

Research Report on the Overseas Network Communication Power of Northwest Chinese Universities under the Background of the “Double First-Class” Initiative

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Abstract: *As China's “Double First-Class” initiative gains strategic prominence in global higher education, this study investigates the overseas communication challenges faced by 12 Northwest Chinese universities compared with top 12 QS-ranked institutions. Through social media data scraping and multidimensional analysis of communication channels, content strategies, and engagement effects, we identified four critical deficiencies: insufficient systematic communication planning, redundant channel management, monotonous content presentation lacking multimedia integration, and inadequate crisis response mechanisms. Corresponding optimization strategies propose establishing real-time information updates, centralized channel management with multimedia content diversification, and enhanced crisis prevention systems. The findings provide empirical evidence for improving international communication capabilities, offering strategic references for Chinese universities to enhance global competitiveness through effective brand management. This research contributes methodological frameworks for assessing institutional communication efficacy while proposing actionable solutions for China's higher education internationalization.*

Keywords: “Double First-class” Initiative; Overseas Dissemination Power; Proposals and Recommendations.

1. INTRODUCTION

National image is the combination of a country's self-perception and the perception of it by other actors in the international system, resulting from a series of inputs and outputs. In today's complex international situation, promoting the common development of the country and the world requires a strong national image. In the face of the great changes in the world that have not been seen in a century, enhancing the communication of Chinese civilization, building China's discourse and narrative system, showing a credible, lovely, and respectable Chinese image, and forming a discourse power that matches China's comprehensive national power and international status, is an important means to improve the national image at present.

With the rapid development of information technology and the daily penetration of search engines and social media, the Internet has become an important channel for people around the world to obtain and share information. To adapt to the social development trend of the media, the overseas network communication power has increasingly become an important aspect of expanding China's cultural influence and promoting the construction of soft power. Education, as a means of expanding China's cultural influence and telling Chinese stories, is also an important link to consolidate the construction of international communication capabilities, enhance the discourse power and influence of the country, and strengthen the country's cultural soft power.

As an important carrier of China's international communication power and one of the windows for international cultural exchanges, universities have received attention from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council. The “Double First-Class” strategy of building world-class universities and first-class disciplines is part of the embodiment of the national image, and it is an important force to effectively enhance China's international competitiveness and discourse power in higher education and to establish a good brand and image of Chinese universities. Although Chinese universities have entered the international platform, their image is still spontaneously constructed by netizens, and their influence and image are difficult to integrate into Western audiences and become an important factor affecting Western values. Among them, “Double First-Class” universities in Shaanxi Province and other regions in Northwest China also have obvious gaps and deficiencies in overseas network communication power.

The research content of this topic starts with the current situation of the overseas network communication power of “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, mainly in Shaanxi Province, examines the communication power of these universities on the Internet international platform, and studies the differences between the promotion of these universities on overseas platforms and domestic platforms, so as to explore the focus and operation strategies of each university in communication on overseas social platforms. It also puts forward response strategies and suggestions for the shortcomings in the overseas influence and brand shaping of “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China. It is of great significance to understand the cutting-edge level and current situation of the overseas network communication power of Chinese universities.

This research selected 12 “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, mainly in Shaanxi Province, and compared them with the top 12 universities in the 2022 QS ranking. By scraping the data of major overseas social platforms, specific dimensions and indicators were set for comparative analysis, and algorithms and models were designed to comprehensively judge the overseas network communication power of “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, so as to understand the current situation of the overseas network communication power of Chinese universities. At the same time, by combining the social platform performance of our university and well-performing domestic and foreign universities for individual analysis, it is expected to improve the overseas communication ability of universities, improve China’s overseas network communication system, and then enhance China’s international communication power.

2. Project Implementation

2.1 Determining the Objects of Analysis

This study selected 24 universities as research objects, including 12 “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, mainly in Shaanxi Province, as follows: Xi’an Jiaotong University, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Northwest Agricultural University, Northwest University, Shaanxi Normal University, Xidian University, Chang’an University, Air Force Military Medical University, Lanzhou University, Xinjiang University, Shihezi University, Qinghai University; and the top 12 global universities in the QS ranking as follows: Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), University of Cambridge, Stanford University, University of Oxford, Harvard University, California Institute of Technology (Caltech), Imperial College London, University College London, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH Zurich), University of Chicago, National University of Singapore, Peking University. These 12 universities serve as reference objects for “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China. Selecting these universities as samples for examination is of great significance to understand the current situation of the overseas network communication power of “Double First-Class” construction universities in Northwest China, mainly in Shaanxi Province.

2.2 Selecting Algorithm Indicator Weights

This study used the expert method to establish indicators and weights. First, six platforms were selected as the analysis dimensions for the overseas network communication power of “Double First-Class” universities in Shaanxi Province: X (Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google, and Wikipedia. Second, specific indicators were set for each dimension, and each indicator participated in the dimension evaluation with different weights. The six dimensions had a total of 32 second-level indicators, and each was quantified and analyzed to obtain the overseas network communication power scores of the 24 universities. The weights of each indicator are shown in Table 1.

The specific algorithm is as follows: First, qualitative data was converted into quantitative data, including qualitative data such as “whether there is an official account” on X; “whether there is an official account” on Facebook, etc. Second, the coefficient of each indicator was calculated according to the listed indicator weights in the table. Finally, the overseas network communication power of the university was calculated through the formula. The calculation formula is as follows:

$$Y = \sum_{i=1}^5 \sum_j a_{ij} \frac{K_{ij}A}{a_j}$$

Y: The overseas network communication power score of any university; a_{1j}: The value of any indicator on Google, j = 1, 2; a_{2j}: The value of any indicator on Wikipedia, j = 1, 2, 3, 4; a_{3j}: The value of any indicator on X, j = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; a_{4j}: The value of any indicator on Facebook, j = 1, 2, 3, 4; a_{5j}: The value of any indicator on Instagram, j = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; K_{ij}: The weight of any indicator; a_j: The average value of any indicator; A: The sum of the average

values of all indicators.

2.3 Studying the Differences in Operation Strategies of Different Universities on Various Platforms

Based on the final score of overseas network communication power, the overall situation of quantifiable data was obtained, that is, the actual communication ability of each university on objective dimensions. On this basis, the outstanding data advantages of each university were explored, and the communication content was analyzed in addition to the data. By scraping the popular picture and text content and video content on each platform within one year, and the difference between the communication content on Chinese platforms and that of “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, the focus of each university’s communication on various platforms was explored in terms of school living conditions, academic achievements, expert lecture publicity, and other overall aspects of the school, in order to understand the operation strategies of universities in improving overseas network communication power.

2.4 Proposing Strategy Suggestions Based on Comparative Analysis

Based on the quantitative research in the early stage, typical sample universities were selected for case investigation. By comparing and analyzing with the top 12 universities in the QS ranking, the shortcomings and problems of “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, mainly in Shaanxi Province, in overseas influence and image shaping were found, and targeted strategies and suggestions were put forward.

Table 1: Indicator Weights

Weight of Various Indicators on Overseas Internet Platforms			
Dimension			Indicator
Instagram	20%	30%	Whether there is an official verified account
		30%	Number of followers
		20%	Number of contents posted within a year
		20%	The highest number of likes
Twitter	20%	30%	Whether there is an official verified account
		30%	Number of followers
		20%	Number of contents posted within a year
		20%	The highest number of likes
Facebook	20%	30%	Whether there is an official verified account
		30%	Number of friends
		20%	Number of contents posted within a year
		10%	The highest number of likes for a picture - text post within a year
		10%	The highest number of video views within a year
YouTube	20%	30%	Whether there is an official verified account
		30%	Number of subscribers
		20%	Number of contents posted within a year
		20%	The highest video view count within a year
Google	10%	100%	Number of news articles
Wikipedia	10%	25%	The completeness of the entry
		25%	Number of times the entry was edited within a year
		25%	Number of users who participated in editing the entry within a year
		25%	Link situation (What links here)

3. Analysis of the Overseas Network Communication Power of Each University

3.1 Panoramic Scores of Overseas Network Communication Power of Each University

Table 2: Panoramic Scores of Overseas Network Communication Power of 24 Universities

Panoramic Scores of Overseas Online Communication Influence of 24 Universities (Sorted from High to Low)	
Harvard University	79.384
Oxford University	66.275
Peking University	54.979
Stanford University	53.465
University of Cambridge	53.154
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	50.751
University of Chicago	48.485
Imperial College London	46.975
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich	41.757
University of London	41.09

National University of Singapore	39.337
California Institute of Technology (Caltech)	36.551
Northwestern Polytechnical University	32.457
Xi'an Jiaotong University	31.331
Xidian University	30.334
Northwest University	29.494
Lanzhou University	23.892
Shihezi University	21.659
Chang'an University	18.588
Qinghai University	14.579
Northwest A&F University	11.294
Shaanxi Normal University	11.222
Xinjiang University	5.125
Air Force Military Medical University	2.598

This time, the construction situation of the six platforms: Google, Wikipedia, X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, of the 12 “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China and the top 12 universities in the QS ranking, a total of 24 schools, was sorted out and summarized. The overseas network communication power scores of the 24 universities were calculated using the specific indicator data under the six dimensions.

Among the 12 “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, the highest score was obtained by Northwestern Polytechnical University, with a score of 32.457, but its leading advantage was not obvious, and the gap with other universities was small. The top five “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China in terms of overseas communication power score were: Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi’an Jiaotong University, Xidian University, Northwest University, and Lanzhou University.

The average score of the 12 “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China was 19.381 points, while the average score of the top 12 universities in the QS ranking was 51.017 points, with a large gap in communication power scores.

3.2 Brief Analysis of the Overseas Network Communication Power of “Double First-Class” Universities in Northwest China

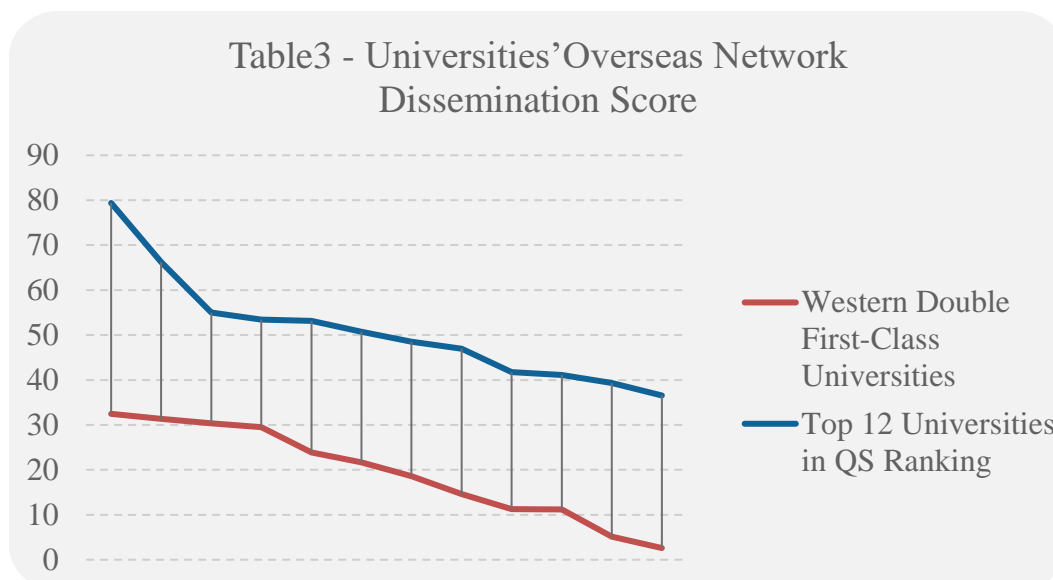
During the research process, it was found that many universities did not pay attention to the construction of overseas network communication, which was reflected in the following aspects:

The school information on overseas networks was not updated in a timely manner. The social posts on X, Instagram, and Facebook platforms of Qinghai University, Xinjiang University, and Northwest Agricultural University basically stopped updating from 2016 to 2019, and more effective information could not be found thereafter.

Lack of official accounts and lack of voice channels. All “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China did not have official accounts other than the International Office. At the same time, many universities had too low an update frequency and could not effectively follow up on school dynamics. Taking X as an example, the number of posts updated by Lanzhou University, Xidian University, and Xi’an Jiaotong University within one year was between 6 and 12, with an average update of once or twice a month, which was too low;

Multiple accounts and multiple projects are operated independently, resulting in redundancy. Northwestern Polytechnical University had two accounts on social platforms: @nwpunews and @npuintl. Generally, there was a lack of specific introduction to school life, and the operation content was generally focused on enrollment promotion and campus scenery photography, making it impossible to understand the school’s scientific research strength and faculty strength in detail;

At the same time, the awareness of public opinion risk prevention and control was relatively weak. When social events occurred at the school, due to the lack of voice channels and professional operation teams, it was impossible to effectively explain and deal with the events on overseas network platforms in the first place, and the communication power was generally at a low level.



3.3 Brief Analysis of the Overseas Network Communication Power of the Top 12 Universities in the QS Ranking

The top five universities in the QS ranking in terms of communication power score were: Harvard University, University of Oxford, Peking University, Stanford University, and University of Cambridge. The highest score was obtained by Harvard University, with a score of 79.384, and the lowest was obtained by California Institute of Technology, with a score of 36.551, all of which were higher than the highest score of “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China (Northwestern Polytechnical University scored 32.457). Compared with “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, the top 12 universities in the QS ranking had obvious advantages in the basic construction of overseas network communication, which were reflected in the following aspects:

- (1) All 12 schools had official certification and regularly updated to follow up on school dynamics in a timely manner. The update frequency of Wikipedia was extremely high, with a large number of editing users, which could ensure the accuracy and timeliness of information by following up on the development progress of the school in a timely manner;
- (2) A communication matrix was formed, and strong publicity was carried out with various picture and text forms. Different publicity strategies were implemented on Facebook, Instagram, and X and other different social platforms to maximize communication efficiency. The average number of likes per post had already exceeded 10,000;
- (3) There was an awareness of public opinion risk prevention and control, and it was possible to explain the details of social events and corresponding details in the first place. Under the professionalism of the operation team, these universities had a good school brand image overseas, which had a great influence on Western social values and even enjoyed a certain reputation in China, with strong network communication power.

4. Problems in the Overseas Network Communication of “Double First-Class” Universities in Northwest China

4.1 General Lack of Awareness of Overseas Network Communication Construction and Poor Operation of Overseas Platform Accounts

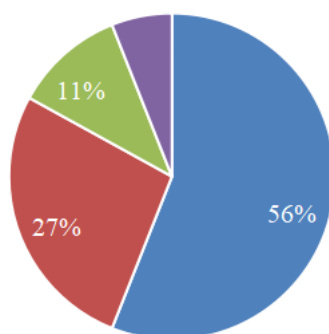
In the construction process of “Double First-Class” universities, the accuracy of information is the basis and premise for the audience to correctly understand and then spread the information. However, many “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China did not effectively pay attention to the accuracy and timeliness of information. After creating accounts and entries, they did not update effectively, resulting in the stagnation of information on the progress of school construction and development [10], continuously lagging behind domestic social platforms in China.

Taking the social platform Facebook as an example, the average number of posts published by the eight “Double First-Class” universities in the province in the past year was only 23.66, and only Northwestern Polytechnical University had more than 100 posts. In terms of the number of editing users and the number of edits on Wikipedia, the overall performance was significantly behind the top 12 universities in the QS ranking, and there was no active effort to increase the frequency of presence on the Internet to enhance its international influence [10].

4.2 Lack of Specialized Overseas Communication Operation Institutions and Unified Voice Channels, with Redundant Account Operation

Table 12 - Content Proportion

■ Admissions Presentations ■ Campus Scenery
 ■ Study Abroad Activities ■ Research Achievements



“Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China lacked unified coordination and integration in the construction of overseas network platforms. Multiple departments, multiple entities, and multiple project accounts were operated, and it was impossible to effectively integrate on-campus and off-campus resources to form a unified voice channel [4]. At the same time, there were accounts that had not yet been officially certified, with relatively small authoritative influence. The publicity content was somewhat biased and could not truly reflect the performance of the universities in various aspects, resulting in the audience only being able to understand partial information, greatly reducing the strength of communication, and ultimately leading to the further consumption of the universities’ overseas reputation. At present, the overseas communication channels of universities in the province were mostly set up in the Publicity Department, International Exchange and Cooperation Office, Alumni Association, and secondary colleges. There was a lack of unified coordination between departments, and resources were relatively isolated, scattered, and solidified, resulting in the dispersed operation of multiple accounts and the inability to form a communication synergy.

4.3 Singular and Unattractive Content Published on Platform Accounts

Among the “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, official accounts were generally operated under the names of “International Office” and “Admissions Office”, which also represented that the operation and communication content were generally focused on enrollment promotion and conference promotion, failing to introduce more information about faculty strength, talent cultivation, and scientific research strength in an all-round way. The publicity narrative was relatively dry, lacking the awareness of storytelling, and as a result, the strength of spreading overseas voices was small [11].

According to statistics, more than half (56%) of the content publicized on the websites and platforms of “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China was for enrollment promotion meetings and conferences, while overseas audiences were more concerned about study abroad life and scientific research achievements, which only accounted for 11% and 6%, respectively.



Figure 1: Top 20 Keywords of Popular Content of Each University

4.4 No Effective Risk Prevention and Control Mechanism Established, Unable to Deal with Overseas Public Opinion in the First Place

Universities often have a higher probability of major social events. With the continuous development of the Internet, the speed of information dissemination and the momentum of public opinion after an event occur are further strengthened. Under the current social context, “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China obviously lacked a public opinion monitoring mechanism for overseas platforms. After a social event occurred, it was impossible to clarify doubts and adjust contradictions in the first place, guide overseas public opinion, and maintain the school’s reputation. The insufficient operation in daily life also made it impossible to establish a good university image [12].

4.5 Significant Language and Cultural Differences, Lack of Localization Strategies for School Image Shaping

When “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China carried out overseas communication, language and cultural differences might become obstacles. Due to the large cultural differences between China and the West, the content and meaning of some specific Chinese content might deviate when converted into English. The way of expressing content, cultural background, and word usage habits would all be related to the culture and language background of the target audience. Universities did not take localization strategies for image shaping in overseas regions for this phenomenon, but only ensured the accuracy of the text, and did not establish their own image and characteristics according to the overseas characteristics.

4.6 Lack of Interactivity on Overseas Social Platforms, Urgently Need to Use the Mass Advantage to Close the Distance

Although the overseas communication power of some universities, such as Tsinghua University, in platform self-construction has gradually caught up with universities in China’s Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan regions, there is still a gap compared with top universities in the United States. Overall, the interactivity of Chinese mainland universities on overseas social media platforms needs to be improved. According to statistical data, “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China generally lack interactivity. Some universities have official accounts on various platforms, but there is little connection between the platforms, and there is also less interaction with overseas users. For example, they rarely reply to comments, which may make some followers lack a sense of participation, and some questions cannot be solved in a timely manner, losing effective feedback.

5. Policy Suggestions for Improving the Overseas Network Communication Power of Universities

5.1 Improve the Internationalization Level of Schools and Ensure the Accuracy and Timeliness of Information

Enhancing the internationalization level of schools is the premise and foundation for “Double First-Class” universities to increase their frequency of appearance and enhance their international communication power. It is

also necessary for “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China to further improve their internationalization level, so that all publicity is based on solid academic strength, scientific research foundation, and educational quality [13]. Taking the school’s strength as the entry point, efforts should be made to carefully cultivate platform publicity, and on the basis of achieving the internationalization of discipline construction, faculty team, and talent cultivation, effectively enhance international communication power, so as to achieve the “bilateral cooperation” of comprehensive strength and overseas network communication power, and elevate the brand reputation to a height commensurate with the actual level. At the same time, it is also necessary to ensure that the development and construction of the school are updated in a timely manner on overseas platforms. Operators should follow up on school dynamics in a timely manner and publish through multiple platforms and channels to form a communication matrix, ensuring the timeliness of information release. For example, basic information and scientific research achievements on Wikipedia should be updated in a timely manner to reduce the information differences caused by different regions, so that the construction and progress of the school can be understood by people all over the world, enhance the attractiveness and attention of the university in the international community, and effectively improve the overseas network communication power.

5.2 Adapt to the Current Internet Thinking and Form an International Communication Matrix and Integrated Media Ecology

In the construction of overseas network platforms of universities, there is a lack of overall coordination and insufficient integration. At the same time, multiple individual spontaneous operations, multiple departments, and multiple accounts lack unified coordination and operate independently. Each university can establish a special overseas communication operation department to be responsible for the operation and management of overseas network media accounts, with dedicated personnel for specific positions. Forming a unified external output channel and using it as the center to form a matrix for communication through various media forms has become a matter of course. By enhancing the awareness of overseas communication [14], efforts should be made to use overseas platforms to display themselves, use storytelling, utilize the advantage of international talents, combine cultural differences, and publish vivid and colorful campus events instead of dry publicity. By integrating on-campus and off-campus resources and forming a publicity matrix on different social platforms, attention should be paid to the operation skills of social media, shape the brand image of “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China, and build a unified yet diverse integrated media ecology that reflects the different aspects of the universities to a certain extent [15].

5.3 Improve the Quality of Operation Account Content and Expand Influence with the Help of Professional Operation Teams

Many “Double First-Class” universities in Northwest China have a high level of platform operation and readership in China, with relatively professional operation teams. On this basis, universities can combine the corresponding content and operation skills of domestic platforms and apply them to overseas platforms to improve the quality of content published on platform accounts. By combining the characteristics of the universities and providing content that overseas audiences like, the publicity of the universities can be unified through professional teams and professional operation, and the volume of publicity discourse can be increased. At the same time, the resources should be effectively combined according to the characteristics of each platform, and more in-depth binding international culture and university-specific pictures, videos, and other communication forms should be edited. Regularly providing high-quality content materials for overseas platforms can also further expand the overseas network communication power of universities [17].

5.4 Establish Monitoring and Early Warning of Public Opinion Risks and Improve Risk Response Capabilities

The number of university students and faculty is large, and the uncontrollability of major social events is strong [18]. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with potential public opinion risks at home and abroad in a timely manner after a social event occurs, so as to prevent the further spread of false information and cause a bad influence. This requires universities to be prepared for prevention in daily times, establish a public opinion crisis monitoring mechanism for universities, cultivate talents in international communication and crisis management, and issue early warnings for potential public opinion risks, achieving the unity of attitude and strategy, and reducing the impact of events as much as possible to maintain the overseas reputation of universities. The regular maintenance of the platform by universities is also beneficial to shaping a good university image, which is helpful for reducing the impact when negative events occur [19].

5.5 Strengthen the Construction of School Operation Interface to Provide Convenience for Information Inquiry in Overseas Regions

Universities should establish an official website with rich content, beautiful design, and easy navigation to display the school's characteristics, advantages, teaching, and research results. At the same time, the website should provide multiple language versions to meet the needs of users in different countries and regions, and arouse the interest and attention of overseas users. Universities such as Nanjing University, Wuhan University, and China Academy of Art have taken the cutting-edge scientific research results and Chinese traditional culture as the focus of overseas communication of Chinese mainland universities. Shanghai Conservatory of Music and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology have paid attention to the interaction with well-known alumni and visits of top talents, driving the growth of overseas communication power of Chinese universities. To build a university communication platform with its own characteristics and Chinese characteristics, and continuously improve the quality and attractiveness of communication content, it is necessary to go from shallow to deep, use overseas media resources to understand the needs and feedback of overseas users, and further optimize communication content and strategies.

5.6 Cooperate with More Academic Institutions and Overseas Universities to Play the Advantage of Clustering

Establish cooperative relationships with other universities, institutions, or enterprises to jointly promote content and expand the scope of communication. The interaction between universities and the linkage between platforms have become a new way to play the advantage of clustering. At the same time, actively establish cooperative relationships with overseas media, and improve overseas reputation through media reports, exclusive interviews, and other forms. It is also beneficial to discriminate good media with objective positions and overseas influence for publicity, which is also beneficial to the improvement of the school's own reputation.

5.7 Jointly Explore Social Forces and Continuously Cultivate Communication Talents

Internally, it is necessary to strengthen the strategic deployment of overseas communication, establish a special overseas communication authority department, and establish a working system led by "pioneers", planned by "policymakers", and implemented by "implementers". At the same time, strengthen policy support and guidance, increase special fund investment and professional talent leadership, and lead the long-term development of overseas communication work. The power of overseas alumni associations and other groups should be tapped, as they have certain local social experience in overseas regions, and can achieve cultural communication that is more conducive to local acceptance in a more localized way.

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