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Research on the Optimization Path of Network Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities in Xinjiang

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Abstract: The Report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly emphasized the promotion of educational digitalization. The rapid development of new media in the era of network information has not only broadened the horizons of college students but also profoundly transformed the content and methods of ideological and political education. As the frontline of ideological work, colleges and universities in Xinjiang are guided by the Party's strategy for governing Xinjiang in the new era to advance network ideological and political education. This is of great significance in guiding students to develop correct network literacy and promoting ideological and political education to keep pace with the times. Through methods such as text analysis, questionnaire surveys, and interviews, this paper outlines the concept, characteristics, and value of network ideological and political education in colleges and universities in Xinjiang, analyzes its current development status and existing issues, and proposes optimization paths such as adhering to correct political guidance, highlighting regional characteristics, innovating educational methods, and strengthening subject construction. These efforts aim to fulfill the fundamental task of "cultivating talents with moral integrity" and serve the overall goal of social stability and long-term peace in Xinjiang.

Keywords: Colleges and universities in Xinjiang; Network ideological and political education; Optimization path; Digital education; Ideological security

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1. Introduction

The Report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed promoting the digitalization of education and building a learning-oriented society and a learning-oriented power. As a key symbol of the information age, the Internet not only provides new methods and approaches for ideological and political education in universities but also brings about new contradictions between the virtual and the real due to its characteristics of openness and anonymity. Xinjiang, located in the northwestern frontier with complex geopolitical conditions, has long been a focal area for Western influence infiltration. This determines

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the particularity and urgency of conducting online ideological and political education in Xinjiang's universities. Xinjiang's universities need to base themselves on regional realities and take online ideological and political education as an important means to implement the Party's strategy for governing Xinjiang in the new era.

Existing research primarily focuses on online ideological and political education in mainland universities, with relatively scattered and unsystematic studies targeting the Xinjiang region. This paper combines regional characteristics and proposes optimized paths through empirical investigations, providing theoretical references and practical guidance for online ideological and political education in Xinjiang's universities.

2. Related concepts and characteristics

2.1. Conceptual definition

2.1.1. Ideological and political education

Ideological and political education refers to the social practice activities where a society or social group exerts purposeful, planned, and organized influences on its members through certain ideologies, political viewpoints, and moral norms, shaping their ideological and moral qualities that meet the requirements of a given society [1]. Against the backdrop of social and historical development in the new era, it is essential to uphold the "Two Integrations" unwaveringly, laying a solid ideological and cultural foundation for the conduct of ideological and political work. Additionally, it is crucial to thoroughly implement the "Six Musts," providing fundamental guidelines and methodological directions for advancing the orthodoxy and innovation of ideological and political education.

2.1.2. Online ideological and political education

Online ideological and political education represents an extension of traditional ideological and political education into cyberspace. The concept was first introduced by scholar Liu Mei in 2000, who defined it as "ideological and political education conducted through computer networks, based on theories of communication and ideological propaganda" [2]. As the discipline has evolved, its connotations have expanded, emphasizing the use of online platforms and technological tools to carry out ideological education.

2.1.3. Online ideological and political education in Xinjiang's universities

Currently, universities in Xinjiang leverage online platforms and information technology to conduct organized, planned, and purposeful theoretical and practical activities in ideological and political education. These efforts aim to guide students in forming thought patterns, political views, and moral values that align with the needs of economic and social development, while also ensuring the complete and accurate implementation of the Party's governance strategy for Xinjiang in the new era.

2.2. Main characteristics

2.2.1. Interactivity and multi-ethnicity of educational subjects and objects

Online platforms have broken down the traditional one-way indoctrination model, promoting subject-objectification and object-subjectification processes, and enhancing two-way communication. Educators and students in Xinjiang's universities come from multiple ethnic groups, including Han, Uyghur, and Kazakh, showcasing significant multi-ethnic characteristics. Given the differences in historical and cultural backgrounds, as well as educational levels among teachers and students from different ethnic groups, there is a need for scientific and targeted guidance methods. These methods should facilitate active exchanges and mutual learning

among all parties, thereby jointly improving their overall qualities.

2.2.2. Richness and specificity of educational content

In terms of content, it is essential to adhere to the unity of the Party's guiding ideology while integrating diverse information sources such as government reports, cutting-edge academic research, and current political hot topics. Universities in Xinjiang should take fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation as their main focus, strengthen education on the "Five Identifications," and establish correct views on the state, ethnicity, history, culture, and religion. While the wealth of online information brings positive factors, it also comes with negative impacts. Therefore, universities must establish a comprehensive system of ideological and political education departments, rigorously review relevant materials, ensure the consistent cultivation and promotion of core socialist values, and create a healthy, civilized, and harmonious internet environment in universities in the new era.

2.2.3. Innovativeness and comprehensiveness of educational approaches

Leveraging technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence, a hybrid teaching model combining online and offline elements has been established. Various ideological and political education websites, revolutionary-themed platforms, and short-video accounts complement each other to carry out all-encompassing cultural enrichment activities in Xinjiang. Online and offline hybrid teaching is widely adopted in network-based ideological and political education in Xinjiang's higher education institutions. Building on the stability of the first classroom (in-class teaching), it enriches the second classroom (extracurricular practice) while innovating the third classroom (online activities). This approach extends communication channels, broadens dissemination dimensions, and enhances the comprehensiveness of ideological and political education practices through multidimensional integration.

2.2.4. Virtuality and complexity of the educational environment

The virtual nature of the internet has broken down temporal and spatial barriers, intensifying ideological struggles. External forces often infiltrate extremist ideologies through the internet, posing threats to the ideological and political environment in Xinjiang's higher education institutions. Located in China's northwestern frontier, Xinjiang is the country's largest province by area, shares borders with the most countries, and has the longest land border. Its complex geopolitical situation makes ideological struggles particularly intense. External extremist religious forces and ethnic separatist groups have long infiltrated Xinjiang through neighboring countries, seriously threatening social stability and overall national security.

3. Value implications

3.1. Guiding college students to develop proper online literacy

The cultivation of youth values shapes the future direction of society. Through online ideological and political education, Xinjiang's higher education institutions strengthen education on internet ideological security and legal norms, enhancing students' ability to discern information and guiding them to adopt mainstream societal values. Given the internet's inherent potential security risks due to its anonymity and concealment, coupled with the vast amount of information that is both good and bad, students in Xinjiang's higher education institutions face unique ideological risks when using the internet. These measures not only facilitate the cultivation of proper cyber literacy and habits, guiding the physical and mental health and long-term development of college

students in Xinjiang, but also contribute to the implementation of the national "Clear and Bright" special campaign and the construction of a more harmonious, green, and civilized cyber society.

3.2. Promoting the in-depth development of ideological and political education

The Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in the New Era (2021) emphasizes the need to deeply integrate ideological and political work with information technology. The digitalization of networks provides Xinjiang with abundant resources and innovative methods for ideological and political education, aiding in the proactive control of ideological and political endeavors. In the internet age, guided by relevant top-level designs, colleges and universities in Xinjiang deeply integrate and highly combine ideological and political education with internet information technology. This not only provides a vast repository of diverse educational content for ideological and political education among college students in Xinjiang but also innovates and expands the methods and pathways for ideological and political education in Xinjiang's colleges and universities in the new era, thereby effectively occupying the ideological and educational frontlines in cyberspace.

3.3. Facilitating the implementation of the strategy for governing Xinjiang in the new era

Xinjiang, located at the heart of the Eurasian continent, stands at the forefront of the ideological struggle against separatism. Some college students in Xinjiang have been misled by various social ideologies from both domestic and international sources, objectively adding uncertain factors that affect social stability and long-term peace in Xinjiang. College students in Xinjiang represent a pivotal force in determining social development. Ideological and political education guides the development of cyberspace, enhancing the understanding and implementation of the Party's strategy for governing Xinjiang in the new era and promoting the modernization of social governance in Xinjiang. As the primary group in cyberspace and the new generation shouldering the responsibility of national rejuvenation in the new era, college students in Xinjiang constitute a crucial demographic that determines the future social development and value orientation of Xinjiang.

4. Analysis of the current situation and issues

Research and surveys indicate that while network-based ideological and political education in Xinjiang's colleges and universities has achieved certain successes, significant challenges still persist.

4.1. Main achievements

4.1.1. Consensus on education has largely been reached, and platform construction has begun to show results

The majority of universities have widely implemented online ideological and political education. For instance, Xinjiang University has established new media studios such as the "Honghu Youth" WeChat official account and "Weiguang," while Xinjiang Normal University has actively built online platforms like the series of ideological and political micro-lectures on "The Spiritual Genealogy of Chinese Communists" and the "Xiaoma Benteng" new media studio. The "Youth Blooms: The Z Generation" Creative Speech Contest for University Students Across Xinjiang and Online Civilization Practice Activities were held both online and offline at Xinjiang Agricultural University, where teachers and students from 46 universities across Xinjiang shared how to fulfill the youth pledge of "Rest assured, the Party, our country will be strong with us." Survey data indicate that nearly 70% of universities in Xinjiang "frequently conduct" online ideological and political education

activities, demonstrating a widespread consensus and active practice among universities in Xinjiang regarding online ideological and political education.

4.1.2. Teaching platforms are gradually being integrated into classrooms, and blended learning is gradually being promoted

Platforms such as Chaoxing Learning Pass, university official websites, and WeChat official accounts have become the primary carriers. Xinjiang University's "Virtual Teaching and Research Office for Concise Local History of Xinjiang Course" was selected for the Ministry of Education's pilot program, and the School of Marxism at Xinjiang Normal University collaborated with China Telecom Xinjiang Branch to establish the "Digital Education Research Institute for Strengthening the Sense of the Chinese National Community." These initiatives reflect the progress of technology-enabled teaching. In terms of platform selection, universities primarily rely on "Chaoxing Learning Pass," university official websites, WeChat official accounts, and "Rain Classroom," with each accounting for over half of the choices. The construction of these carriers has begun to take shape, covering a wide range of information dissemination.

4.1.3. High student satisfaction and significant educational effects

Questionnaire survey results show that over 90% of students are satisfied with the current online ideological and political education, believing that it has a positive impact on their daily behavior. Half of the students always think before acting to self-regulate, indicating that the current educational content has, to a certain extent, achieved "penetration into the mind and heart." Especially in terms of national identity, ethnic unity, and awareness of the rule of law, students generally reported an enhanced understanding through online learning. For instance, some students mentioned in interviews, "Through online learning about the 'Five Identifications,' I have developed a stronger sense of identification with the Chinese nation and a deeper understanding of Xinjiang's importance in the country's development."

4.2. Existing problems and their causes

4.2.1. Complex online environment challenges ideological fronts

Foreign forces exploit the internet to infiltrate Western values, and some students, with weak information discrimination abilities, are susceptible to negative influences. The internet's timeless and spaceless nature has brought about an unprecedented information explosion, with students accessing information from a wide range of sources in cyberspace, where diverse values collide and interact. Multiple Western hostile forces are leveraging their technological advantages to frequently promote Western capitalist values and ideologies to young students of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang, attempting to fundamentally undermine the construction of China's mainstream ideological fronts and achieve the goal of "Westernization" and "division" of China [3]. College students are generally at a stage where their physical and mental development is not yet fully mature, and negative influences can easily cause severe harm to the physical and mental well-being of students with weak information screening and discrimination abilities.

4.2.2. Homogenized educational content lacks attractiveness and relevance

Although universities generally offer online ideological and political education columns, issues such as outdated content, similar formats, and dull language are prevalent. Most platforms primarily focus on policy promotion and theoretical indoctrination, lacking content design that integrates with students' lives and interests. During interviews, some students expressed a desire for diverse content, such as the incorporation of traditional culture

and gaming elements. Currently, although specialized websites at universities in Xinjiang are divided into different thematic sections and columns to display various resources and information, some websites have long update cycles, resulting in educational lag. The overall integration of online ideological and political education ecological construction in Xinjiang's universities is not high, with limited information sharing and learning exchange among universities. Additionally, the limited communication between online ideological and political education workers and students, as well as the low level of understanding of students' actual educational needs, collectively contribute to the phenomenon of monotonous and highly homogenized content in online ideological and political education at Xinjiang's universities. Some interviewed students mentioned, "We hope that the school can better align online ideological and political education with students' interests. For example, I am very interested in China's excellent traditional culture and hope that more interesting historical knowledge and cultural traditions can be incorporated into daily teaching. I would be very willing to listen."

4.2.3. The support of information technology is weak, and innovative approaches are insufficient

In August 2019, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the *Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools in the New Era*, emphasizing the need to "vigorously promote the reform of teaching methods in ideological and political courses, enhance the information technology literacy of teachers in these courses, and promote the application of modern technologies such as artificial intelligence in the teaching of ideological and political courses" [4]. At present, colleges and universities in Xinjiang mostly use low-end technologies such as PowerPoint presentations and microfilms, with less application of cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual simulation. Survey data indicate that the technologies currently used in online ideological and political education teaching in Xinjiang's colleges and universities mainly include PowerPoint presentations, microfilm screenings, online knowledge competitions, and MOOC course recordings, with less introduction of more advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and virtual simulation. Xinjiang's colleges and universities have failed to overcome the technological update dilemma, mostly remaining at the stage of theoretical learning and future planning, lacking practical development and innovation of available platforms and teaching tools, thereby failing to provide teachers and students with higher-level digital teaching solutions.

4.2.4. Teachers' mindsets are outdated, and their skill sets are imbalanced

Teachers are the key actors in online ideological and political education, but currently, the ideological and political education teaching staff in Xinjiang's colleges and universities generally exhibit problems of "emphasizing theory over technology" and "prioritizing indoctrination over interaction." Some teachers still adhere to a one-way indoctrination model, lacking technical application skills and resulting in insufficient teacher-student interaction. Most ideological and political course teachers still adhere to traditional teaching philosophies, possessing only simple and procedural technical tool operation skills, and lacking the ability to flexibly apply various intelligent technological means, causing online ideological and political education to remain as superficial "formality." More than half of the students hope that teachers can genuinely enhance students' learning agency by adopting approaches such as "minimizing purely theoretical content to make it more accessible and understandable," "integrating students' online usage habits into their daily campus life," "avoiding one-way indoctrination and encouraging students to express themselves actively," and "expanding current political hot topics in an engaging manner to ensure that the knowledge learned stays up-to-date." Some

interviewed students mentioned that different teachers have varying levels of proficiency in network technology and its application, and there is often a lag in updating both technology and concepts. In practical teaching, methods such as PPT presentations and video playbacks remain predominant, while teaching approaches with higher technological proficiency, such as VR virtual practice, are less widely adopted.

5. Optimization pathways

In response to the aforementioned issues, Xinjiang's higher education institutions should embark on a comprehensive approach encompassing philosophy, content, technology, and faculty to construct a systematic and sustainable network-based ideological and political education system.

5.1. Upholding correct political orientation and fulfilling the fundamental task of cultivating talents with moral integrity

5.1.1. Strengthening awareness of ideological frontlines

Centered around the decisions and deployments of the Party Central Committee, integrate Marxism with Chinese characteristics and adapt to contemporary China into teaching to enhance the appeal and influence of ideological and political education. The essence of ideological and political education lies in its ideological nature. Ideological work is of paramount importance to the Party and serves to establish the core values of the nation and the spirit of the people. Therefore, conducting ideological and political education must always revolve around the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi as the core, uphold the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological sphere, and resolutely undertake the era's responsibility of safeguarding ideological security frontlines.

5.1.2. Innovating teaching with a student-centered approach

Respect the dominant position of students, strengthen humanistic care by integrating ethnic characteristics and historical culture, and stimulate the effectiveness of online education. "The foundation of a university lies in cultivating talents with moral integrity," which ultimately requires focusing on individuals themselves, namely, "people-oriented" principles. In the realm of online ideological and political education activities in colleges and universities, a people-oriented approach entails emphasizing the development of human nature and providing an environment conducive to the integrated cognitive and experiential development of learners, thereby achieving educational objectives ^[5]. Under the premise of respecting and caring for students, continuous efforts should be made to strengthen, improve, and innovate the content, delivery methods, and dissemination channels of ideological and political education, thereby continuously meeting students' needs and promoting their all-around development. This can be achieved by enhancing online communication with students through digital platforms and social media apps, adjusting teaching content and methods in real-time based on students' physical and mental conditions, integrating humanistic care with ethnic characteristics and historical and cultural heritage throughout the educational process, actively occupying the online high ground, and stimulating the practical effectiveness of "cultivating virtue and nurturing talents" through the internet.

5.2. Highlighting regional characteristics and strengthening precise content delivery

5.2.1. Implementing the strategy for governing Xinjiang in the new era and deepening localized content development

Combining the regional conditions of Xinjiang, it is essential to strengthen education on the "Five Perspectives"

of Marxism and deepen ethnic unity and patriotism education. Located in the northwest border region of the motherland, Xinjiang boasts a unique geographical location, a complex international environment, and distinctive regional characteristics such as a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious context. In the specific teaching process, colleges and universities in Xinjiang should place particular emphasis on strengthening education on the "Five Perspectives" of Marxism, namely the Marxist perspectives on the state, ethnicity, history, culture, and religion. This will foster increasing political, ideological, theoretical, and emotional identification with the Party's innovative theories. By leveraging ethnic festivals and the Ethnic Unity Education Month as significant opportunities, ethnic unity education and patriotism education should be organically integrated.

5.2.2. Meeting student needs and building a "content pool" and "resource library"

Leverage data analysis to understand students' interests and utilize platforms such as Weibo and Douyin to promote trending topics, thereby achieving precise content delivery. Ideological and political education is a comprehensive concept, featuring a multidimensional teaching system and covering a wide range of content. However, with the emergence of characteristics such as diverse interests and prominent individuality, gaining a deep understanding of college students' needs has become an important internal driving force for content innovation in network-based ideological and political education in the new era. Currently, the content of network-based ideological and political education in Xinjiang's universities should not be limited to education in disciplines, theories, moral qualities, and other aspects, but should also return to the primary needs of students, providing precise and differentiated content. On the basis of self-improvement, network-based ideological and political education in universities should actively seek cooperation with external platforms that carry a large amount of popular information, such as Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin, and leverage these platforms to disseminate content on ideological and political education that students find appealing.

5.3. Innovating educational methods to achieve a combination of online and offline education

5.3.1. Enhancing information technology capabilities and strengthening technology-enabled teaching

Increase funding to build facilities such as artificial intelligence laboratories and VR teaching and research rooms, and cultivate specialized network talents. Faced with the impact and challenges posed by the current development of Internet technology, Xinjiang's universities should strengthen macro-level planning, increase the proportion of funding allocated to technology application, enhance technology supply, and improve the intelligent and digital levels of infrastructure for network-based ideological and political education. While ensuring network information security, vigorous efforts should be made to construct artificial intelligence laboratories, VR virtual teaching and research rooms, and online teaching live studios. On the basis of improving the overall quality of the network-based ideological and political education team, Xinjiang's universities should establish and cultivate specialized talent teams, including high-level network researchers, network correspondents, and network counselors, and strengthen exchanges and cooperation with telecommunications departments and Internet technology research and development institutions both inside and outside the university.

5.3.2. Diversifying educational formats and establishing a multidimensional educational network Integrate online and offline approaches to conduct classroom, club, and social practice activities, forming a

multidimensional educational network. The Ministry of Education has repeatedly emphasized the need to adopt diverse forms of practical teaching that complement each other's strengths. Therefore, network-based ideological and political education in Xinjiang's universities should organically integrate network technology with traditional models, achieving information sharing, mutual support, and complementarity between online and offline platforms. Centered around ideological and political theory courses, activities should radiate outward to encompass student communities, student organizations, library archives, and other sectors, fostering a comprehensive approach to network-based ideological and political education. Students should be encouraged to integrate online and offline practices, creating a multi-dimensional educational effect.

5.4. Strengthening subject construction and improving long-term mechanisms 5.4.1. Optimizing the faculty and establishing a "composite" teaching team

Enhance teacher training to improve network technology application capabilities; refine supervision and evaluation mechanisms, and establish specialized management institutions. Led by the ideological and political education departments of universities, sufficient policy support and institutional frameworks should be provided for training university teachers in network information technology and ideological and political theory course instruction. Simultaneously, on the basis of strengthening financial support and collaborating with external departments, the hardware construction and software updates of campus network infrastructure should be continuously improved. Regular training should be strengthened, combining professional theoretical knowledge with internet application technology, on the basis of talent introduction and cross-university exchanges. Xinjiang's universities should establish specialized supervision departments and comprehensive management institutions for network-based ideological and political education, set up scientific supervision indicators, construct a feedback and incentive system, and ensure overall supervision and dynamic evaluation of their educational work.

5.4.2. Encouraging student participation in content production and dissemination

Establish a "Two-Level Collaboration" mechanism to guide student self-management and equal communication, and improve the teaching evaluation system. To promote reform and innovation in ideological and political theory courses, it is essential to maintain a balance between guidance and student agency. The internet not only provides a convenient platform for information aggregation and ideological exchange but also offers a new space for the interaction and activities of the subjects and objects of ideological and political education. Xinjiang's universities should actively create a "Two-Level Collaboration" management mechanism that combines teacher guidance with student participation, actively guiding students in Xinjiang's universities to engage in self-education, self-management, courageous expression, and critical thinking during the process of network-based ideological and political education. Additionally, based on the principles of fairness and justice, a scientific and flexible approach to student evaluation should be adopted, allowing students to provide real-time feedback and suggestions on the teaching performance of their instructors.

6. Conclusion

The online ideological and political education in Xinjiang's universities must be grounded in the region's unique characteristics and guided by the Party's strategies for governing Xinjiang in the new era. Through multi-dimensional optimization of content, methods, and mechanisms, the fundamental task of fostering virtue and nurturing talent can be accomplished. This paper proposes pathway recommendations based on empirical

research; however, due to limitations in academic proficiency and article length, the depth of the study still requires enhancement. Future efforts will continue to deepen relevant exploration, providing references for ideological and political education in universities located in frontier regions. Standing at the historical juncture of the "Two Centenary Goals," and reviewing the overall development of the ecological environment of online ideological and political education in Xinjiang's universities, it is essential to recognize that Xinjiang's overall social environment has undergone profound changes with economic development and social progress. Nevertheless, continuous attention and focused supervision of the online ecological environment in universities remain necessary, with vigorous efforts directed towards constructing a targeted network ideological security system.

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