



Reflections on Strengthening the Leadership of Ideological Work in Universities Against the Backdrop of the "Two Major Transformations"

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Abstract

The current context represents a historical convergence of the "two major transformations": the unprecedented changes in the global landscape in a century and the overarching strategy for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Universities, as the frontline of the Party's ideological work, must approach the strengthening of ideological leadership in alignment with these "two overarching contexts". It is essential to scientifically and dialectically analyze the challenges and opportunities posed by these transformations for university-level ideological construction, fully and accurately understand the new requirements brought forth by the strategy for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and advance innovation in ideological leadership. From rethinking strategies and principles to adjusting methodologies and refining discourse systems, universities should innovate and holistically strengthen their efforts in ideological education.

Keywords: "Two Major Transformations", Ideological Work, Ideological Discourse Power.

1 Introduction

Xi Jinping emphasized, "We must keep in mind the 'two overarching contexts': one is the overarching strategy for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and the other is the unprecedented changes in the global landscape in a century. These are the fundamental starting points for planning our work" (Xi, 2020, p. 77). Currently, we are witnessing a historical convergence of the "two major transformations": the unprecedented changes in the global landscape in a century and the overarching strategy for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Challenges such as sluggish global economic recovery, increasing international uncertainties, the unfolding Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the emergence of global challenges further complicate this context. On July 4, 2023, during the 23rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Xi Jinping remarked, "Today, the world is witnessing a confluence of change and turmoil, with the evolution of the century's major transformations accelerating, presenting humanity with unprecedented challenges" (Xi, 2023). As a new U.S. administration assumes office, the uncertainty surrounding China's international environment will inevitably increase significantly. Simultaneously, China's domestic reforms have entered a critical stage, with deeper contradictions and issues becoming increasingly apparent. The significant upheaval in both international and domestic situations has rendered the overall landscape of ideological work more diverse and severe. To build a modern socialist power amidst these severe risks and challenges, China must firmly grasp the leadership in ideological work. As the frontline of the Party's ideological efforts, universities bear the critical mission of nurturing talent for the Party and the nation. They inevitably shoulder the responsibility of advancing ideological construction and must base their efforts on the "two overarching contexts" to strategize ways to enhance the leadership of ideological work in higher education institutions.

2. Scientific and Dialectical Understanding of the Challenges and Opportunities Posed by the "Century of Transformation" to University Ideological Work

The "unprecedented changes in a century" is a significant assertion made by the Party based on a profound understanding of the global landscape within the overarching strategy for the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This transformation reflects not only the gradual evolution of human society into an information-driven world but also an increase in global instability and risks. With intensified ideological struggles among nations and more pronounced ideological issues in

domestic development, the internal and external environments have become more complex than ever, leading to heightened challenges. Factors such as the tide of economic globalization, the rise of diverse social ideologies, and the chaos in online information have presented both challenges and opportunities for ideological construction in universities.

2.1 The Impact of Economic Globalization

In the 21st century, economic globalization has deepened, driving unprecedented transformations in the world, the times, and history. While Western developed nations have disseminated advanced production methods and scientific technologies globally, they have also "dumped" their ideologies, infiltrating China's mainstream ideology through various channels and posing significant challenges. Economic globalization represents an irreversible historical trend. Protectionism and unilateralism are not viable solutions for humanity. Only through solidarity and collaboration can nations address developmental deficits. However, as developing nations like China have increased their share of the global economy, Western countries have experienced economic recessions and a decline in their global influence. This shift has prompted Western nations to turn towards "de-globalization", a phenomenon fundamentally driven by the "highly unequal distribution of traditional globalization dividends, rendering the traditional globalization order unsustainable" (Wang & Duan, 2018, pp. 12-15). In recent years, the United States has increasingly prioritized self-interest over justice, asserting hegemony across political, economic, military, technological, and cultural domains. Other nations have followed suit, promoting unilateralism and protectionism, thereby challenging the normal functioning of economic globalization. These developments have undeniably increased the instability and uncertainty in China's pursuit of comprehensive reform and opening-up, further complicating and intensifying the challenges of ideological education for young students.

At the same time, economic globalization offers opportunities for ideological construction. It has facilitated cultural exchange and integration among nations, providing China with the chance to absorb and learn from outstanding global civilizations. Through cultural exchange, China can better understand the cultural characteristics and values of other nations, fostering mutual understanding and respect while contributing to the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

2.2 The Impact of Diverse Social Ideologies

In the current era, economic globalization combined with the rise of digital information has enabled various social ideologies, such as neoliberalism, populism, historical nihilism, and "universal values", to emerge prominently and spread rapidly on a global scale. This has facilitated the exchange and collision of diverse cultural elements, resulting in a pluralistic ideological landscape. The rise of diverse social ideologies has intensified conflicts and clashes between different thoughts and beliefs, leading to a trend of value pluralism in Chinese society. This trend, to some extent, weakens the authority of mainstream ideologies, leaving individuals more confused and uncertain in their choice of values. The resulting divergences and disagreements complicate the process of achieving social consensus, making it difficult for society to form unified perceptions and actions on critical issues. These cultural ideologies often incite emotional reactions in the digital space, causing significant disruption to the rational thinking of youth, who are naturally curious. They continuously challenge the worldviews, life perspectives, and values of young people. Growing up in an era of information explosion and ideological diversity, the younger generation must navigate a maze of complex information, discern truth from falsehood, and choose among conflicting values.

Nevertheless, the proliferation of diverse social ideologies also provides opportunities for the innovation and development of ideology. By continuously absorbing and learning from the outstanding achievements of human civilization and integrating these with the characteristics of the current era and the realities of society, ideological innovation and development can be advanced. This approach will better meet the needs of societal development.

2.3 The Impact of Online Information Disorders

The rapid advancement of technologies such as the internet, big data, and artificial intelligence has significantly enhanced the efficiency and convenience of information dissemination. However, these technologies have also been exploited by malicious actors to propagate erroneous ideologies and extreme rhetoric. The resulting online information disorders negatively influence individual beliefs, values, and the overall social atmosphere. The proliferation of false information and extreme opinions in cyberspace, coupled with the rise of various youth subcultures, has continually challenged mainstream culture, leading to the "silencing" and "disorder" of core societal values. Over time, such influences subtly but profoundly affect young people, making them prone to emotional and entertainment-focused expressions. This manifests in their preference for "meme culture" and satirical commentary, as well as psychological tendencies such as being "anti-establishment", "anti-authority", and "anti-mainstream". In the era of digital information, creators and disseminators of online content are no longer limited to official mainstream media. The post-2000 generation, often referred to as "digital natives", are particularly keen on constructing their own online discourse systems, posing challenges to the formation of mainstream ideological values among youth. As "new media technologies have rapidly developed in the 21st century, and network communities have stratified into different social groups, traditional

circles based on kinship, locality, and shared professions have been replaced by new online circles connected by shared interests, emotions, and cultures" (Wang & Lü, 2021, p. 116). This shift leads young people to primarily engage with information and viewpoints within their own "circles", forming value barriers and closed cognitive frameworks. Such tendencies make it increasingly difficult for ideologies, including core socialist values, to "break into" these circles.

3. Fully and Accurately Grasping the New Requirements for University Ideological Work Within the Framework of the Strategy for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation

The realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation represents the greatest dream of the Chinese people and nation since modern times. It also embodies the Chinese Communist Party's fundamental mission in the new era. As China embarks on the new journey of comprehensively building a modern socialist nation, "advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese-style modernization" (Xi, 2022, p. 21), it is essential to fully and accurately understand the new requirements this strategy places on university-level ideological construction.

3.1 Adhering to Party Leadership to Ensure Ideological Security

The security of university ideology holds a vital position in safeguarding national ideological security and carries a special mission. Only by adhering to the Party's leadership can universities effectively ensure ideological safety within their domains and fulfill their historical mission in ideological work. Universities must consistently uphold Party leadership, integrating it into all aspects and processes of ideological construction. Strengthening the Party's comprehensive leadership over university ideological work ensures that it remains aligned with the correct direction and fulfills its responsibilities within the overarching framework of the nation's ideological security strategy.

3.2 Serving National Strategies and Cultivating a New Generation

The new era marks a pivotal phase in completing the establishment of a moderately prosperous society and advancing toward the comprehensive construction of a modern socialist nation. It is also the era of striving to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. The achievement of the "Two Centenary Goals" and the Chinese Dream ultimately depends on talent and education. Xi Jinping emphasized that "ideological work serves to establish the soul of the nation and the foundation of the state" (Xi, 2022, p. 43). Universities must align their efforts with the "Two Centenary Goals" and the realization of the Chinese Dream by continuously cultivating talents that meet the needs of national and societal development. Ideological construction in universities should serve this national strategy by strengthening ideological and political education, fostering innovative thinking, and enhancing practical abilities, thereby nurturing more talented individuals with a sense of social responsibility, innovative spirit, and practical competence.

3.3 Upholding Moral Education and Strengthening Ideological Guidance

Moral education is the fundamental task of universities and the core of their ideological construction. Universities must enhance the effectiveness of moral education by strengthening faculty ethics, optimizing curricula, and improving teaching methods. Ideological construction in universities must adhere to the correct political direction, guiding students to establish a sound worldview, outlook on life, and value system. Through strengthened ideological and political education and thematic educational activities, universities can inspire students to solidify their ideals and beliefs, foster a love for the country and its people, and develop a sense of responsibility for the times. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping has placed significant emphasis on university-level ideological work, providing multiple directives, including "making moral education the central focus", "integrating ideological and political work into the entire education and teaching process", "strengthening ideological guidance, and firmly grasping the leadership of university ideological work", as well as "focusing on foundational, strategic, and critical aspects, enhancing the quality and standards of the work". These directives offer foundational principles and clear directions for universities to firmly maintain leadership in ideological work.

3.4 Innovating Ideological Discourse and Constructing University-Specific Discourse Systems

Ideological construction in universities must align with the pace of the times and resonate with contemporary realities by innovating ideological discourse. By effectively telling the stories of China in the new era and amplifying the voices of the new era, universities can enhance the explanatory and critical power of mainstream ideologies concerning prominent, challenging issues. Universities should leverage their distinctive institutional characteristics and strengths to develop discourse systems tailored to their unique identity. Efforts such as enhancing campus culture, conducting academic research, and facilitating academic exchanges can drive innovative advancements in university-level ideological construction.

3.5 Advancing Media Integration to Consolidate Ideological Strongholds

With the rapid development of digital technologies, the media landscape is undergoing profound transformations. Traditional methods of disseminating Marxist knowledge alone can no longer suffice in modern university ideological education. The internet significantly influences how people think and receive knowledge, making it an indispensable

platform for modern university ideological construction. Universities must actively promote media integration to establish a comprehensive media guidance system, thereby consolidating ideological strongholds. To this end, universities need to strengthen the development and management of campus media, improving their credibility and authority. By enhancing information dissemination platforms and expanding communication channels, universities can bolster the dissemination and influence of ideological narratives. The overarching strategy for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation imposes new mission requirements on university ideological construction. Universities must consistently uphold Party leadership, serve national strategies, emphasize moral education, innovate ideological discourse, and advance media integration. These measures collectively aim to cultivate a new generation equipped to shoulder the responsibilities of national rejuvenation and to contribute to realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

4. Strategic New Approaches to Strengthening Ideological Leadership in Universities Amid the "Two Major Transformations"

Against the backdrop of the "Two Major Transformations", China faces new opportunities and challenges in maintaining ideological leadership. It is essential to address this complex landscape by formulating targeted strategic choices for ideological work. Ensuring ideological security is indispensable for ensuring long-term governance. For a nation with a population of 1.4 billion, achieving ideological security holds significant importance. The focus must be on macro-level innovation in ideas, meso-level adjustments in methods, and micro-level refinements in discourse systems to drive innovation in ideological leadership in universities.

4.1 Macro-Level Innovation in Ideas: Adhering to Marxism as the Fundamental Guiding Thought

Since its founding, the Party has consistently emphasized the innovation and adjustment of ideological construction principles across different historical periods. In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics and against the backdrop of the "Two Major Transformations", the number of risk factors has increased, and the dominant position of Marxist ideology faces numerous challenges. As the primary stronghold for Marxist advocacy, universities must continually innovate and adapt their ideological principles to effectively address these risks and challenges.

Marxism remains the fundamental guiding thought for ideological work in universities and must always retain its leading position. The Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Upholding and Improving the Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics and Modernizing the State Governance System and Capacity*, which, for the first time, established adherence to Marxism in the ideological domain as a foundational system. This decision provides robust legal and institutional guarantees for strengthening ideological work. The 20th CPC National Congress report emphasized the necessity of "firmly grasping the Party's leadership over ideological work, fully implementing the responsibility system for ideological work, and consolidating and strengthening the mainstream ideological discourse for the new era" (Xi, 2022, p. 43).

Building a cohesive and leading socialist ideology requires adherence to Marxism as the foundational system in the ideological domain. Abandoning Marxism in this context and pursuing a pluralism of guiding ideologies would inevitably lead to ideological chaos, social disunity, and catastrophic errors, resulting in irreparable losses for the Party and the nation.

4.2 Meso-Level Adjustments in Principles and Methods: Enhancing the Appeal and Influence of Ideological Work

Applying the "six principles of adherence" is a reflection of the positions, methods, and viewpoints of ideological work in universities. These principles embody the innovative drive, thinking methods, practical requirements, value orientations, sustainable development commitment, and spirit essential for effective ideological work in the new era. They provide fundamental guidance and methodological tools for university ideological work.

Firstly, adopting problem-oriented methods involves addressing the challenges posed by diverse ideological trends, identifying risks of ideological conflicts and sensitive issues, and targeting the complexities of ideological battles. Collaborative education efforts can help strengthen and stabilize ideological strongholds.

Secondly, systematic thinking guided by development and interconnectedness requires universities to follow its inherent laws and practical requirements. This enhances awareness of the overall situation and fosters collaboration to improve the quality and scope of ideological work.

Thirdly, focusing on upholding integrity and innovation involves preventing deviations from correct paths while ensuring relevance and leadership in the current era. By concentrating on educational content, methods, and pathways, universities can maintain mainstream socialist ideology guided by Marxism and innovate in strategies, approaches, and institutional mechanisms.

Fourthly, adopting a people-centered value orientation emphasizes the central role of students as active participants and value creators. Universities must design educational content, innovate teaching methods, and organize social practices to highlight students' active involvement and contributions.

Fifthly, embracing a global vision requires combining domestic development with global responsibilities. This includes implementing principles of "harmony in diversity" and "inclusive coexistence", reflecting the Party's commitment to international cooperation and national rejuvenation through Marxist scientific theory and values.

Finally, upholding a spirit of self-confidence and independence ensures that universities firmly establish Marxism as the guiding ideology for ideological work. Anchored in the Party's political construction, universities must remain vigilant against cultural nihilism and revivalism to strengthen students' cultural confidence.

By implementing these principles, universities can enhance the appeal and impact of ideological work, ensuring it remains relevant and compelling for the younger generation.

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