



The Barriers and Strategies of Ideological and Political Education in Chinese Higher Education

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Abstract. This article examines the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of IPE. It explores the impact of rapidly developing Internet technology on traditional, teacher-centered IPE methods, emphasizing the shift towards more engaging and student-centric learning models. The paper also identifies issues in current teaching strategies and assessment systems, highlighting the overemphasis on rote learning and the lack of focus on fostering personal development and creativity in students. Furthermore, it discusses the insufficient integration of traditional Chinese culture in IPE course content. To address these barriers, this article makes the following recommendations. First of all, it is necessary to focus on using clear words and perspectives to interpret the problems in learning and ideological construction for students. Secondly, it is crucial to pay attention to updating teaching strategies based on the background of the times and the learning characteristics of students. Finally, it is important to focus on the innovation of teaching methods and make full use of information technology to improve the course experience and effectiveness.

Keywords: Chinese Higher Education, Ideological and Political Education, Teaching Strategies.

1 Introduction

Ideological and Political Education (IPE), also known as moral education in China, faces unique challenges and opportunities due to significant changes in both internal and external environments. The increasing trend of globalization, the introduction of diverse ideologies from Western countries, and the impact of the digital media age have collectively reshaped the context in which IPE operates in the context of China [1].

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, a variety of ideological perspectives, including those from Western contexts come into China. This circumstance could potentially conflict with traditional Chinese values and the principles of IPE government seeks to pass. Meanwhile, the rise of digital media has revolutionized the way young people interact with the world, fostering a generation that is more inclined toward critical thinking. They actively question the outdated knowledge and actions in the education process, unlike older generations who passively receive imparted knowledge.

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Y. Li et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2024 3rd International Conference on Science Education and Art Appreciation (SEAA 2024)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 866,
https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-291-0_59

In addition to the challenges posed by external factors, IPE also faces significant internal obstacles that hinder its effectiveness in shaping the worldviews and political beliefs of Chinese citizens. While IPE plays a crucial role in cultivating citizens aligned with the nation's values and political framework, its internal methodologies and approaches have raised concerns regarding their relevance. One major internal challenge is the predominant reliance on classroom-based theoretical instruction, which often appears disconnected from the social realities of modern China. This gap between classroom ideals and practical student experiences can reduce the effectiveness of IPE, emphasizing the need for more dynamic and relevant educational methods. Meanwhile, the content of IPE courses has often been criticized for being overly doctrinaire, failing to engage students' interest and passion. The traditional and rigid teaching methods, characterized by only using one-way transmission of information, further exacerbate this issue by not accommodating diverse learning styles or encouraging interactive and reflective learning.

To address these challenges, this article proposes innovative approaches to make IPE more engaging and relevant. The aim is to propose strategies that not only align IPE with contemporary social realities but also enhance its effectiveness in fostering informed, critical thinking, and socially responsible citizens. By identifying and addressing both external influences and internal shortcomings, this paper seeks to contribute valuable insights into reforming IPE, ensuring its continued relevance and efficacy in the rapidly evolving landscape of Chinese higher education.

2 Background and Context of IPE in China

In some foreign literature, civic education is often conflated with China's Ideological and Political Education, but they are not entirely the same. The primary aim of civic education is to nurture citizens into responsible members of society, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and awareness needed for effective participation in public life within a capitalist context [2]. Although it doesn't have a specific course like China's IPE, civic education is still integrated into school subjects related to social studies, such as natural sciences and sociology, where it subtly disseminates ideas. It's also conducted through various practical activities in society, like community service [2].

The system of Ideological and Political Education (IPE) within Chinese higher education institutions has a complex history, deeply intertwined with the country's sociopolitical evolution. This curriculum is rooted in the traditions of Confucian teaching, which emphasizes moral and ethical conduct. It is noteworthy that although Confucian thought and culture were often criticized as part of feudalism in the 20th century, in modern China, the aspects of Confucian thought related to political systems have been omitted. However, its ideas as moral practices and social norms are praised by the government, described as a part of China's heritage, a bond linking different ethnicities, and a symbol of China's valuable soft power [3]. However, it must also be acknowledged that many of the outdated concepts in Confucianism are still rejected

by the majority of Chinese people, considered unnecessary, and viewed as overly outdated and rigid [3].

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there has been a considerable evolution in the Ideological and Political Education (IPE) system. Initially, IPE was primarily focused on instilling communist ideology and revolutionary values among students, eliminating the influence of feudal and semi-feudal systems. This shift moved away from the past political objectives and reflected the nation's continuously changing social needs and political direction. In the current educational landscape, the scope of education is expanding, IPE serves multiple roles and objectives. Education policies are increasingly transitioning from a primary emphasis on allegiance to the governing party to also encompassing individual growth, social accountability, and engagement in community activities within the context of the national political structure. It is not just a means of conveying political and ideological concepts but also a tool for fostering a well-rounded moral and ethical consciousness among students. The goal of IPE is to nurture individuals who excel academically and are also committed to social responsibility, possessing a robust national identity and a dedication to the progress of both society and the nation [3]. All these universities have a similar IPE system. In Chinese universities, IPE encompasses compulsory theoretical coursework, moral instruction, and a range of broader educational activities that are designed to influence students' everyday lives. The in-school curriculum often includes mandatory subjects for which students earn credits, related to Marxism, Chinese socialism, and the political thought of contemporary Chinese leaders, alongside broader themes such as ethics, law, and history [4]. The Party's leadership and student counselors play a crucial role in ensuring the implementation of IPE [4]. In Chinese universities today, the prevailing ideological and political classes represent the primary formal setting for civic education among college students, as universities are considered the most influential medium for political socialization, with a clear goal of educating students to become specific individuals [2]. The current IPE in Chinese higher education is not limited to in-class theoretical courses, it also emphasizes extracurricular educational activities. The first year of undergraduate studies typically involves military education and training for most students. During this period, students undergo training similar to that of soldiers, cultivating patriotism and a sense of discipline [4]. This experience is aimed at shaping a collective mindset among students. Additionally, students participate in activities like paying tribute at martyrs' memorials to learn about the sacrifices made by war heroes for the country. During holidays, schools encourage students to engage in practical social activities, such as supporting rural education and volunteering at public places [4].

The societal and political expectations from IPE are multifaceted. At a societal level, there is an expectation for IPE to produce citizens who are aligned with the core values of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and who can contribute positively to social harmony and stability. This involves nurturing a sense of civic responsibility, ethical conduct, and an understanding of the rights and duties of citizens under the Chinese constitution and legal system. Politically, IPE is seen as a vehicle for maintaining the ideological continuity of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC). It is expected to foster loyalty to the party and an understanding of its historical and ongoing

ing role in shaping modern China. This includes educating students on the CPC's policies, achievements, and vision for the country's future. Moreover, in the context of increasing globalization and exposure to diverse ideologies and cultures, IPE faces the challenge of reinforcing national identity and values while encouraging openness and adaptability. This equilibrium is essential in preparing students to adeptly handle the intricacies of an ever-evolving global landscape while maintaining a firm connection to their cultural and ideological roots.

3 Barriers and Opportunities for the Development of IPE System

3.1 Rapid Developed Internet Technology

While the advancement of internet technology brings new opportunities, it also poses challenges to Ideological and Political Education (IPE). Previously, when internet technology was less developed, teachers were the primary providers of knowledge and content, leading to traditional, teacher-centered, unidirectional educational models. However, with the rapid development of the internet, knowledge has become easily accessible. Students now autonomously access a variety of knowledge points from the internet, adapting their learning pace and capabilities for a more efficient process. In the classroom, the use of new media by teachers can make the overall teaching process more engaging and interesting. Outside the classroom, online platforms can integrate IPE into students' daily lives, moving beyond theoretical classrooms [5]. However, it's important to note that the information in the online world can be chaotic and disorganized, requiring teachers to appropriately guide students in discerning this information. As China is a developing socialist country, capitalist culture inevitably infiltrates the thoughts of students, possibly leading them to political biases [5].

3.2 Inappropriate Teaching Strategy and Assessment System

Regarding the complexity of theory, Chinese IPE, which contains a substantial amount of Marxist content, can be abstract and profound for students in higher education. This can lead to a situation in formal theoretical courses where the content becomes dull and repetitive, causing students to lose interest and perceive IPE as a burdensome rote learning exercise. The theoretical part of these courses is highly summarized and uses academic language unfamiliar to students' daily lives [5]. Meanwhile, IPE is a course system that places significant emphasis on the construction of the ideological field [6]. In the study of theory, merely repeating knowledge from textbooks without integrating it with real-world practical experience makes it difficult to achieve the expected outcomes of IPE. Due to school assessment systems, students' exam performance becomes an indicator of teacher and school quality, with emphasis on ranking and checking the progress towards publicly set educational objectives. This leads most teachers to adopt an exam-oriented approach, focusing on exam-

related topics rather than the ultimate goals of IPE, which are to foster personal development, creativity, and societal contribution in students [7]. Moreover, in the context of China, assessment is not always an accurate or effective measure of student learning and may even disrupt teaching, forcing teachers to adopt methods incompatible with their teaching beliefs [7]. Therefore, educators must convey these concepts in a more understandable and accessible manner [5].

3.3 The Lack of Emphasis on Traditional Chinese Culture in IPE Content within Textbooks

Although IPE course content and objectives mention the need to integrate with China's excellent traditional culture, Xue Wei notes that after studying the textbooks used for IPE courses in Chinese universities, they found that only a few sections focus on China's excellent traditional culture [8]. During the teaching process, this aspect is not given much emphasis. This leads to teachers being unable to use real-life examples of China's excellent traditional culture, which are more relatable to students' lives, to explain abstract Marxist theories. As a result, students' understanding of the theories remains superficial.

4 Suggestions

4.1 Providing Clear Theoretical Discourse

In public opinion, there are many discussions about excessive authoritarianism and political propaganda, which are seen as limitations on students' freedom of thought and innovation. On the other hand, some views suggest that authority can unify people, enabling them to act together towards a common goal. Without the support of theoretical courses, students may fall into a lack of deep understanding of the nation's history, culture, and political system [9]. This necessitates the need for clear theoretical discourse to resolve students' confusion about theory and practice, rather than mechanically repeating the content from courses and textbooks [9].

4.2 Updating the Teaching Strategy

When teachers discuss the interplay of emotions and theory, they should focus not only on the theoretical aspects but also on humanistic care, narrating theories with rich emotions. For example, when discussing the stories of martyred heroes, it's insufficient to simply explore their contributions and historical significance. It's also important to bring in the emotional and human aspects of these stories. Teachers aim to create a learning environment that encourages students to understand not just the theoretical aspects but also to empathize with the emotions and human experiences behind these theories [9]. Additionally, the subject matter should be refreshed and updated; incorporating recent events and contemporary issues into the curriculum can enhance students' engagement with the subject and encourage them to critically think

about how historical lessons are applied to modern contexts and challenges. This approach is not only about instilling patriotic sentiments or national pride and a heightened sense of serving the people [10]. It is also aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of social dynamics and encouraging active citizenship.

4.3 The Application of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC)

Research indicates that most teachers and students are familiar with and supportive of online teaching for ideological and political theory courses, with half of the students believing that online teaching aids in learning these subjects [11]. The use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has been shown to improve learning efficiency and student satisfaction to some extent [12]. While widely welcomed and recognized by most students, the need to focus on the interestingness of courses to maintain engagement and learning effectiveness is emphasized. Many courses, despite being online, don't fully utilize the advantages of web technology and tend to repeat traditional offline content, becoming procedural [11]. Students can easily get distracted during online classes, not actively engaging with the content. Studies show that students cannot maintain high attention throughout a class due to physiological factors and unengaging content [13]. Therefore, teachers should manage class duration effectively and use the advantages of web technology, incorporating different sensory experiences related to course content, like animations and sound effects [13].

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this article highlights the current landscape of Ideological and Political Education (IPE) in Chinese higher education, underscoring the evolving challenges and innovative strategies for effective implementation. It emphasizes the importance of integrating modern technology, updating teaching strategies, and infusing course content with humanistic elements and traditional culture. To engage students meaningfully and foster critical thinking, IPE must evolve to accommodate diverse learning needs and align with contemporary societal contexts. The integration of MOOCs, practical teaching methodologies, and a focus on holistic student development are crucial for adapting IPE to the current educational landscape in China.

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