

Research on Ideological Education of Foreign Language Majors in China: Necessity and Approach

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Abstract: The higher education in China aims to cultivate advanced talents who would like to be devoted to cause of socialist construction with firm belief in communism and collectivism and mastery of modern science and technology. The significance of ideological education of undergraduates has been constantly aware of in China since the founding of the nation. In this day and age, with the implementation of cultural development strategies by telling Chinese stories well, the ideological education is increasingly significant in higher education. Compared with other majors, foreign language majors are in greater need for ideological instruction since they have to take a series of courses relevant to foreign cultures including but not limited to the general background, geography, history, literature, society and religion of relevant foreign countries. Even when they practice skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing, they are supposed to have a clear picture of the cultural background of a certain foreign country or region. Meanwhile, there is particular demand for ideological correctness for their future jobs as teachers, translators or interpreters. Apart from taking compulsory courses of ideological and political theory, foreign language majors shall be cultivated through delivery of ideological education by academic courses, national innovation and entrepreneurship education and extra-curricular activities.

Keywords: Ideological education; Foreign language majors; Necessity and approach

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1 Introduction

The higher education in China aims to cultivate advanced talents who would like to be devoted to cause of socialist construction with firm belief in communism and collectivism and mastery of modern science and technology^[1]. The significance of ideological education of undergraduates has been constantly aware of in China since the founding of the nation. The political leadership of the Communist Party of China (the CPC hereafter) has been unequivocal since the founding of the curriculum system of the ideological and political theory courses even before the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy. The undergraduate ideological and political education gradually became systematized with the relevant courses compulsory for each college student. Both the compiling of relevant textbooks and the reform of relevant courses were attached great importance to by the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC in the new era of reform and opening up and the role of the ideological and political theory courses in fostering virtue has been definitely confirmed since the 18th CPC National Congress^[2]. In this day and age, with the implementation of cultural development strategies by telling Chinese stories well, the ideological education is increasingly significant in higher education. Compared with other majors, foreign language majors are in

greater need for ideological instruction.

2 Particular necessity of ideological education of foreign language majors in China

2.1 Delivery of foreign cultures in foreign language study

Language, as the tool for forming and conveying ideas, is part and also carrier of culture. In order to learn foreign languages well, foreign language majors have to take a series of courses relevant to foreign cultures including but not limited to the general background, geography, history, literature, society and religion of relevant foreign countries. Even when they practice skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing, they are supposed to have a clear picture of the cultural background of a certain foreign country or region. When they learn vocabulary, it is absolutely beneficial for them to acquire the cultural information related to any word or expression. The input of foreign cultures is certainly of great help for further understanding of foreign languages. But it influences the thinking and logic of foreign language majors at the same time and if they take everything relevant to foreign cultures as the right way of thinking, it would work against the aim of higher education when they participate in cross-cultural activities.

Since 1980s, Chinese scholars have been aware of the importance of cultural study while teaching a foreign language. Shu Dingfang (1996) illustrated the relationship between language teaching and cultural input before proposing the way of integrating culture into language teaching^[3]. Zhang Youping (2003) put forward the system of delivering culture in teaching a foreign language by a so-called “cultural introduction” approach that emphasized the invisible relationship between language teaching and cultural instruction^[4]. It seems universally recognized in China today that the input of culture is of great significance while learning or teaching a foreign language and nobody bothers to illustrate the necessity of it any more. The first decades in the 21st century has witnessed how the Chinese culture got the attention of foreign language teaching when the phenomenon was noticed that a graduate might know how to talk about an English or American breakfast but had difficulty describing a Chinese one. In this way, they might be lack of balance between Chinese culture and a foreign culture in cross-cultural activities.

2.2 Particular demand for ideological correctness for future jobs

Generally speaking, foreign language graduates in China would take the following genres of jobs. Firstly, a large portion of them would go to work as teachers from kindergartens to colleges and they would have opportunities to share their cultural awareness with their future students. Secondly, some of them would take their positions as translators or interpreters in firms and business companies. According to a survey conducted by Cheng Jiafu and Zhang Weihong (2013), more than half of the graduates find their jobs as teachers, translators or interpreters in the above mentioned fields^[5]. In addition, a small portion of graduates would gain places from government agencies, some public organizations or banks.

It is apparently seen that it is of extreme importance for teachers to be ideologically correct as their values will influence all of their students who are the future of a country. Teachers can convey their values in their lectures or in extra curriculum activities. Especially at primary schools, pupils tend to worship their teachers and take their teachers as their idols and models. They would seldom doubt the values of their teachers and are inclined to imitate teachers’ behaviors and accept any idea from their teachers. From their standpoint, teachers are of the top priority and authority.

Translators and interpreters should hold the right ideological view in their work especially when they communicate with foreigners on behalf of Chinese organizations or firms. In the English-centered language world, a large part of foreigners don’t have a clear picture of what is happening in China. The image of China is twisted or mistaken by some foreign political parties for their own purposes^[6]. Thus it becomes vital for Chinese people to help foreigners learn the wonderful side of China when there are chances, among whom translators and interpreters would play a key role as they could get access to foreigners and they have bilingual advantages.

3 Approach to ideological education of foreign language majors in China

Foreign language majors are supposed to take courses of ideological and political theory as required. The courses cover Marxism, Mao Tse-tung thought, the Three Represents, the socialist core value, contemporary Chinese history, the current situation and policies etc.

With aid of the theory lectures and practice, foreign language majors shall have an insight into socialism and have full confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics. However, all of these courses are taught in Chinese in most colleges and universities and it is still challenging for foreign language majors to convey what they gain from the courses in foreign languages. That's why it is necessary to combine academic courses, national innovation and entrepreneurship education and extra-curricular activities to deliver ideological education.

3.1 Delivery of ideological education by academic courses

The national steering committee for education and instruction of foreign language majors of the Ministry of Education released the guidelines for foreign language majors (the guidelines hereafter) in March 2020 which claim that the basic mission of reforming foreign language teaching is to foster the virtues, that is, to figure out the key to the questions of "the aim of education and the approach to education". With fostering the virtues as the foundation, foreign language teaching shall form its own education system with Chinese characteristics. "Telling Chinese stories well, spreading the voice of China well" is not only an important strategic task to enhance the country's soft power of culture, but also a fundamental principle for the public diplomacy^[7]. The foreign language majors shall shoulder the vital mission of telling Chinese stories well without hesitation.

With help of the guidelines, the academic courses shall complete the task of ideological education as follows. First and foremost, courses related to Chinese culture, history, literature shall be compulsory for foreign language majors. Take English majors as example. The course of Introduction to Chinese Culture shall be compulsory so that all of English majors shall have an insight into Chinese culture and become aware of telling Chinese stories in English. Moreover, the courses relevant to comparative studies between Chinese culture and foreign cultures such as comparative study of Chinese and foreign languages, comparative study of Chinese and foreign cultures and comparative study of Chinese and foreign societies shall be compulsory so that the foreign language majors shall have a cross-cultural perspective and international view. In addition, while teaching foreign cultures or literature, a comparative view should be adopted all

the time. For example, while British literature is taught from the old English period to the post-modern period, a comparative study of British literature and Chinese literature shall be conducted in each period. As for the old English period, the similarities of origins of British literature and Chinese literature shall be explored while as to the Middle English period, a research shall be done to compare and contrast the Chinese folk song *Birch Forest* and the British ballad *Three Ravens*. In terms of the Renaissance period, the Chinese poems of describing beauty and the lines from *Romeo and Juliet* shall be studied at the same time. When Bacon is investigated, Wang Zuoliang's translation of his essay *of Studies* shall be appreciated. When Percy Shelley is focused on, his influence on Chinese poet Guo Moruo shall be explored. With a series of comparative study, the English majors shall realize how profound the Chinese language and Chinese literature are and how proud they should be of Chinese culture.

3.2 Delivery of ideological education by national innovation and entrepreneurship education

The national innovation and entrepreneurship education began with the national innovation and entrepreneurship training program in 2010s. A large number of college students take part in the program each year for which they shall come up with a brilliant idea, make up a specific plan and work it out with their teammates. The national innovation and entrepreneurship education shares similarities with ideological education in aspects of teaching aims, teaching methods and practice. Ding Wei (2018) believes that the colleges and universities should draw the top-level design to integrate the innovation and entrepreneurship education into ideological education^[8].

The ideological education shall be integrated with innovation and entrepreneurship education in two aspects. On the one hand, the courses relevant to innovation and entrepreneurship education shall aim for morality education. For example, foreign language majors shall be inspired to arouse interest in telling Chinese stories in an innovative way. On the other hand, foreign language majors shall be encouraged to apply for the national innovation and entrepreneurship training program and put their brilliant ideas of telling Chinese stories well into practice. The plans for telling Chinese stories well proposed by foreign language majors should be taken into consideration by the authorities of colleges and universities.

3.3 Delivery of ideological education by extra-curricular activities

Extra-curricular activities are of extra importance for college students who tend to learn with full enthusiasm when they attend extra-curricular activities. As for foreign language majors, it is feasible to arrange a variety of extra-curricular activities for ideological instruction. The regular ones include various contests such as speech contest, writing contest, interpretation contest, and reading contest etc. The topics or texts selected for the contests shall be related to Chinese stories or comparative study. Besides, class meetings and Youth League branch activities are also great chances for ideological education. The colleges and universities shall design purposes for class activities so that foreign language majors shall organize their activities for ideological instruction, the effect of which shall be improved evidently by participation of professors.

4 Conclusion

The COVID-19 reminds the world not only the importance of life and health but the significance of cultivating talents with virtues who can fight for the right and for the nation. No risk of ideological education of undergraduates should be taken in the contemporary world. Compared with other majors, foreign language majors are in greater need for ideological instruction and there is particular demand for ideological correctness for their future jobs. With combination of compulsory courses of ideological and political theory, delivery of ideological education by academic courses,

national innovation and entrepreneurship education and extra-curricular activities, it is likely that foreign language majors shall have increasing confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics and shall become good tellers of Chinese stories.

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