

# *An Exploration on the Ideological and Political Practice of the Course “History of Western Civilization”*

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**Abstract:** Taking the core course History of Western Civilization (HWC) as an example, this paper explores the ideological and political elements in the course, and probes into the teaching practice of the organic integration of cultivating language communication ability and improving ideological and moral quality and cultural awareness. The practice of the course includes three interrelated aspects: (1) the course module of “comparison of Chinese and Western cultures” in the course, (2) group presentation of “comparison of Chinese and Western cultures”, (3) multi-dimensional assessment of language expression, moral quality, content and ideological and political integration. Based on the previous teaching practice, this paper introduces the specific cases of the above three aspects to provide reference for foreign language teachers to carry out ideological and political practice.

## **1. Introduction**

In contemporary academic research, the concept of “Ideological and Political Education in the Curriculum” has emerged as a pivotal topic within China's higher education system. This study aims to explore the ideological and political practices in the “History of Western Civilization” (HWC) course and their integration into the curriculum.<sup>[1]</sup>

Within China, research on curriculum-based ideological and political education displays a variety of perspectives. Sun and Wang's 2020 study on Western Economics courses emphasizes that the essence of ideological and political education in the curriculum involves more than just adding a new course or activity, with the aim of subtly cultivating virtues and enlightening students<sup>[3]</sup>. From a practical research perspective in curriculum-based ideological and political education, Chen (2021) noted that the advancement of this education requires strengthening theoretical guidance and value orientation, wherein teachers play a crucial role and textbook development serves as a foundational element<sup>[2]</sup>. The identification and utilization of ideological and political education resources is a prerequisite for achieving these goals. Shi (2021) examines the key issues encountered in curriculum ideological and political education, such as management concepts, reform measures, teaching methods, and institutional mechanisms, and argues that the correct analysis and addressal of these issues is crucial for the smooth implementation of curriculum ideological and political education<sup>[5]</sup>. Internationally, perspectives on education vary. American educator Philip W. Jackson, in his 2018 work “What is Education?”, proposes from the perspective of frontline teaching realities that education is fundamentally a moral enterprise, wherein both teachers and students should

endeavor to become “better people”<sup>[4]</sup>. Similarly, the German educator Herbart, in “General Pedagogy”, posits that education should aim at cultivating morality, termed as the “moral purpose” or “necessary purpose”. This represents not only the ultimate goal but also the highest purpose of education, emphasizing that civic moral education is an essential requirement for setting educational objectives and developing student personality.

Building upon these perspectives, this study will delve into the ideological and political practices in the HWC course, and how these practices can be effectively integrated and implemented in teaching. By comparing both domestic and international research and educational practices, this study aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding and analysis of curriculum ideological and political education in higher education.

## **2. Course-Embedded “Ideological & Political Education + Western Civilization History” Module**

### **2.1 Design and Implementation**

“Ideological and Political Education in the Curriculum” is a novel and essential practice in foreign language teaching in China's new era. The HWC course is a core subject for the Foreign Language and Literature majors at our university. It is aimed at helping students construct knowledge of the spiritual and cultural aspects of the Western world, providing a general understanding of the foundational aspects and significant achievements in major cultural domains of the West. Its aim is to broaden students' intellectual horizons, enrich and perfect their humanistic knowledge framework, thereby enhancing their cultural literacy.

### **2.2 Content Integration**

Within the HWC course, our curriculum's ideological and political objectives are defined as follows: through studying this course, students are expected to develop both an understanding and analytical ability of both Western and Chinese cultures, along with the capability to apply these understandings comprehensively. The course is structured to foster macro-historical awareness and cultural critical thinking ability.

"Ideological & Political Education + Western Civilization History" Module: The course is strategically designed to incorporate ideological elements into its teaching materials, ensuring a strong correlation between the embedded modules and the primary content of the course. This integration aids in the simultaneous development of language proficiency and cross-cultural awareness, key components of foreign language education.

The integration of ideological and political education within higher educational curricula, particularly in foreign language courses, represents a significant paradigm shift within contemporary academia<sup>[4]</sup>. The HWC course, a core subject in the Foreign Language and Literature program, highlights its innovative approach to embedding ideological and political elements. The course's unique framework not only enhances students' language skills but also deepens their understanding of cultural nuances and ideological perspectives.

### **2.3 Extracurricular Group Practice -- “Comparison of Chinese and Western Cultures”**

Complementing the classroom learning, this extracurricular module involves students in group activities focused on the comparative analysis of Chinese and Western cultures. By utilizing real-life cases and diverse perspectives, these activities aim to enhance students' comprehensive abilities while fostering ideological and moral qualities aligned with socialist core values.

## 2.4 Multidimensional Evaluation

The course employs a multifaceted evaluation approach assessing various aspects of student learning, including language expression quality, cross-cultural communication awareness, cultural confidence, and core competencies. This assessment evaluates the degree of integration between language skills and ideological objectives. A combination of teachers, students, and teaching research teams are involved in the evaluation process, utilizing tests, interviews, and self- and peer-assessments to motivate and gauge student learning effectively.

The synergy between the embedded course modules and the extracurricular activities is pivotal. It exemplifies the “learning by doing” approach, facilitating the practical application of theoretical knowledge. This strategy also supports the internalization of value systems, encourages students to compare and internalize diverse cultural and ideological perspectives.

## 3. Case studies from the course

This section explores the pedagogical framework of the HWC course, particularly emphasizing its first two teaching units which exemplify the integration of “Ideological and Political Education in the Curriculum” with the subject matter. The course employs a Production-Oriented Approach, encompassing various teaching phases and employs comparative studies between Eastern and Western philosophies.

### 3.1 Unit 1: Exploration of Ancient Greek Culture with an Emphasis on Greek Philosophy

**Pedagogical Structure:** The unit on ancient Greek culture, specifically focusing on Greek philosophy and the teachings of Socrates, is structured using a three-phase teaching methodology: initiation, facilitation, and evaluation. This structure encompasses two classroom sessions complemented by approximately two hours of extracurricular activities.

**Curricular Materials:** Both in-class and extracurricular materials include English-language resources to facilitate comparative studies between Chinese and Western cultures.

**Educational Output Task:** The primary task involves students to introduce the life and philosophical thoughts of Socrates and Confucius to their peers during an international student exchange context. This activity is designed to enhance the understanding of Confucian thought and Chinese culture among international students.

**Learning Objectives:** The linguistic objective focuses on acquainting students with the fundamentals of ancient Greek philosophy. Concurrently, the ideological and political objectives entail cultivating an understanding of the divergent philosophical inclinations of Eastern and Western traditions, alongside an appreciation of the scientific spirit epitomized by Socrates and the patriotic ethos embodied by Confucius. This, in turn, aims to deepen students’ comprehension of Chinese civilization and reinforce their cultural confidence.

**Group Practice Activity:** An integral part of this unit is students’ engagement with “Divine Encounter--The Dialogue between Confucius and Socrates,” a feature from CCTV News, followed by enacting an English-language drama, further consolidating their understanding.

### 3.2 Examination of Ancient Roman Culture, Focusing on the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire

**Educational Output Task:** In this unit, students take on the role of volunteer guides at the Hubei Provincial Museum, tasked with elucidating the historical parallels between the Roman Empire and the Qin and Han dynasties to international visitors, thereby enhancing their understanding of

Chinese historical narratives.

**Learning Objectives:** The language learning objective centers on understanding the expansion and decline of the Roman Empire, alongside mastering relevant historical terms and expressions. The ideological and political objectives focus on deepening understanding of the distinct developmental paths of these major empires, fostering a macro-historical consciousness, and instilling a critical perspective on culture. This aims to cultivate a profound understanding of Chinese history, fostering patriotism and national pride among students.

**Cultural Comparative Activity:** A key component includes a visit to the Hubei Provincial Museum, where students encounter artifacts from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, narrated by an English-speaking guide. This experience is crucial in presenting an authentic historical perspective of China and cultivating a sense of national identity among students, thereby fulfilling the practical goals of ideological and political education.

### 3.3 Evaluation Phase

Each unit begins with the introduction of a specific output task, setting a clear direction for students' learning journeys. This phase combines in-class lectures and discussions with independent extracurricular study, which encourages deep engagement with the subject matter. The learning process culminates in an evaluation primarily through group PowerPoint presentations, focusing on students' comprehension and comparative analysis of the cultural nuances of the Greek, Roman, and Chinese civilizations. Through this pedagogical approach, the course not only enhances language proficiency but also fosters a comprehensive understanding of cultural differences and similarities. This method is significant as it cultivates a holistic educational experience, blending linguistic skills, cultural understanding, and ideological insights.

In evaluating student output tasks within the HWC course, a multifaceted, rigorous assessment framework is employed, focusing on both linguistic proficiency and the integration of ideological and political education goals. This comprehensive approach ensures a comprehensive assessment of students' academic progress and moral development, aligning with the course's educational objectives.

The assessment of language expression is thorough and methodical. First, accuracy in the use of specialized terminology, particularly terms pertinent to the Greek, Roman, and Chinese cultures, is scrutinized. This accuracy is indicative of students' understanding of the subject matter. Second, the application of sentence structures, as taught in the course, is evaluated, highlighting students' ability to construct complex and meaningful linguistic expressions. Third, the use of cohesive devices is assessed, with an emphasis on students' skills in creating a logically coherent and structured presentation. Finally, the overall coherence of expression is evaluated, encompassing both the clarity and fluency of the students' language, ensuring their presentations are comprehensible and logically consistent.

A significant aspect of the evaluation process is the examination of students' ability to elucidate local cultural concepts and to effectively compare these with Western cultural phenomena. This approach tests not only students' understanding of the material but also their proficiency in cross-cultural communication strategies, a crucial skill in the increasingly interconnected global context.

The assessment extends beyond academic proficiency to include moral and ethical competence. This is discerned through the depth of students' language expressions and their emotional engagement, which provides insights into their comprehension and personal connection to the content. Additionally, interviews and teachers' self-evaluations offer a deeper understanding of the students' ideological states and the effectiveness of integrating teaching objectives with ideological

and political goals. The extent to which students engage in reflective thinking and formulate unique insights is crucial for assessing the integration of language knowledge objectives with ideological and political education goals.

Students are encouraged to engage in self-reflection, self-assessment, and peer assessment. These methods are instrumental in enhancing both their language skills and core competencies, fostering a culture of continuous learning and self-improvement. The teaching and research team plays a pivotal role in this evaluative process. Through academic discussions and classroom observations, they provide critical assessments that are instrumental in refining and improving the effectiveness of the ideological and political practices within the course. This evaluation system is not merely an academic exercise; it embodies the course's commitment to nurturing well-rounded individuals. Balancing linguistic proficiency with cultural awareness, critical thinking, and moral qualities, the course aims to achieve its educational objectives, preparing students to be thoughtful and responsible global citizens.

#### **4. Discussion**

This paper delves into the proposed framework for ideological and political practice in the HWC course, which comprises the embedded course module “Ideological & Political Education + Western Civilization History”, the extracurricular “Comparison of Chinese and Western Cultures” group practice activities, and the multi-dimensional evaluation system. This represents a comprehensive and cohesive approach to integrating ideological and political education in higher learning.

##### **4.1 Enhanced Dual Functionality**

The embedded course module serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it systematically develops students' language skills, an aspect elaborated previously in the methodology section. More importantly, it simultaneously cultivates moral and ethical values, crucial elements in higher education. As students progress through the course by merging textual analysis with personal expression, they demonstrate incremental improvement in English proficiency. This enhancement is not solely linguistic but also extends to critical thinking and cultural understanding.

##### **4.2 Cultural Output as a Driving Force**

A distinctive aspect of this framework is the cultural output driven by an in-depth exploration of Chinese traditions. This exploration enables objective evaluation of Western cultural paradigms and is pivotal for students to develop a nuanced understanding of their own culture. This process, as highlighted in previous sections, is instrumental in reinforcing students' cultural confidence and advancing their cross-cultural communication skills.

##### **4.3 Synergy Between Classroom and Extracurricular Activities**

The “Comparison of Chinese and Western Cultures” extracurricular activities complement classroom instruction, embodying an applied learning approach. This synergy fosters practical application of theoretical knowledge, as students engage with real-world cases and contemporary issues. Such engagement deepens their understanding of Chinese historical and contemporary contexts, fostering national identity and pride.

##### **4.4 Comprehensive Multi-Dimensional Evaluation**

The multi-dimensional evaluation system, encompassing language expression, moral and ethical

competence, and integration of content with ideological and political objectives, forms the cornerstone of this framework<sup>[6]</sup>. As indicated in earlier sections, this evaluation is not unidirectional, but involves multiple stakeholders, including teachers, students, and the educational research team. The diversity in assessment methods – tests, interviews, self and peer assessments – ensures holistic and objective evaluation of student performance and progress.

In summary, the framework for the HWC course exemplifies a novel approach in higher education, where language learning is interwoven with ideological and political education. This integrative model enhances not only students' academic prowess but also equips them with cultural understanding and ethical consciousness needed in today's globalized world. Through this approach, this course significantly contributes to the overarching goal of educating well-rounded, culturally aware, and socially responsible individuals.

## 5. Conclusion

Building on prior teaching practices and explorations, this paper serves as a reference for foreign language educators in implementing ideological and political practices in their courses. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that universities significantly vary in their academic environments and student demographics. Consequently, the methods and approaches of integrating ideological and political education in foreign language courses require continuous refinement and updates through continuous practice.

While this paper provides a foundational framework and offers insights into effective practices, it also underscores the need for adaptability and continuous development of educational strategies. Diverse contexts and unique challenges of different educational institutions necessitate flexible approaches to curriculum design and pedagogical methods. Therefore, future practices should be informed by continuous research and adapted to the specific needs and conditions of each university.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on ideological and political education in foreign language teaching, offering a foundation for further exploration and development. This encourages educators to continuously innovate and adapt their teaching practices, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness in diverse educational contexts. The ultimate goal is to enrich foreign language education with cultural depth and ideological insight, preparing students to be well-rounded, culturally competent, and socially responsible global citizens.

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