

Ideological and Political Education in Chinese Universities: Structures and Practices

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Abstract

This paper provides a detailed introduction to the structures and practice of ideological and political education in Chinese universities. It draws on a thematic analysis of documents from the Chinese Communist Party and State sources, and data from 24 in-depth interviews with managers of ideological and political education, teaching staff, student counsellors and students from three universities. This paper shows how ideological and political education in Chinese universities has developed into an institutionalized and nationwide system. It reveals how the practices of ideological and political education institutionalize patriotism and conformity as appropriate ideological perspectives for students. It offers empirical evidence of the party-led structures, formal teaching and varied activities that together make up ideological and political education in Chinese universities.

Key words

Ideological and political education, China, universities, qualitative study

Introduction

The present study shows how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, formally known as the Communist Party of China or CPC) seeks to secure the political and ideological unification of young people in higher education (HE). It focuses on universities' internal processes

designed to achieve the goal of Ideological and Political Education (IPE). For the CCP and state agencies, the student body is of strategic significance because of its size and growing impact upon society. Ministry of Education (MOE, 2020) figures show that the 2020 total student enrolment across all HE institutions reached 40 million, with 30.31 million students pursuing full-time study leading to a bachelor/associate degree. This means that China has the highest number of registered students in HE in the world. The CCP seek to maintain its influence among university students to ensure the implementation of the role of universities required by the *Law of Higher Education* (National People's Congress, 2015), to “cultivate the builders and successors of socialism for the future”. This was reinforced when President Xi (2016) made a speech at a conference on IPE of universities. He emphasized that,

IPE in universities should be integrated into the whole education process of HE, and universities must focus on students, caring for them, serving them, and helping them improve in ideological quality, political awareness, moral characteristics and humanistic quality to enable them to develop both ability and integrity.

One of IPE's aims is to achieve a broad acceptance of the ideological dominance of the Communist Party among students through various studies and activities, as well as promoting a national patriotic sentiment among them. The IPE system also helps to sustain the self-identification of students as builders of and successors to socialism.

This paper asks what are the practices and structures of IPE as an institutionalized system in Chinese universities? It first explores a number of theoretical considerations and outlines the methodology used in the study. It then focuses on the leadership of CCP in universities through student counsellors, educational activities and the theoretical course which consists of multiple courses, and how this translates into institutional designs and everyday practice. This is followed by the discussion before presenting the conclusion that, overall, IPE plays an important role in maintaining the CCP's authority and cohesion in universities.

Literature review

According to Marx and Engels (1970), ideology is the production of ideas, conceptions and consciousness, and it includes politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. Marx and Engels assert that ideology is an instrument of social production and argue that, while one class rules over the others, the ruling ideas are an expression of the dominant ideology. As an important component of superstructure, ideology is formulated to serve the ruling class's best material interests. Ideology refers to a form of communication by those in power to strengthen the existing relations of dominance (Habermas, 1984), and a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group (Williams, 1977). Critics have claimed that this is achieved by creating a false consciousness, such as encouraging a focus on possessions and material conditions rather than on politics. The ruling class achieves this domination through its hegemony, through which the objectives of the dominant group are presented to the population not only as the interests of the ruling class, but as universal interests of the entire society (Fairbrother, 2003). Such an approach is embedded into political and economic institutions and relationships, as well as active forms of experience and consciousness (Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 2005).

One goal of ideology mentioned above is to legitimise those forces in a position of power. For Gramsci (1992), power refers to the ability of dominant groups to establish the common sense of a society, transforming their ideas into natural laws or ways of social practise. This domination can be achieved through coercive means, including through the judiciary, legislature and the military. Gramsci's understanding of power mainly depends on the negotiation of consent and active participation of citizens in civil society institutions. This includes institutional structures such as schools, universities, media outlets, NGOs, and trade unions (Gow, 2017). Power has to be constantly built and rebuilt by dominant groups through

contestations and negotiations (Apple, 2014) and this has enabled citizens to go beyond an understanding of power as merely repressive to involving the ideological leadership of dominant groups and the fostering of the active consent of subordinated groups (Lim and Apple, 2016). Apple (1993) also emphasizes that power can be built through accommodating the culture of the ruled. To apply it in terms of education, Apple (2004) argues that school helps to fortify power relations through a process of accommodation whereby a dominant worldview is constructed out of the values, consciousness, and practices underlying subordinated people's lives. Shapiro (1984) and Watkins (1992) have also applied the notion of power in general, and of cultural incorporation in particular, to examine the use of educational policy in social reproduction.

Another perspective is that of political socialisation, explained by Dawson and Prewitt (1968) as the process by which regimes justify their rule and motivate populations to support national goals. They argue that students are taught about the political system and the nation and are encouraged to support it. There is also a system of mass education, in particular in schools that have been entrusted by the state with carrying out formal programmes of political socialisation (Meyer et al., 1992). This political socialisation aims to preserve the social order and consensus, and to maintain the political, economic, and social status quo (Morrow and Torres, 1995).

These studies, developed in non-Chinese contexts, nonetheless provide different perspectives for consideration of the logic of IPE sponsored by CCP in the universities. Amongst Chinese scholars, Zeng (2015) argues that, in contemporary China, IPE plays an important role in influencing the world views and political beliefs of people. Ping et al. (2004) point out that IPE develops the political cultivation and values view of the next generation while guiding students into the Party's ideology. IPE is one of the basic carriers and realization forms of conducting and developing Chinese mainstream culture and ideology (Zhang, 2015). The IPE

of university students should make use of the developments in IT (Lou, 2018) as those born from the year 2000 onwards may be seen as the aborigines of the internet. Universities should grasp the characteristics of media forms, explore the IPE model based on them, and innovate IPE's practical path (Fu and Hou, 2019). Also, given the recent and ongoing experiences of COVID-19, it would make sense for universities to promote in-depth integration of epidemic prevention with IPE and strive to improve the pertinence and timeliness of IPE (Li and Wang, 2020).

Following the literature quoted above, in this paper, IPE refers to how to use certain ideas, political views, and moral norms to exert influence on social members so that they form social practice activities that meet the requirements of the State. In this framework, events including teaching and daily activities are integrated which ensures the smooth running of IPE in the universities.

Methodology

We adopted a qualitative approach for this study, accepting that data would not be standardised (Neuman and Robson, 2012). The qualitative method explores how people interpret their experiences (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Schensul, 2012). It illuminates the dynamics of how things run, in particular when the study is complex (Ritchie et al., 2013). Considering this study is to explore the practice of IPE as an institutionalized system in Chinese universities, and this practice is diverse and so difficult to measure by specific technology, qualitative research was employed in this study.

Data was collected through document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews give flexibility to approach key points, allowing interviewees both to answer the posed questions and to present new ideas related to them (Yin, 2013; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). There are 2688 universities in China (MOE, 2020), all of which have a similar

system of IPE. These universities are affiliated with either the relevant provincial and prefectural levels of government, or directly with the MOE (Liu, 2017). Usually the status of HE institutions is lower when they are affiliated to the local city than when they are affiliated to the central government. In order to source a diverse range of participants, this study invited interviewees from three universities, one is affiliated to the provincial government, one the government department of industry and one directly with the MOE.

Given the commitment of the authorities to IPE, the study of policy documents provides background and contextual information for interpreting the practices under investigation (Mason, 2002; Prior, 2004; Gibson and Brown, 2009). In this study, 16 documents were collected, 12 national policies and four regional regulations. These documents were obtained from websites and official publications and they provide the background and supportive information to the interview data.

The research question of this study focusses on the practice of IPE as an institutionalized system in Chinese universities. In terms of the existing regulations on IPE in universities, the main people involved are the teachers of IPE courses and student counsellors. Additionally, managers of student counsellors and senior IPE course teachers are responsible for guiding the IPE work in the universities. We also sought evidence of student perspectives in order to better understand the practice of IPE. Therefore, four types of participants – student counsellors, IPE course teachers, their managers and students – were interviewed. In terms of the requirements of the MOE, the managers, student counsellors and IPE course teachers must be members of the CCP. However, three-quarters of the students who participated in this study were not CCP members.

Interviewees were told the purpose and process of the interview. They were also given the interview questions prior to the interview and reminded that they were free to refuse to answer

any question and/or withdraw from the research at any time without having to give a reason. One potential interviewee withdrew after she received the interview questions because she thought she was not an appropriate person to answer the questions. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed before being returned to the interviewee to check. Interviewees were identified using letters in the analysis so as to protect their anonymity. In all, this study contains interviews from 24 participants: six student counsellors, three managers of student counsellors, eight students and seven IPE course teachers.

Our starting point for the selection of interviewees was existing personal contacts. We invited two participants whose work was known to us. These participants introduced other experienced practitioners in a snowballing process. We are aware that snowball sampling has dangers of bias, and narrows the possible range of views we may encounter. However, apart from the two initial informants, all the other interviewees were previously unknown to us. Even in the case of the two initial contacts, we had not previously interviewed them.

Thematic analysis was carried out using the qualitative analysis software Nvivo and the table below presents the main themes from the data analysis. These themes will be discussed in the paper, but four were identified as the most important, namely: the leadership of the CCP in universities, student counsellors, educational activities and the theoretical course. These four are the main drivers of IPE in universities. We cover the other themes within our analysis of the key themes.

CCP leadership in universities	Student counsellors	Educational activities	Theoretical course
Party members	Communist Youth League Organization	Student Union	CCP at faculty level

Table 1 Themes relating to data analysis

The leadership of the CCP in universities

In China, Law of Higher Education established an institutional governance system for public universities. The institutional system is led by an appointed president under the leadership of the University Communist Committee of the Party (UCCP). In this system, the Secretary of the UCCP presides over the overall work of the CCP and fulfils the requirements of ideological and political work. The president is responsible for the implementation of the decisions of the UCCP through the University Committee as the main executive body and work as the legal representative of the university (Liu, 2017). These responsibilities include designing and implementing the university's long-term strategy and the annual working plan. This involves responsibility for teaching, research, finance, personnel, infrastructure, student recruitment and other administrative management (MOE, 2014). Figure 1 below shows the organizational structure of public universities.

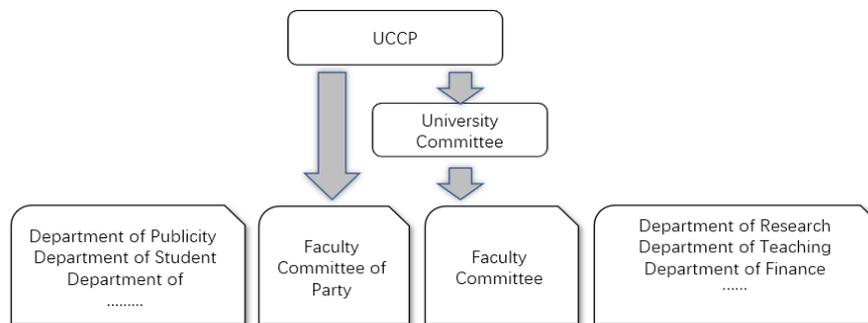


Figure 1 Internal organizational structure of public universities (Liu 2017,p.9)

There is a certain overlap of membership between the UCCP and the University Committee which reduces potential conflict between the academic and political bodies. The UCCP establishes Party branches at faculty level, each of which has a Secretary. It carries out a variety of educational activities for Party members, including the initiation of new members and ensures the implementation of Party policy. Each month the faculty Party branch has a

themed activity. The university sets the themes and formulates guidelines for these activities.

For example, this month's theme is fighting against the epidemic of Covid-19. We discuss the experiences and generate more practical ideas to improve the work. (Student Counsellor Manager B, University A)

The CCP at faculty level is responsible for the IPE of faculty members. The universities have a student department responsible for student affairs for the whole university, and the Communist Youth League Organization (CYLO) is responsible for the youth activities, both of which are led by the UCCP. The CYLO is open to young people from the age of 14 and almost all university students are members. It leads the Student Union, student clubs and organizations which provide programmes and services for students.

At university, students who have the same majors and grade levels usually are grouped into 'classes', numbering from 20 to 60 students, each of which is a youth league branch. Students in the first year are usually asked to gather once a month and the student counsellor often organizes the themed activities of the classes.

For example, our recent theme is the vanguard and exemplary role of many people in fighting the epidemic of COVID-19 and to learn from them. In October, there are themed education activities around National Day (Student D, University B).

The organizational structure for IPE extends beyond the university. For example, as well as being supervised by the UCCP, the CYLO is supervised by the provincial level CYLO and interacts with the CYLOs of other universities. One consequence of this interconnected structure is that IPE in universities is integrated into a national system, pursuing common political and ideological strategies.

Since 1990, an annual national conference, *The Construction of the Party in Universities*, has been held. In the 2016 conference, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed that universities must care for students and help them improve in ideological quality, political awareness, moral

characteristics and humanistic qualities (MOE, 2016). Xi emphasised that students should be encouraged to integrate their own ideals and pursuits into the cause of the nation. What Xi said was understood in China as being the need to secure a new generation of youth to be the future builders of socialism in the country.

Following this conference, the Organization Department, the Publicity Department and the MOE (2017) jointly formulated a document which put particular emphasis upon the integrity and quality of leaders and the need to strengthen and improve the political and ideological task of universities. In order to achieve the Two Centenary Goals – to build a prosperous society by 2021 and to build a democratic and harmonious, socialist, modern country by 2049 when the PRC will have been in power for a hundred years – the university should cultivate socialist-minded, professionally competent people, with both ability and political integrity. These will be qualified builders and reliable successors of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In terms of this document, the basic principles of strengthening and improving the ideological and political work in universities are to:

- Maintain the Party's leadership in universities;
- Adhere to the socialist direction of running the university;
- Adhere to the whole process of all-round education in which ideological values are part of the whole process of education and teaching;
- Combine the theoretical education and practical activities in IPE with the cultivation of the student; and
- Promote the content, forms, and methods of IPE, and enhance the effectiveness of education.

Wang Huning, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee¹, attended the 2020 Construction of the Party conference (MOE 2020), and said that solid progress in Party construction and IPE in universities would provide a

¹ He is also the Secretary of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee

strong foundation for training socialist builders and successors who are moral, intellectual, fit, and hard-working in an all-round way. The aim is clear – Party ideology is to permeate the entire system so that universities become bastions for creating a new generation who will become the successors of socialist China.

Student counsellors

The UCCP pays particular attention to combining IPE with the practical needs and daily life of students. As previously mentioned, students are grouped into classes of between 20 to 60. Every class has a counsellor who covers several classes – most on the same programme so they become familiar with the pedagogic approach. They are responsible for student affairs and are the first person a student would go to if they had any difficulties. These counsellors are full-time university staff and each is responsible for around 200 students. Usually these student counsellors accompany students from their first day at university. They communicate with and help students with their studies and life at the university. For example, they give guidance on employment and financial support, on academic and residential aspects of campus life, and any necessary psychological counselling. In particular, during the first year, to help a student adjust to the change in lifestyle from high school's rigid timetable to the university's much more flexible timetable, some universities arrange for students to do morning exercise at around 6:30 am. Many interviewees acknowledge that this is particularly hard in the winter. Counsellors usually exercise along with the students to encourage and supervise them. The student counsellors also work with other departments on campus: for example, the student financial aid office often sends the financial aid allocation to student counsellors, and they then provide help to the students in need.

Usually, student counsellors are responsible for the construction of student Party branches, youth leagues and classes. They need to maintain good communications with teachers to know how the students are doing academically, and also form a joint force

of IPE for the students. (Manager of Student Counsellor C, University C)

An indicator in the evaluation of merit awards for students is their ideological and political performance. As student counsellors, we need to guide the ideology and daily lives of students. (Student Counsellor E, University B)

These counsellors are usually the secretaries of the CCP student branches, and they organize a number of activities relating to IPE such as theoretical study workshops and essay contests. These counsellors usually develop a friendship with the students that often continues through their whole life. In 2015, Chinese universities had a total of more than 130,000 full-time and 50,000 part-time counsellors (Cai and Zheng, 2016), who are the backbone of ideological and political training in their universities. Since 2015, all full-time counsellors have been required by the MOE to be Party members. In order to obtain more practical skills, these counsellors receive compulsory training in psychological counselling and career development mentoring. The MOE is seeking to establish a three-level training system of counsellors, at the national, provincial and university levels and, in order to enhance the professionalism of counsellor training, a number of counsellor training bases have been established throughout the country.

Educational activities

In 2016, 1.8 million students were Party members (MOE, 2016). The percentage of Party members in elite universities is higher than those in other universities. It is whilst they are at university that most students are encouraged to write their CCP membership application. Applicants come from a variety of social backgrounds and classes and, although many have parents who are Party members, some do not.

After freshmen have registered at the university, the first thing is to carry out entrance education activities for students. We usually introduce the application procedure of becoming a Party member in the entrance education activity. (Student Counsellor B, University A)

Through the application, the students become active applicants for Party membership, and are

advised to participate in a number of training events focusing on the history and development of the CCP. During this stage, the Party will arrange two members to be contacts for the students and to supervise the applicants' understanding and performance. The applicants are required to provide a Thought Report every quarter to show their progress in their understanding of the CCP, their academic performance and participation in other social events which can show their efforts and progress.

At this stage, the student counsellor plays an important role in deciding who will first go to the training focussing on the history and development of CCP as they are in daily contact with the students. After this, the candidates are comprehensively assessed by the faculty branch of the Party using a number of criteria, including their studies, public performance in daily life and their training record. Usually, the two contacts will provide references for each candidate. A formal meeting will be held to discuss whether to upgrade the candidate to become a probationary Party member. After one year, the Party branch will hold another meeting to discuss the candidate's performance and decide if they will be promoted to a full Party member. If there is a record of academic failure or disciplinary issues, the promotion might be delayed and the candidate will continue under observation. The process includes to write the application, become an active applicant for Party membership, to study in the training programme, to become probationary party member and to become Party member.

All Party members and active applicants are invited to attend the routine meetings of the relevant branch of the Party Committee in the university. This is one of the CCP's main platforms for communication and education. Activities vary but the theme is related to ideological and political education: studying documents, watching movies and going on group visits to historical or cultural sites. In branch meetings, applicants and Party members are encouraged to exchange thoughts, with students expected to reflect on their own thinking and daily performance while others provide feedback and suggestions.

Last term, we arranged for active applicants for Party membership to go to Wenchuan, where the great earthquake happened in 2008 The reconstruction process of the Wenchuan earthquake disaster region was greatly aided by the whole state, which reflects the superiority of the socialist system. (Student Counsellor D, University C)

We organized student visits to patriotic education bases, but also asked them to write down their reflections. It is not difficult to understand that Party membership would help employment on graduation, in particular if students hope to work in the government, because they took many of these types of educational activities. (Student Counsellor C, University B)

In China, undergraduates are required to live in university accommodation on campus and most have meals in university dining facilities. This means that students spend most of their time on the campus and student life is therefore a period of relative separation from family. Students will typically live in dormitories with 4 or 6 people sharing a room and bathroom. Disagreements or even conflicts might arise as a result of people's different personalities, living habits, or cultural backgrounds. The supervision of the students places a heavy workload on universities, but it also creates the space for different collective activities that can help students in their ideological education. This work is undertaken by the UCCP in various forms. For example, in some universities the UCCP establishes a Party organization within student accommodation units such that each floor may have a Party group that initiates seminars, reading groups, or volunteer services. These events are also open to other students who would like to participate.

The activities of the Party branch were usually serious. Every month is based around a certain theme. We prepared materials related to the themes and brought them to the meeting to share and discuss. (Student F, University C)

A concrete example of this is the screening of a documentary about Nobel Prize Winner Tu Youyou who discovered artemisinin and dihydroartemisinin, a breakthrough in the treatment of malaria which has saved millions of lives.

When the Party branch organized a documentary about Tu Youyou's team to introduce

how they developed artemisinin to treat diseases, we were deeply touched. I feel my responsibility as a human being, for my country and the world. (Student D, University B)

The UCCP has recently started using social media to construct a platform to achieve IPE. For example, it has established study groups about IPE and developed many apps which deliver materials (including videos and documents) about IPE at fixed times. The development of technology has enabled IPE to achieve some goals that traditional mechanisms are not able to. Many universities carry out education activities targeting Chinese students to participate in overseas exchange programmes to promote the internationalisation of HE. In order to support CCP members who are overseas, some UCCPs have established overseas groups of Party members. These groups meet to discuss domestic policies and development and often invite speakers to share their experiences of how they dealt with the challenges of studying abroad.

Another activity is military education and training. This is an important aspect of the ideological education of university graduates. Such training happens under the direction and training of members of the People's Liberation Army who live on campus for the training period. The compulsory military training course usually takes place in the undergraduates' first or second year and lasts for around two or three weeks. Students are organized into platoons, companies, battalions and regiments to be trained as if they were living in the army. One of the main aims of this training is to foster a spirit of patriotism and discipline that will shape the collective mentality of the students and lead to the development of positive habits for their later lives. The content of military education includes physical training, military gymnastics, collective awareness and knowledge of the CCP.

We participated in commemorative activities in the martyrs' cemetery during military education and training. When I understood the stories of these people and touched my army uniform, I would spontaneously feel reverence for them. I feel that I should live like them, to work hard for my country. (Student E, University C)

Practical social activity is another vehicle for IPE in universities. In 1980, students of Tsinghua University initiated counselling services following the slogan “to revitalize China, start with me and start from now”. This generated a strong response among other university students who joined similar practical social activities. In 1983, the CCP Central Committee issued a document in which the concept of practical social activities for university students was formally articulated for the first time. In 1987, the CCP Central Committee and the State Education Commission (1987) jointly issued *Requirements on Organizing University Students to Participate in Social Practice* which supported the active advocacy of the CYLO and the National Student Union in promoting social practice as an effective form of IPE. After that, practical social activity developed in various forms including social surveys, advisory services and voluntary labour. This practice has been encouraged by the CCP, and its content has been continuously expanded.

In 1997, volunteers from universities provided cultural, scientific and health education activities to people in the countryside during their summer holidays. This became a popular activity among university students. Countryside support takes many forms, including educational support and practical help such as fixing household appliances for local people for free. In 2005, the Government pointed out that cultural, science and technology, and health activities were especially relevant in the countryside, whilst science and education, art, law, and health were more relevant for the urban community.

We also organize students to carry out volunteer activities in villages, such as helping with children’s homework by tutoring them. (Student Counsellor D, University C)

These practical social activities continue to expand in terms of both the number of students who participate, and the number of people they benefit. There is now a wide range of volunteer service activities in the countryside such as art performance teams, science and technology construction stations, library services, and lectures on rural development and best practice for

rural health. In cities, students go to urban communities and factory enterprises to carry out community services, vocational training and social surveys. To strengthen these social activities, the universities arrange for staff members to participate in these activities alongside the students. Many universities have established cooperative relationships with enterprises and social institutions to develop long-term social activities.

In 2001, the *Implementation Summary for Improving the Construction of Civic Morality* was issued (CCP Central Committee, 2001). This document introduced the concept of citizenship into IPE. It states that civic morality is part of ideological and political activity and is of particular importance in the cultivation of socialist citizens who have ideals, morals, culture and discipline, and in the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics. IPE was expanded to include citizenship education that aims to emphasize an independent social position and the personality of individuals (Li and Zhong 2002). There is some evidence that this reform has positively influenced attitudes to participation and students' self-confidence (Zhang and Fagan, 2016).

The theoretical course

Another important channel that integrates IPE into students' daily life is the theoretical course. This is a compulsory course which runs through undergraduates' four years of study and consists of a number of modules including Basic Principles of Marxism, Mao Zedong Thoughts, Deng Xiaoping Theory and the Three Represents, Modern Chinese History, Ideological and Moral Cultivation and its Legal Basis, and, Contemporary Situation and Development in China and the World. The IPE theoretical course is taught to all university students, follows a standard framework and offers academic credits.

In 2015, the MOE promoted the reform of IPE teaching as the modules had become too formal and students were losing interest in them. The MOE and Publicity Department (2015) asked

teachers to explore their teaching methods in order to inspire student interest. The MOE also edited teaching materials for students on the subject of Marxist theory, trained a group of scholars in the subject of Marxism and developed a number of influential Marxist faculties to act as model institutes. At the same time, a series of modules about China that introduced aspects of national development and culture were made part of the course. The theoretical course would not only aim to present theories, but seek to engage students in discussions on cultural factors. One example was the introduction of aspects of the history of the universities into the teaching in an attempt to make students relate more to the course contents. However, the basic thrust remained to instil confidence in the achievements of the State and the university and strengthen students' adherence to socialism with Chinese characteristics.

There will be a lot of pictures, videos and cases for each topic of the course. The overall effect is generally ok. Some teachers present it vividly and some present it in a boring way. The presentation quality of teachers is an important factor affecting student interest in the course (Student A, University C).

The General Secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping, hosted a forum on the IPE theoretical course. Xi (2019) emphasized that the most fundamental task of the ideological and political theory course was to fully implement the education policy of the State and the Party. Education is to serve the people and is a governance mechanism of the CCP in China, consolidating and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics. The ultimate goal of IPE is to cultivate the comprehensive development of socialist builders and successors as a new era of national revival. Previous policies affecting the teachers of the theoretical course mainly focused on curriculum-setting, textbook quality and improving the knowledge accumulation and accomplishments of ideological and political course teachers. Xi emphasised that the key to running the ideological and political theory course lies with the teacher, and in giving space to the teacher's enthusiasm, initiative and creativity.

I thought ideological and political theoretical courses were less important than

professional courses. After learning and thinking about Xi's speech, I realised the importance of ideological and political courses and the importance of myself as an ideological and political teacher. (IPE teacher, University A)

After the forum, ideological and political course teachers were not only required to be good at delivering lectures to students, but also to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the law of ideological and political course teaching, to constantly promote the reform and innovation of the courses, to enrich the learning experience of students, and to strengthen their own ideals and beliefs in the socialist system.

Discussion and conclusion

IPE for students is considered a priority in Chinese universities. It is also one of the important approaches for students to learn theories of society, politics and economics and understand history. It is delivered through a range of structures and activities including formal lectures as one delivery method. This paper introduces the leadership, content and implementation of IPE in universities in China by drawing extensively on interviews and documents from the CPC and state government. The study shows that the content of IPE is closely connected with the tasks of the Communist Party and it has developed into an institutionalised nationwide system. IPE in Chinese universities integrates compulsory theoretical courses, moral education, and broader educational activities to shape the daily lives of students. In addition, the CCP leadership and the student counsellors are important to ensure the implementation of IPE.

In general, IPE plays a significant role in maintaining unification and conformity in contemporary China (Holbig, 2013).

There are some parallels to China in other HE systems historically and currently. In the UK, the Robbins Report on higher education (1963) argued that one of important functions of HE is the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship. However, there

has been no attempt to implement this systematically. Indeed, in the 21st century the humanities (including literature, arts and history) have been under attack in the UK and other nations where the instrumental purpose of universities has been prioritised over more intrinsic aims. In other words, a university education is no longer an end in itself but rather a means for the state to ensure a supply of trained and skilled workers as well as the research and development that will ensure future economic progress. There is agreement across governments of the importance of knowledge production, but there is no longer a consensus that this should be the result of open-ended enquiry (McCowan, 2015).

The withdrawal of funding to the humanities in Japanese universities and in the UK (Barnett, 2018) is both an imposition of neoliberal logic, since scientific subjects have a higher market value, and an ideological choice to limit the influence of critical voices. However, such reforms do not go so far as to mandate a specific political and social worldview. In Vietnam, where the political and economic structures have similarities with those of China, all undergraduate students must undertake compulsory national defence education, but this is accompanied by study of the humanities and social sciences (Harman, Hayden, & Phạm, 2010). In the Philippines, universities partner with industry to encourage employability of students as well as the relevant research. Nonetheless they have an overarching mission to develop critical leadership rather than commitment to a national ideology (Trinidad, & Leviste, 2021).

At school level governments in many countries have developed policies and curricula for civic or citizenship education that promote patriotism (Osler & Starkey, 2005, 2009; Jerome, 2012; Vincent, 2019). Like other cultural institutions, schooling is likely to attempt to transmit to the young generation the values, beliefs, and practices of the ruling culture, rather than providing opportunities to discuss and challenge these values and practices. During this process, schools can become conduits for the settled ideology (Shapiro, 1984). In the practice

of Chinese universities, the CCP has continually adjusted the mechanism of IPE to transmit the settled ideology to the younger generation. It plays a crucial role in developing a set of ideological discourses and strategies. Through IPE the ideological and political practices work together to promote the power of the Party-State configuration and institutionalize certain ideological perspectives within the student body.

The narrative of modern Chinese history includes foreign invasion and occupation, and civil war and this is a powerful argument for education to prioritise national unity and stability and one that is widely accepted. The CCP leadership strives to ensure that the opening of the Chinese economy which has greatly developed in recent decades. The CCP leadership is convinced that making its ideological basis consistent with the political economy of China is crucial to maintaining internal stability and Party cohesion (Zeng, 2015). It operates on the basis that retaining political and social stability will ensure economic growth and a peaceful prosperous society. HE is therefore mobilized to ensure that the stability of the Chinese regime remains high (Zhao, 2009). IPE is a crucial and powerful element of the CCP's influence on the thoughts and actions of the country's university students.

Acknowledgements: This work was supported by the Funding of Philosophy and Social Sciences of Guangdong (GD20CJY09), Funding of Guangdong Education Science “13th Five-Year Plan” (2020GXJK372) and Funding of Educational Science of Shenzhen (YBFZ20037).

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