Original Paper

A Triple Logic Reflection on the Influence of Historical Nihilism on College Students in the Digital Intelligence Era: Manifestations, Root Causes, and Countermeasures

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Abstract

With the rapid development of digital intelligence technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence, the dissemination paradigm of historical nihilism has undergone a fundamental transformation, becoming more concealed, precise, and efficient in its influence. As active internet users and a group with dynamic thinking, college students are in a critical period of shaping their values, making them a key target for the infiltration and contestation of historical nihilism. Its disseminators now exhibit a "human-machine collaboration" characteristic, where social bots are used to fabricate false public opinion. The content has shifted toward "micro-content penetration," employing fragmented, multimodal, and entertaining forms to erode the solemnity of history. The dissemination arena has moved into "immersive communities," leveraging circle culture and virtual reality technology for implicit implantation. This phenomenon stems from both the technological manifestation of its idealist historical view core and the coupling effect between algorithm-driven precision delivery and college students' specific cognitive stage. To effectively address this challenge, a systematic defense system must be established: the core lies in deepening education on materialist historiography to consolidate ideological foundations; the key is innovating technological governance by using intelligent tools for monitoring and optimizing algorithmic logic; the long-term basis involves empowering individuals by comprehensively enhancing college students' critical historical thinking skills and digital media literacy, while encouraging them to engage in positive historical practice and expression. The goal is to fortify college students' historical and value perspectives in the digital intelligence era and safeguard national ideological security.

Keywords

Digital intelligence era, Historical nihilism, College students, Ideology

1. Introduction

A historical perspective is a fundamental issue concerning the founding and governance of a political party and the rise and fall of a nation. As an erroneous ideological trend, the dangers of historical nihilism have been proven by history and reality. In the era of traditional media, its dissemination was more overt and its reach relatively limited. However, entering the digital-intelligence era characterized by big data, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic recommendations, the dissemination model of historical nihilism has taken on new features of being intelligent, concealed, and highly penetrative. This poses threats and challenges to ideological security and has a profound impact on university students, who constitute an active online demographic. Due to their still-developing characteristics of active thinking and information discernment, they are highly susceptible to becoming the primary targets for the precise, segmented erosion by this ideological trend. Its harm is profound, directly concerning the political beliefs, historical confidence, and even the fundamental identification with the nation and its path among university students.

2. Multidimensional Manifestations of Historical Nihilism's Influence on College Students Empowered by Digital Intelligence

Empowered by digital intelligence, the dissemination of historical nihilism no longer confines itself to explicit text debates or open advocacy but permeates all aspects of the information ecosystem, forming a more precise, concealed, and efficient dissemination mechanism.

(I) The Paradox of Blurring and Precision in Dissemination Agents: From "Human Spokespersons" to "Human-Machine Collaboration"

Traditional dissemination of historical nihilism often relied on specific "opinion leaders" or organized "spokespersons" for viewpoint output, with relatively identifiable agents. In the digital-intelligence era, this manifestation has undergone a fundamental shift. On one hand, dissemination agents exhibit a high degree of ambiguity and virtualization. Proponents of historical nihilism no longer need to personally intervene. They can leverage artificial intelligence technology to train "intelligent assistants" with specific narrative styles or create large numbers of "social bots." These non-human agents can automatically generate content, participate in interactions, and create public opinion hotspots, becoming propagation proxies with a degree of autonomy. For instance, using virtualization technology to register numerous false accounts allows for the organized and targeted liking, commenting, and reposting of information containing historical nihilism, fabricating a false impression of "public sentiment" or "consensus." This aims to induce uninformed university student audiences to accept its viewpoints under herd mentality. This makes tracing origins and assigning accountability exceptionally difficult, increasingly blurring the boundaries of agency.On the other hand, the targeting of audiences has achieved unprecedented precision. Utilizing big data and user profiling technology, platforms can perform in-depth analysis of university students' data, including communication, social interactions, consumption, and browsing history, accurately identifying their interests, cognitive preferences, and even emotional states.

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Information containing historical nihilism can thus be intelligently distributed in a "thousand faces for a thousand people" manner through algorithmic recommendation systems. For example, for users who have previously browsed entertainment gossip or emotional stories, algorithms might persistently push fragmented, entertainment-packaged historical narratives like "The Little-Known Romantic Anecdotes of a Certain Historical Figure." This "feeding" mechanism, based on precise profiling, enables historical nihilism to bypass universal public discourse and directly embed itself into an individual's closed-loop of information reception, constructing robust "information cocoons" and "echo chamber" effects, thereby the efficiency of its influence. This dual nature of agent ambiguity and targeting precision constitutes the two sides of the same coin in the dissemination of historical nihilism in the digital-intelligence era.

(II) The Shift in Dissemination Content: From "Grand Narratives" to "Micro-content Infiltration" – Fragmentation and Multimodality

To adapt to the fragmented, visual reading habits of the digital intelligence era, the content production strategy of historical nihilism has significantly changed, shifting from directly challenging "grand narratives" to subtly infiltrating through "micro-content." This shift manifests in two interrelated dimensions: content form and expression. First, in terms of content form, it exhibits distinct fragmentation and detail-orientation. To avoid direct challenges to overarching historical conclusions, the strategy turns to manipulating historical details. Disseminators often use "textual research" or "exposés" as pretexts to isolate specific fragments, anecdotes, or unverified "archives" from vast historical materials, amplifying or distorting them out of context. For example, overemphasizing a historical figure's personal traits may subtly deconstruct their significant public historical evaluation. Such content is short, specific, and topical, fitting perfectly with the fast-scrolling, instant-consumption mode of social media. It caters to fragmented reading habits, eroding and fragmenting college students' holistic, coherent historical cognition as they encounter numerous such "historical particles." Second, in expression, it shifts from text-dominated to entertainment-oriented multimodal integration. Using AI synthesis, deepfakes, and short-video editing, historical narratives are widely transformed into images, audio-visuals, animations, games, and even VR experiences. Serious historical events may be adapted into frivolous jokes; noble heroic images may be deconstructed into mocking memes; complex factual disputes may be simplified into visually striking clips with clear stances. Encasing nihilistic cores in entertaining shells greatly erodes the solemnity and seriousness of history. By directly appealing to sensory stimulation and emotional resonance, it replaces rational scrutiny of "truthfulness" and "reasonableness" with emotional judgments of "appeal" and "interest," making the spread of erroneous views more misleading and infectious in immersive, engaging experiences.

(III) From "Public Forums" to "Immersive Communities": The Migration Toward Circle Culture and Immersion

In the digital intelligence era, the dissemination arena of historical nihilism has shifted from open cyberspace to closed communities and immersive virtual environments, forming a more adhesive penetration network. Dissemination first heavily relies on various online communities. Circles

aggregated by interest or academic ties (e.g., WeChat groups, Douban groups, Bilibili channels) provide fertile ground due to their high member homogeneity, frequent interaction, and strong internal trust. Related viewpoints are often packaged as "internal research" or "in-depth analysis" and disseminated by key opinion leaders within these communities. Such dissemination, based on strong relational chains, easily triggers emotional identification among members, which is reinforced through secondary creation, making external corrective or clarifying information hard to penetrate and leading to more stubborn and profound ideological erosion of college students. Meanwhile, technological developments are opening new frontiers. Immersive platforms like VR, AR, and the metaverse enable digital reconstruction and narration of history. In the future, users might "experience" a carefully falsified historical plot via VR devices or participate in distorted historical scenario interactions in metaverse games. Such deeply immersive experiences blur the line between virtual and real, directly impacting senses and cognition through a strong sense of "presence" and interactivity, thereby shaping individual historical concepts more subtly and profoundly. This emerging frontier poses new challenges for ideological confrontation.

3. Fundamental Causes of Historical Nihilism's Influence on College Students in the Digital Intelligence Era

The impact of historical nihilism on college students in the digital intelligence era is not accidental but the result of complex interplay among theoretical, technological, and subjective factors.

(I) Contemporary Manifestations of Idealist Historiography and "Soft" Weapons in Ideological Struggles

Historical nihilism is not without source; its essence is a new variant and concrete manifestation of the idealist view of history under contemporary social conditions. Through a discourse system that appears "academic" or "rational," it systematically negates the objective laws of social development and the subjective role of the people, with its ultimate aim being to serve specific political agendas and ideological subversion.

First, its ideological core is rooted in idealist historiography, conflicting with the fundamental stance of materialist historiography. Marxist materialist historiography posits that "it is not people's consciousness that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Note 1); historical development follows objective laws, and the people are the creators of history. In contrast, historical nihilism slides into idealist historiography, essentially denying the objectivity and regularity of history and portraying history as an object that can be subjectively pieced together and interpreted based on specific stances and intentions. In the digital intelligence era, this trait becomes more concealed. It often adopts technical forms—such as presenting seemingly objective data charts or citing scattered archival fragments—to disguise itself as value-neutral "research" or "restoration." Its core technique involves purposefully selecting and fragmenting historical materials, then adding emotional narrative rendering to use local, accidental, or even fictional details to question and negate the overall main thread and essence of history. This severs intrinsic connections between historical phenomena, deviating from the Marxist principle of analyzing issues within specific historical

contexts, and may cause youth to lose macro-level grasp of historical mainstreams and trends when faced with massive information fragments. Second, in reality, it often serves as a specific theoretical tool and flexible carrier for Western ideological infiltration against China. Historical nihilism is not pure academic inquiry but a social trend with distinct political agendas. Its emergence and spread are closely tied to specific ideological struggles in the international environment, with the core goal of questioning the historical inevitability of China's choice of the socialist path . In the digital intelligence era, this infiltration strategy has evolved from "hard indoctrination" to "soft packaging." It frequently blends with postmodern deconstructionism, consumerism, and other trends, cloaking itself in "academic reflection," "humanistic care," or "universal values." For example, under the guise of "re-evaluation," it erodes the legitimacy of mainstream values by deconstructing the nobility of revolutionary heroes or speculating about historical figures out of context. Its long-term aim is to destabilize a nation's spiritual foundation by disrupting its historical memory and value judgments—an embodiment of the adage, "To destroy a country, first erase its history." Third, it precisely aligns with and exploits cognitive tensions and psychological states among some youth during social transition. China is undergoing rapid modernization, and ideological pluralism and contradictions are inevitable. Some narratives of historical nihilism capture and amplify feelings of alienation from grand narratives, value confusion, or rebelliousness that some youth may experience during growth. By constructing a tragic narrative focused on individual suffering and historical contingency, it promotes skepticism toward nobility and deconstruction of meaning, catering to certain desires for novelty or questioning authority. However, such narratives often abstractly discuss "human nature" and "choice" while detaching from specific historical and social contexts. When college students lack sufficient theoretical reserves—especially the ability to analyze complex social phenomena using materialist historiography—they struggle to identify the fallacies of such narratives at their ideological roots, making them susceptible to influence through emotional resonance and weakening their historical confidence and cultural identity.

(II) Algorithm-Empowered Precise Dissemination and Cognitive Reconstruction

The rapid development of digital intelligence technologies provides unprecedented technological leverage and new arenas for the dissemination and infiltration of historical nihilism, shaping college students' cognition.

First, algorithm-driven targeted push and solidification of information environments. Personalized recommendation algorithms, based on user profiling, meet individual information preferences but easily create "information cocoons." When college students accidentally encounter marginal historical narratives due to interest, algorithms may continuously recommend similar content, immersing them in a filtered, homogeneous information environment. This "cocoon" effect reinforces their one-sided cognition, passively reducing opportunities to access diverse, authoritative historical discourses, thereby subtly instilling erroneous historical views selected and amplified by algorithms. Second, intelligent technologies subvert content authenticity. Tools like generative AI and deepfakes drastically lower the threshold for fabricating historical information. Disseminators can easily produce seemingly authentic

fake historical materials, altered images, or forged speeches. Such multimodal content, with high visual realism and narrative coherence, severely undermines traditional authenticity verification methods, rendering the adage "seeing is believing" obsolete. Faced with technically synthesized "evidence," college students lacking professional discernment are easily misled, potentially shaking their historical cognition built on genuine archives. Third, automated programs manipulate public opinion ecosystems. Disseminators exploit online anonymity to hide identities and use automated tools like social bots to simulate human behavior. These programs can mass-publish information, auto-generate supportive comments, and fabricate fake forwarding data, artificially creating a false impression of widespread support for erroneous views in a short time. Such algorithm-distorted "majority opinions" or "public opinion heat" exert significant herd pressure on individual judgment, interfering with college students' perception of normal social consensus on issues, making them more prone to being misled in isolated judgments. Fourth, fragmentation and entertainment weaken historical depth. To fit mobile communication's fast pace, historical narratives are deliberately cut into short jokes, minute-long videos, or mocking memes. Serious historical issues are wrapped in entertaining, superficial shells, eroding their inherent complexity and gravity. This strategy replaces deep rational thinking with sensory stimulation and instant fun, causing college students to unconsciously diminish reverence for history and weaken serious scrutiny of its embedded values while casually consuming and sharing such content.

(III) Coupling Between College Students' Cognitive Traits and Digital Intelligence Lifestyles

College students' own cognitive-psychological traits and their lifestyles in the digital intelligence era form a "coupling" with historical nihilism's dissemination characteristics, making them more vulnerable to influence.

First, the formative stage of values and insufficient information discernment. College students are in a critical period of shaping their worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. They are intellectually active and curious, but with limited social experience, their dialectical thinking and deep analytical abilities regarding complex historical issues are still developing. Faced with massive, mixed authenticity online information, they may struggle to effectively discern due to insufficient historical knowledge and theoretical tools. Second, curiosity about "novel" perspectives and rebellious psychology. Historical nihilism often appears as "exposés," "re-evaluations," or "alternative perspectives," catering to some youth's desire for novelty and reluctance to blindly follow authority. Curiosity about so-called "forbidden news" or "subversive views" may lead them to accept such content without in-depth verification. Third, media dependence and shallow reading as "digital natives." As digital natives, college students rely heavily on the internet for information and are accustomed to fragmented, fast-food-style reading. This shallow information consumption mode makes them more receptive to historically nihilism content that is cut and entertainment-processed, while hindering systematic, in-depth historical thinking, leading to flattened and superficial historical cognition. Fourth, emotional resonance and herd pressure in circle-based socializing. In online communities and circle cultures, emotions and views easily infect each other. Content containing historical nihilism may resonate emotionally (e.g., dissatisfaction with reality,

"freedom") within small circles, creating group pressure that silences or compels individuals to conform even if doubtful.

4. Building a Systematic Defense System Against the Influence of Historical Nihilism

Facing the intertwined penetration of historical nihilism's triple logic in the digital intelligence era, we must abandon single, passive responses and instead build a systematic resistance and guidance system centered on strengthening theoretical grounding, supported by innovative technological governance, grounded in empowering individuals, and guaranteed by improved coordination mechanisms.

(I) Deepening Education in Historical Materialism to Consolidate the Theoretical Foundation

First, efforts must be made to solidify the theoretical education of historical materialism. Historical materialism must be positioned as the core of historical education, clearly explaining its fundamental tenets such as how social existence determines social consciousness, the contradictory movement between productive forces and production relations, and how the people are the creators of history. Instruction must not be confined to the mere indoctrination of knowledge; instead, it should be closely integrated with the latest manifestations of historical nihilism , such as its "academic" or "humanized" disguises. This involves conducting in-depth theoretical analysis and case-study critiques to expose its idealist historical essence and political perils, thereby equipping university students with the theoretical tools to identify and refute erroneous ideological trends.Second, the narrative logic within general education (public) courses must be systematically constructed. Ideological and political theory courses in universities, along with related humanities and social science courses available to all students, constitute the main channel for historical education. These courses should not be a simple accumulation of historical facts. Instead, they should strive to build a complete, coherent, and persuasive grand narrative framework. Utilizing rigorous historical materials, vivid case studies, and accounts of developmental achievements, these courses need to effectively counter the fragmented issues raised by historical nihilism and proactively elucidate the underlying logic of key questions.Finally, a broad historical perspective must be actively cultivated and applied. Students should be guided to "analyze the mechanisms of change and explore historical patterns from the long river of history, the tides of the times, and global developments." Through comparative analysis of China and other nations, and by connecting past and present, China's development should be examined within the grand vision of the continuous evolution of Chinese civilization over more than five millennia and the development of world socialism over more than five centuries. This approach fosters a deep understanding of the historical inevitability and civilizational contribution of the Chinese path, thereby dispelling the myth of the Western-centric "modernization paradigm" propagated by historical nihilism.

(II) Innovate Technological Governance to Enhance Online Ideological Governance Efficacy

Confronted with technologically empowered historical nihilism, we must skillfully use technology for governance, achieving "managing technology with technology."

First, use intelligent technologies for precise identification and risk early warning. Vigorously develop

and apply AI monitoring tools capable of multimodal analysis of text, images, and audio-visual content. Use natural language processing to analyze semantic tendencies and computer vision to identify suspected tampered images, gradually establishing and improving feature databases for relevant content to achieve automated screening of massive online information and early warnings of potential risks, shifting from passive response to proactive detection. Second, optimize algorithmic logic to actively break closed information environments. Promote and urge internet platforms to optimize recommendation algorithm models, embedding value guidance in design, increasing the weight and push ratio of authoritative, positive, and diverse historical content. For young users, consciously "deliver" mainstream narratives to their information flows to counter the siege of homogeneous, extreme content. Simultaneously, explore establishing audit and supervision systems for algorithm operations to enhance transparency and accountability. Third, use blockchain and other technologies to trace rumor sources and improve governance precision. Explore using blockchain's immutability and traceability to archive important historical information and authoritative releases. For malicious tampering or fabrication of historical information, effective source tracing and evidence fixation can be achieved, enhancing legal deterrence and investigation efficiency against historical nihilism creators and disseminators.

(III) Focusing on Empowering Students: Comprehensively Enhancing Historical Thinking and Media Literacy of College Students

The long-term strategy to resist historical nihilism lies in empowering students as the main agents, fostering their growth into "rational digital citizens" with independent thinking abilities and firm value stances.

First, systematically cultivate critical historical thinking. The goal of history education extends beyond knowledge transmission to nurturing historical thinking. Through curriculum design, academic training, debates, and seminars, students should be taught to apply the fundamental principles and methodology of historical materialism. They must learn how to collect and discern historical materials, analyze historical contexts, evaluate historical figures and events, and grasp the laws and mainstream trends of historical development. When confronted with so-called "historical revelations" or mixed information, they should instinctively question the reliability of sources, the completeness of narratives, and the rationality of logic, thereby developing an inherent "intellectual immunity."Second, it is essential to integrate media literacy education into the national education system, particularly promoting and deepening it in universities. Media literacy education should not remain at the level of "safe internet use" but must advance to "critical engagement with media." The curriculum should encompass the operational mechanisms of platforms, the logic of algorithmic recommendation, the political economy of traffic (attention economy), models of sentiment-driven dissemination, and the identification of new falsification techniques like deepfakes. Special emphasis should be placed on training students to recognize deepfake content, be wary of "information cocoons," and understand tactics like social bots manipulating public opinion, shaping them into discerning and responsible digital citizens. Through this education, students transform from passive information consumers into active, aware, and responsible

information evaluators and disseminators. Third, encourage active historical practice and positive expression. Conditions should be created to support students in utilizing their acquired knowledge and digital skills to actively participate in constructing and disseminating accurate historical perspectives. For instance, organizing oral history interviews, field research to red heritage sites, or encouraging the creation of history-themed short science videos and operating thematic public accounts. Through firsthand research, experiential learning, and creative production, theoretical knowledge solidifies into internal conviction. Furthermore, by influencing peer groups through interactive communication, an endogenous force within the campus to resist erroneous ideological trends can be formed.

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Note

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