnic groups, especially the relationship between EM groups and the Han people. As articulated by one interviewee who is an EM member serving as an EMSI administrator, “from the long Chinese history, we have learned that we should live a harmonious life with other ethnic groups” (EMI01).

When covering the internal facilitating factors for TCUs and EMSIs to achieve their roles of serving their students and communities, interviewees’ responses showed more disparities than similarities. First of all, the internal facilitating factors for TCUs are closely related to the inherent characteristics of the institutions and the tribes. For example, the internal facilitating factor discussed most by interviewees is the on-reservation location of the TCUs. It is crucial because the close-to-community location of TCUs perfectly comply with their place-based and needs-based characteristics. With this close proximity, TCUs are strategically positioned to provide immediate services to their communities. In addition to the location, the tribal culture and tradition and native institutional leaders are other factors that are directly related to their tribes and cultures.

In comparison, the internal facilitating factors for EMSIs are closely related to the national policies, which reflect the perception of EMSIs that they are policy-oriented institutions. For example, as one facilitating factor, the self-positioning of EMSIs within the HE system is directly related to the policies of how to define EMSIs. While the government and some scholars keep emphasizing the importance of the ethnic characteristics (Zhong and Lei 2017), there is a trend among EMSIs of balancing their characteristics as ethnic and regular HEIs (Ou 2017; Zhang 2017). Many interviewees argued that EMSIs should focus on this trend because regular HEI status can bring them additional resources, which can be applied to accomplish their target goals in primarily serving EM students and communities. Another example is the institutional cooperation among EMSIs and the partnerships that exist between EMSIs and regular HEIs in China. The government initiates the cooperation as a policy like the “National Ethnic Minority College Presidents Conference” and the Partnership Assistance Program, both of which are administered by the government. However, the partnership that exists as an internal facilitating factor for TCUs like AIHEC and partnerships forged with other mainstream HEIs is based on the willingness of TCUs and governed by themselves.

Second, in the interviews, the strategic location was highlighted by interviewees from both countries as a significant internal facilitating factor to realize their institutional missions. However, the emphasis on this factor also has its differences. For TCUs, as previously discussed in this section, being located on reservations means an ability to offer immediate services to the needs of their students and communities, especially in remote and rural areas where public transportation is not well developed. Furthermore, because most TCUs are located on reservations, the facilitating effects of the location can apply to most of them. In comparison, for EMSIs, the factor of location mentioned by the interviewees stresses the available resources to them because of their geographic locations. On the one hand, because most EMSIs are located in rural and remote areas, for those Ethnic Minority Colleges and Universities (EMCUs) located in major urban centers—such as Minzu University of China in Beijing and Central-South University for Nationalities in Wuhan—they can benefit from the economically developed conditions, as well as the HE resources in finance and quality faculty and staff. On the other hand, for those EMSIs located within the border provinces—such as Yanbian University in Jilin next to the Korean Peninsula and Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities in Inner Mongolia next to Mongolia—they can benefit from the ethnic connections to better help their students find employment opportunities following graduation and better preserve their cultures and languages (Xiong et al. 2016). In this sense, different from the effects of location on TCUs, the benefits from the location can only apply to a small group of EMSIs.

Finally, different groups of people at TCUs and EMSIs were discussed by interviewees as the facilitating factor in realizing their missions. For TCUs, interviewees emphasized the significant roles of the indigenous presidents, especially those founding presidents in their development. In many TCUs, the founding presidents have served for a very long period, and some of them are still serving in this leadership position. The visions and dedications of the founders were the primary reason to make TCUs happen in the early days of the Tribal College Movement, and their legacies are still helping their institutions (Boyer 2015). In this sense, TCU leaders were highlighted by interviewees as a key facilitating factor of their development and the realization of their missions. For EMSIs, people mentioned by interviewees are referring to a broader group of people, including ethnic students, faculty, and leaders. Their dedication to

promoting the development of EM HE as well as preserving their cultures and languages is a major facilitating factor for EMSIs.

The establishment and development of TCUs and EMSIs, as well as the realization of their missions, are benefited from the favorable external environments and their endeavors. However, TCUs focus primarily on the characteristics of their own tribes and institutions, while EMSIs generally stress the importance of policy-related internal factors.

10.3 CHALLENGES

TCUs and EMSIs face many more challenges than facilitating factors when it comes to implementing their institutional missions. These challenges are organized similarly to how the analysis of facilitating factors section was, where the author examines both external and internal challenges. Many of the challenges can also be viewed as facilitating factors, which causes some complexities but also provides some insights to TCUs and EMSIs to better understand and overcome these types of challenges.

Regarding the external challenges, the major one faced by TCUs is the unstable and mostly single-source funding strategy. While the available funding sources are also viewed as a facilitating factor for TCUs to establish and develop, the uncertain status of these funds is a major challenge as well for TCUs to set up new programs and meet the emerging needs of AIAN students and communities. There are six reasons for the unstable status of funding for TCUs discussed in the interviews, which are also supported by the literature (Clement 2009; Stull et al. 2015). First, the unstable nature of the funding is derived by the highly political and sometimes divisive federal government in guaranteeing to fund according to the *Tribally Controlled Universities and Colleges Assistance Act of 1978*. The federal government remains the primary funding source for most TCUs, so without guaranteed funding, it complicates the operational capacity and potential of these institutions. Second, most tribes have no tax base for their TCUs. Third, TCUs also depend on obtaining soft-money grants, and many of them have no qualified grant writing staff to compete in this highly competitive arena. Fourth, the funding shortage sometimes results from tribal politics which can significantly influence what financial support is given/available from the tribal governments. Fifth, the poverty of the rural and remote tribal communities is another external challenge contributing to the underfunded situation of TCUs. Sixth, some interviewees mentioned that an increase in the number of non-native students worsens

the financial situation of TCUs because they cannot receive funding from the federal government for these students. However, while the growth of AIAN student enrollments also complicates the funding crisis for some TCUs, very few interviewees mentioned this point.

Compared to TCUs, EMSIs face challenges in relation to national policies and their marginalized position in the Chinese HE system. First, there are always controversial perceptions on the preferential policies to EMs in HE, especially considering Han students in the ethnic and rural areas who are poor and struggling to obtain a HE degree, while they cannot enjoy the preferential policies (Feng and Cheung 2010). Second, despite the national policies to promote their development, EMSIs are still in a marginalized position in the Chinese HE system. This is manifested by the fact that not many EMSIs can enter the prestigious HE development plans such as the previous *985 Plan* and *211 Plan*, and the current *Double First Class University Plan*. These prestigious plans mean sufficient financial and policy support given to HEIs. However, very few EMSIs enjoy access to this level of support.

Regarding the internal challenges, both US and Chinese interviewees discussed some related to the students; however, they have placed different emphases in relation to these challenges. TCUs deal with challenges related to low student enrollments and readiness, while EMSIs are focused heavily on student success in HE. For TCUs, the primary challenge is students' readiness for college-level education (Nguyen et al. 2015). Because many first-year students are non-traditional and some of them have not completed their basic education, TCUs must devote a considerable portion of their budgets to remedial education programs. Also, some TCUs also face the challenge of low student enrollment because of the competition from other mainstream HEIs near the reservations and the social issues hindering students to enter TCUs such as prevalent drug abuse and alcoholism. In comparison, for EMSIs, because the Chinese government has put significant efforts in promoting HE access to EM students, EMSIs have done very well in enrolling EM students and keeping the required ratio of EM students in their institutions. Meanwhile, the Preparatory Programs have greatly helped EM students prepare for HE. Therefore, the primary student needs at EMSIs are additional support services for EM students to achieve good academic performance and compete with their Han counterparts in colleges and universities, as well as in the job market after graduation (Ye et al. 2017).

In addition to the challenges related to student enrollment, readiness, and success, TCUs and EMSIs also lack the ability to attract and retain quality faculty, leaders, and staff. The difficulty of recruiting quality faculty and the high turnover rate are two major challenges for both TCUs and EMSIs, and one common reason can be attributed to the relatively low salaries, poor living conditions, and rural/remote locations. However, TCUs and EMSIs have different emphases on how to deal with this challenge. Many US interviewees emphasized that the decreasing native faculty members and the death of tribal elders are enormous challenges that need to be addressed. Also, TCUs are trying to grow their own faculty members, but the challenge lies in how to equip the new faculty members with a good understanding of their tribal cultures and philosophies in learning and knowing. In comparison, Chinese interviewees focused how to alleviate the high turnover of faculty members, especially those excellent faculty members who choose to relocate to the economically developed areas on the eastern coast of China. Moreover, the faculty members of EMSIs mentioned in the interviews mainly refer to the general faculty members instead of EM ones, especially those EMSIs located outside autonomous ethnic areas. This situation also reflects that the ethnic programs at most EMSIs only take a small part of the whole disciplinary structure.

As just mentioned, ethnic programs at EMSIs are only a part of the whole disciplinary structure. Moreover, the trend in China for HEIs to become comprehensive institutions makes the share of ethnic programs gradually smaller. Many kinds of literature argue that this trend dismisses the ethnic characteristics of EMSIs (Bai 2005; Lei 2010; Meng 2016; Ou 2011). Explicitly, this situation places a barrier for EMSIs to allocate scarce resources to ethnic programs and serve their ethnic students. In comparing this situation to TCUs that well integrate their tribal culture and philosophy into the organization operation and program delivery, EMSIs are superficially setting up ethnic programs rather than integrating ethnic cultures into the programs. EMSIs need to think further than just focusing on providing natural sciences and engineering courses using ethnic languages as the medium of instruction.

Many studies argue that the HEI accreditation requirements in the United States and the comprehensiveness-oriented trend in China are enormous challenges for TCUs and EMSIs, especially for them to preserve indigenous and ethnic cultures (e.g., Brayboy et al. 2012; Randall 2014; Stull et al. 2015; Willeto 2014). This is because the criteria for HEI accreditation

in the United States and the requirement to be a comprehensive university in China have not fully integrated and taken into consideration indigenous and ethnic cultures and traditions in the accrediting and evaluation process. However, many interviewees presented different perspectives on this issue. For TCUs, the accreditation process guarantees eligibility in receiving federal funding, and more importantly, this process ensures the quality of their programs which is the most critical aspect of attracting students and preparing them for the workforce or to advance to higher-level graduate study at a major university. For EMSIs, the comprehensiveness trend will help them increase their institutional level within the Chinese HE system, which means more potential support in policy, finance, and human resources. With more support and resources, EMSIs can be able to better provide their unique institutional services to EM students and communities.

Even though TCUs and EMSIs face various challenges, it is the challenges that make them struggle and alive. These challenges are valuable experiences and provide them with space to grow. Just as one TCU administrator stated, “Those are the challenges that we are having, but those challenges are what we want. Because we have those challenges, it means we are still around, and we are still here. If we are not faced with them, it means we are done, and we are not around anymore. Because we have them and they are difficult, we can take confidence in addressing them” (TCU03).

10.4 STRATEGIES AND GOOD PRACTICES

One of the objectives of this book is to present the proper strategies and good practices of TCUs and EMSIs, which can add to the depth of understanding how to better serve AIAN and CEM students. Meanwhile, these sound strategies and practices can also provide some insights into their domestic peers and foreign counterparts. In the interviews, participants expressed different perspectives on this topic. In specific, the strategies and practices of TCUs highlighted by interviewees focus on the institutional level, while the strategies and practices shared by the interviewees of EMSIs focus on the national policies. However, interviewees of EMSIs also highlighted some excellent programs that serve their students and communities well.

Regarding the strategies, most TCUs are adopting a student-centered strategy because as one interviewee said, “students are the reason why we

are here” (TCU07). From a practical perspective, many challenges faced by TCUs are related to students, such as enrollments, readiness for a college education, retention, and employment. TCUs clearly recognize the importance of addressing the challenges related to students, which makes it easy to understand why many interviewees treated the student-centered strategy as a critical one (Williams and Pewewardy 2009). Guided by this strategy, TCUs have taken different actions and provided various programs, such as setting up the Student Success Center or incorporating student representatives as part of the Board of Trustees.

The needs-based strategy in community service and outreach is another strategy highlighted by interviewees and is aligned with best practice community engagement in HE strategies (Jacob et al. 2015). This strategy reflects the close relationship between TCUs and the tribal nations. Moreover, several interviewees stressed even though most TCUs are two-year community colleges, they are also engaged in meaningful research activities to meet tribal needs and address local social issues. Also, many TCUs are cooperating with the mainstream research universities to conduct research. Therefore, research is a highlight for TCUs especially when considering most of them are community colleges.

Compared to TCUs, when talking about strategies, interviewees of EMSIs mentioned a lot about national policies, such as the preferential policies for EM students in HE and national-policy-guiding programs like the Preparatory Program and the Partnership Assistance Program. It is because, in the centralized HE system, the government bears the responsibility to address the inequality in HE access for EM students. Also, these national policies have gained notable achievements, so they have been recognized by scholars and EMSI administrators. However, because of the variety of EMSIs, the coverage and effects of the national policies are different for each institution. For example, those institutions administered by the provincial governments receive fewer resources than those directly administered by the State Ethnic Affairs Commission of China. Therefore, in addition to the national policies, these local EMSIs have focused on their specific strategies. These strategies leverage local educational policies to solve their unique issues.

Regarding cultural preservation, which is one important side of the dual missions of TCUs and EMSIs, both groups of interviewees provided some similar responses. They felt it was critical to establish required programs in indigenous and ethnic languages and cultures. However, interviewees shared differing perspectives on how to accomplish this

preservation. For TCUs, interviewees stressed that TCUs integrate their cultures, especially their philosophies of learning and knowledge into the curriculum design and delivery, as well as the management of their institutions. For example, in addition to the mission and vision statements, many TCUs also have statements that reflect tribal philosophies. For EMSIs, interviewees highlighted the need to further development ethnic programs, especially in relation to ethnic research as the main venue to preserve cultures. In specific, many EMSIs have established various research centers on ethnic cultures and languages. While TCUs rely heavily on tribal elders in providing courses on tribal history and culture, only one interviewee of EMSIs mentioned they invite local ethnic artisans to teach classes about the ethnic arts.

10.5 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Interviewees from China and the United States (US) presented two fundamentally different perceptions about future development. US interviewees were pragmatic, and self-determination- and detail-oriented about the future development of TCUs. They expressed optimism that if TCUs can address the challenges they currently face and persevere, they can have a bright future. However, Chinese interviewees presented an idealistic and context-oriented emphasis in their suggestions for the future development of EMSIs. In specific, interviewees emphasized the creation of a more favorable environment for EMSIs, and that EMSIs should take the full advantage of this environment.

For the future development of TCUs, interviewees generally focused on solving their current challenges related to funding, leadership, students, and faculty. In addition, most interviewees argued that they should continue what they are doing well, such as supporting institutional cooperation ventures like AIHEC and partnerships with mainstream HEIs. Meanwhile, TCUs should also focus on creating a favorable social context for their development by increasing greater visibility in US HE and society. As “hidden gems” (TCU05), TCUs should recognize the importance of introducing to the US society what they are and all the tremendous efforts they engage in for AIANs. Additionally, to create a more favorable context, TCUs should maintain a good relationship with their tribes because it is the direct environment where TCUs are operating. In this sense, interviewees stressed that TCUs should keep their place-based and needs-based characteristics to better serve their communities and tribes. Meanwhile, the importance of

partnerships with mainstream HEIs was also highlighted by interviewees and the literature (Gasman et al. 2013; Jacob et al. 2015; Stull et al. 2015).

For the better development of EMSIs in the future, interviewees suggested to better align their missions with national policies and to strategically position EMSIs within the Chinese HE system. First, a significant suggestion from the interviewees was to actively respond to and take full advantage of the government's HE policies (e.g., Hu and Chen 2017; Jin 2015) and other policies in the areas like economy, development, and foreign affairs. The second suggestion interviewees mentioned is to balance the roles of EMSIs to meet the needs of EM students and communities while also aligning closer to regular HEIs (Ou 2017; Zhang 2017). This suggestion is related to the better positioning of EMSIs within the Chinese HE system. On the one hand, EMSIs should keep their ethnic characteristics in serving EM students and communities and conducting ethnic research; on the other hand, EMSIs should realize their general missions, which can be broader to serve as other regular HEIs in talent training, scientific research, social service, and the newly proposed mission of internationalization. The reason for this positioning suggestion is that the classification criteria of EMSIs are based on their target populations; therefore, EMSIs should not be viewed as a separate group of HEIs. EMSIs include all levels of institutions from vocational post-secondary schools to comprehensive research universities granting doctoral degrees. In many ways, EMSIs are essentially the same as regular HEIs, but because their missions are highly regulated by national policies, they are usually categorized as a separate group of institutions. Balancing their position within the Chinese HE system can enable EMSIs to better take advantage of the existing national policies. In addition to the focus on policies, several interviewees suggested the importance of EMSIs to continue promoting harmonious ethnic relationships in all aspects of their operation and services.

A common suggestion proposed by interviewees from both countries emphasized the importance of strengthening and maintaining the quality of the programs they provide. Quality is a key factor for these institutions to be able to attract students and faculty, as well as to guarantee necessary support and resources, which will significantly influence the realization of their missions in serving AIAN and CEM students and communities (Lin and Chen 2017).

10.6 REFLECTIVE REMARKS

Given the discussion on the key findings, TCUs and EMSIs face some common roles, facilitating factors, and challenges, and which are also similar to their mainstream counterpart HEIs. For example, TCUs, EMSIs, and mainstream HEIs are trying to prepare their students with needed competencies to perform well in the job market. However, TCUs and EMSIs have additional and unique purposes to provide indigenous/EM HE, conduct meaningful research, and provide needs-based community service and outreach. For instance, TCUs and EMSIs serve specific groups of population. Also, their dual missions—especially their attention on culture and language preservation—make them differ from mainstream HEIs.

During the research design of this study, the author carefully examined underpinning rationales to compare TCUs in the United States and EMSIs in China. Both groups of institutions were established under very different historical, political, social, and educational environments. Before the implementation of this study, no study had compared and examined TCUs and EMSIs. The underrepresented status of AIANs and CEMs in their respective HE systems, as well as the institutional missions of EMSIs and TCUs in preserving indigenous and ethnic cultures, languages, and identities provide some important rationales for the comparison. Also, from an organizational perspective, both TCUs and EMSIs are relatively new institutions, which face many of the same organizational challenges.

This study offered a balanced perspective by providing both positive and negative findings from study participants and a content analysis of the respective institutional guiding documents. Findings provided many insights and recommendations for TCUs and EMSIs to review and consider as strategies and good practices for future implementation. Usually, TCUs and EMSIs self-reflect on their respective contexts of the US and Chinese HE. Bringing an international comparative perspective, TCUs and EMSIs have one more angle to look at their education, programs, and services provided to their students and communities.

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