

The Construction and Improvement of the Theoretical System of Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities in the New Era

Rufei Zhao*

School of Marxism, Kunming University, Kunming 650214, Yunnan, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

Copyright: © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: In the context of the new era, the construction and improvement of a theoretical system for ideological and political education in universities is a core proposition for fulfilling the fundamental task of cultivating morality and educating people. Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and informed by the realities of social transformation, technological revolution, and educational reform in the new era, this article systematically analyzes the current status and prominent issues of the theoretical system for ideological and political education in universities. It analyzes the causes from the perspectives of concepts, mechanisms, and resources, and ultimately proposes a “three-dimensional collaborative” framework for system construction and specific strategies for improvement. This research aims to provide theoretical support and practical paths for theoretical innovation in ideological and political education in universities in the new era, helping to cultivate new generations of people who will shoulder the great responsibility of national rejuvenation. **Keywords:** New era; Ideological and political education in colleges and universities; Theoretical system; Collaborative construction

Online publication: Oct 21, 2025

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background and significance

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has made a series of important statements on ideological and political education in colleges and universities, emphasizing that “ideological and political courses are key courses for implementing the fundamental task of cultivating morality and educating people”, which provides a fundamental guideline for the construction of the theoretical system of ideological and political education in the new era^[1]. At present, China is in a critical period for realizing the great rejuvenation

of the Chinese nation. The social structure has undergone profound changes, the interest pattern has undergone profound adjustments, and the ideological concepts have undergone profound changes. The value choices faced by young students have become more diverse. At the same time, the rapid development of digital technology has revolutionized the way information is disseminated, and the traditional ideological and political education model faces the risk of “losing its voice”. Against this background, building a scientific and complete theoretical system of ideological and political education in colleges and universities is not only an inevitable requirement for responding to the fundamental questions of “what kind of people to cultivate, how to cultivate them, and for whom to cultivate them”, but also a key measure to improve the pertinence and effectiveness of ideological and political education. It has important theoretical and practical significance for consolidating the guiding role of Marxism in the field of ideology and strengthening the ideological foundation of young students.

1.2. Current status of research at home and abroad

Domestic academic circles have conducted multi-dimensional explorations into the theoretical system of ideological and political education: at the theoretical foundation level, scholars emphasize the core position of the latest achievements in the Sinicization of Marxism and believe that Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era should be integrated throughout the system^[2]. At the system construction level, some studies have proposed a three-dimensional framework of “content-method-evaluation” and advocated the integration of educational resources with systematic thinking^[3]. At the practical innovation level, the concept of “big ideological and political course” has promoted the integration of theoretical system and social practice^[4]. However, existing research still has shortcomings: first, the analysis of the inherent coupling between the characteristics of the “new era” and the theoretical system is insufficient; second, the exploration of the operational path of system construction is not specific enough; and third, there is a lack of integrated research from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Relevant research abroad has primarily focused on the theoretical construction of civic education and values education. Western scholars have often explored the relationship between education and ideology from the perspective of social governance. For example, Torney-Purta (2020) proposed the theory of “participatory civic education”, emphasizing the cultivation of civic awareness through social practice^[5]. Banks (2019)’s “multicultural education theory” focuses on the integration of values within the context of cultural diversity^[6]. Although these studies differ fundamentally from the ideological attributes of ideological and political education in China, they offer some reference value in terms of the adaptability of educational goals to social needs and the innovation of educational methods.

2. Analysis of the current situation and problems of the theoretical system of ideological and political education in colleges and universities in the new era

2.1. Construction status

2.1.1. Continuous strengthening of theoretical foundation

The process of integrating the latest achievements of the Sinicization of Marxism into the education system is accelerating, and remarkable achievements have been made in the “Three Entries” (into textbooks, into classrooms, and into the minds) work of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. At present, the “Student Reader of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” has been fully used in all educational stages from primary school to university. All universities in China have achieved full coverage of the opening of the course “Introduction to Xi Jinping Thought on

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” and the use of unified textbooks, and the curriculum group with this course as the core is also continuously improving^[7]. At the same time, content such as education on the “Four Histories” and education on the core socialist values have been gradually incorporated into the theoretical system, forming a content framework with Marxism as the core and the spirit of the times as supplementary.

2.1.2. Practical innovation has achieved initial results

Colleges and universities are actively exploring new paths to combine theory with practice. First, the popularization of online and offline integrated teaching models, such as Fudan University’s “Cloud Ideological and Political Courses” and Sun Yat-sen University’s “Ideological and Political Live Courses”, use short videos, live broadcasts and other forms to enhance the dissemination of theory. Second, social practice carriers are constantly enriched. Colleges and universities across the country have established more than 12,000 ideological and political education practice bases, and organize more than 5 million students to carry out social surveys, volunteer services and other activities each year. Third, the development of “Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education” has promoted the integration of the theoretical system into professional education. Universities and colleges across the country have accredited a total of 699 national-level demonstration courses for Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education, forming a coordinated pattern of “ideological and political theory courses + curriculum-based ideological and political education”.

2.1.3. Discipline support is gradually strengthened

The status of Marxist theory as a first-level discipline has been further consolidated. As of 2023, statistics from the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council indicate that there are 104 doctoral programs and 377 master’s programs in Marxist theory nationwide, providing solid disciplinary support for the theoretical system of ideological and political education. According to 2023 data from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), research in the discipline demonstrates a dual-track development trend of “theoretical innovation + practical application”. Over the past five years, the number of papers published in relevant core journals has increased by an average of 15.6% annually, with research on “theoretical innovation in ideological and political education in the new era” accounting for 38.2%.

2.2. Prominent issues

2.2.1. The theoretical system is outdated in terms of timeliness and relevance

First, it lacks responsiveness to the characteristics of youth in the new era. Generation Z students, raised in the digital age, possess active minds, strong subjectivity, and diverse values. However, existing theoretical systems still rely on a one-way indoctrination paradigm, and the theoretical language exhibits significant issues of “adultization” and “conceptualization”. In interviews with young people, 81.2 % of students stated that “the theoretical presentation of ideological and political education courses is too abstract and difficult to understand”. Second, it lacks coverage of new fields and topics. Facing emerging issues such as the ethics of artificial intelligence, algorithmic bias, and online ideological struggles, the existing theoretical system lacks systematic interpretation. Third, it lacks adaptability to regional and school contexts. Students from different types of universities and regions exhibit distinct interests, concerns, and needs. For example, students in science and engineering universities are more concerned with “technological ethics and patriotism”, while students in art universities are more concerned with “cultural identity and creative direction”. However, the existing theoretical system for ideological and political education tends to be “one-size-fits-all” and lacks differentiated design.

2.2.2. The mechanism for transforming the theoretical system into practice is not smooth

First, there's a disconnect between theory and practice. Practical teaching often remains superficial, involving activities like visiting revolutionary bases and writing research reports, lacking deep integration with theory. For example, in a "rural revitalization research" initiative organized by one university, only 6.3% of students were able to correlate their findings with the theory of "common prosperity". Second, the translational pathway is unclear. The theoretical system lacks a clear understanding of the "cognition-identification-practice" transformational process. For example, education on socialist core values often remains at the "knowledge" level, lacking mechanisms for internalization and externalization. Third, the evaluation system is misguided. Existing evaluations primarily focus on knowledge assessment, with closed-book exams accounting for over 70% of the total. This inadequately assesses students' ability to apply theory and their effectiveness in implementing these values, leading to a disconnect between learning and application.

2.2.3. Insufficient innovation motivation and guarantee for the theoretical system

First, there is a disconnect between disciplinary research and educational practice. Research in Marxist theory often focuses on purely theoretical discussions, insufficiently addressing specific issues in ideological and political education. Statistics from CNKI in 2023 show that of doctoral dissertations in Marxist theory published over the past five years, only 12.7% addressed "practical issues in ideological and political education". Second, there is a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration mechanisms. Theoretical innovation in ideological and political education requires multidisciplinary support, but significant disciplinary barriers exist within universities, making it difficult to establish interdisciplinary research teams. A survey shows that only 19.3% of universities have established interdisciplinary research platforms for ideological and political education.

3. Analysis of the causes of problems in the theoretical system of ideological and political education in colleges and universities in the new era

3.1. Deviations from educational concepts and value orientations

3.1.1. The squeeze of instrumental rationality on value rationality

Some universities overly focus on the "assessment indicators" of ideological and political education, emphasizing its social function while neglecting the individual spiritual growth of students. This tendency to "emphasize tools over values" results in a theoretical system lacking humanistic warmth and failing to resonate with students. When ideological and political education becomes a "task-based" task, its essence of educating people is inevitably obscured ^[8].

3.1.2. Lack of the concept of subjectivity

The current ideological and political education system still perpetuates the traditional "teacher-centered" model, insufficiently emphasizing the students' central role in theoretical learning. The construction of theoretical systems often proceeds from the perspective of "what educators want to teach" rather than "what students need", leading to a mismatch between supply and demand.

3.1.3. Imbalance between ideological attributes and academic nature

Some studies overemphasize the ideological attributes of ideological and political education and ignore its academic and scientific nature, resulting in a lack of academic support for the theoretical system; other studies unilaterally pursue "de-ideologization" and weaken the guiding role of Marxism. Both tendencies are not

conducive to the healthy development of the theoretical system ^[9].

3.2. Disconnection between the disciplinary system and educational practice

3.2.1. The “suspension” of Marxist theoretical disciplines

As the core pillar of ideological and political education, Marxist theory tends to prioritize academic excellence over practical application. Disciplinary research often focuses on macro-theoretical interpretation, while paying insufficient attention to micro-issues in ideological and political education, such as innovative teaching methods and the popularization of theoretical expression. This makes it difficult to transform theoretical findings into teaching resources.

3.2.2. Barriers to interdisciplinary integration

The construction of a theoretical system for ideological and political education requires the input of multiple disciplines, including law, sociology, psychology, and communication. Legal considerations of rights and obligations can provide a legal basis for cultivating rule-based awareness in ideological and political education; sociology’s analysis of social structure and group behavior offers a perspective for understanding the social context of ideological and political education; and research on the “value formation mechanism” in psychology and the “agenda setting theory” in communication offer important theoretical and methodological insights for ideological and political education. However, significant disciplinary barriers exist in universities, and interdisciplinary collaboration lacks systematic institutional support. This makes it difficult for these interdisciplinary theoretical findings to be effectively integrated into ideological and political education practice, hindering their full supportive role.

3.2.3. “Path dependence” of theoretical innovation

Influenced by the traditional education model, there is a “path dependence” in the innovation of the theoretical system. First, the content update lags behind the development of the times, and the absorption of new ideas and new conclusions is not timely. Second, the method innovation remains at the formal level and fails to touch the transformation of the theoretical core. Third, there is a problem of insufficient “localization” in learning from advanced foreign experiences, and blindly copying leads to “inadaptability”.

3.3. Deficiencies in the evaluation mechanism and resource guarantee

The evaluation system is simplistic, focusing primarily on “inputs” such as the number of courses and textbook usage, while insufficiently assessing “outputs” such as changes in students’ values and theoretical identification. Furthermore, indicators are poorly quantified and lack scientific measurement tools. The effectiveness of “cultivating morality and cultivating people” is still primarily described qualitatively. This “process-oriented, outcome-overwhelming” approach results in a lack of effective traction in the construction of theoretical systems.

Resource allocation is unbalanced and support is insufficient. Data released by the Ministry of Education in 2023 showed that less than 30% of full-time ideological and political education teachers had practical experience, and only 21.7% were proficient in digital technology applications. Funding for practical teaching accounted for only 31.5%, concentrated in a small number of demonstration universities. Platform development

was unbalanced, with online platforms offering limited functionality and lacking interactivity and immersion.

4. Strategies for the construction and improvement of the theoretical system of ideological and political education in colleges and universities in the new era

4.1. Enhancing the timeliness and pertinence of the theoretical system

4.1.1. Innovate theoretical expression and dissemination methods

Promote the transformation of theoretical language into a “younger” and “life-oriented” one. First, transform abstract theories into “case stories” and “scenario scripts”, such as transforming the “Theory of Contradiction” into a case collection of “Contradictions and Their Solutions in Campus Life”. Second, use digital technology to innovate communication forms, and develop products such as the “ideological and political metaverse”, “theoretical short videos”, and “interactive comics”, such as Zhejiang University’s “VR Course on Party History Learning”, which allows students to understand theories in an immersive experience. Third, establish a “teacher-student co-creation” mechanism, and organize students to participate in theoretical interpretation and case writing, such as Nankai University’s “Youth Theory Propaganda Team”, in which students explain ideological and political theories in the language of their peers.

4.1.2. Constructing a theoretical response mechanism for new issues

Establish a “New Era Ideological and Political Education Theory Innovation Think Tank”, bringing together experts in Marxist theory, law, sociology, and artificial intelligence to conduct joint research on emerging issues such as online ideology, algorithmic bias, globalization, and national identity. This will produce a “Handbook of Theoretical Interpretations of New Topics” and establish a dynamic update mechanism. For example, regarding “algorithmic ethics”, this research could analyze the risks of algorithmic alienation from humans, drawing on Marxist theories of human nature, and propose a youth action guide for “technology for good”.

4.1.3. Strengthen the adaptability of regional and school conditions

Universities are encouraged to develop “local versions” of their theoretical systems that reflect regional characteristics. For example, universities in western China could highlight themes such as “the spirit of poverty alleviation” and “ethnic unity”, universities in the Yangtze River Delta could strengthen themes such as “integrated development” and “scientific and technological innovation”, and universities in northeast China could focus on topics such as “revitalizing the Northeast” and “the original aspiration in industrial heritage”. At the same time, they should explore revolutionary resources within their university histories, such as the “fortitude and perseverance” of Southwest Associated University and the “spirit of westward migration” of Jiaotong University, and integrate these into their theoretical systems to enhance a sense of identity.

4.2. Improving the mechanism for transforming the theoretical system into practice

4.2.1. Build a closed-loop chain of “theory-practice-reflection”

Design a three-level practice system of “cognitive practice–experiential practice–innovative practice” cognitive practice aims at “theoretical verification”, such as organizing students in the “Basic Principles of Marxism” course to carry out “Analysis of Contradictions of Campus Phenomena”; experiential practice focuses on “emotional identification”, such as carrying out immersive activities such as “Retracing the Long March” and “Rural Revitalization Observation”; innovative practice is guided by “value practice”, supporting students to carry out social service projects guided by theory, such as the “Red Rain Project” of Huazhong University of

Science and Technology, which transforms the “common prosperity” theory into rural education assistance actions.

4.2.2. Improve the diversified evaluation and feedback mechanism

Establish a comprehensive system of “process evaluation + value-added evaluation + social evaluation” process evaluation focuses on students’ participation in theoretical learning, such as classroom interaction and the quality of practical reports; value-added evaluation measures growth effectiveness through follow-up surveys; social evaluation incorporates third-party feedback from employers, communities, and practice bases, such as establishing a “graduate ideological quality tracking file”. At the same time, develop an “ideological and political education effectiveness evaluation scale” to quantitatively assess students’ theoretical recognition, value practice, and other indicators^[10].

4.2.3. Promote the deep integration of “ideological and political courses + ideological and political education in courses”

Establish a “theory sharing” mechanism to infiltrate the ideological and political education theory system into professional courses. First, compile a “Guide to Integrating Ideological and Political Theory into Courses” to clarify the points of integration between different majors and ideological and political theories. For example, computer majors can combine “artificial intelligence ethics” with “science and technology outlook” theory; second, form an interdisciplinary teaching team of “ideological and political teachers + professional teachers” to jointly develop integrated courses, such as Shanghai Jiao Tong University’s “Intelligent Manufacturing and Great Power Equipment” course, which combines “craftsman spirit” with “patriotism” theory; third, establish a “Course Ideological and Political Theory Innovation Award” to encourage teachers to explore new paths for theoretical integration.

4.3. Strengthening the disciplinary support and resource guarantee system

4.3.1. Promote the application of Marxist theoretical disciplines

Guide disciplinary research to focus on practical issues in ideological and political education: First, establish a “Special Project for the Application of Ideological and Political Education Theory” to fund scholars to study practical issues such as “popular expression of theory” and “theoretical dissemination in the digital age”; second, establish a “disciplinary research-teaching practice” transformation platform, such as the “Theoretical Achievement Transformation Base” jointly established by the Institute of Marxism of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and universities, to transform academic research into teaching resources; third, add a “practical innovation” module to the training of talents in the discipline of Marxist theory to cultivate compound talents who understand theory and are good at teaching.

4.3.2. Build an interdisciplinary collaborative innovation mechanism

Break down disciplinary barriers and form a joint force for theoretical innovation. First, establish an “Interdisciplinary Research Institute of Ideological and Political Education” to integrate resources in fields such as education, psychology, communication, and data science, such as Peking University’s “Institute of Innovation in Ideological and Political Education”; second, open an “Interdisciplinary Forum on Ideological and Political Education” to regularly discuss new issues and new methods, such as “Artificial Intelligence and Ideological and Political Education” and “Youth Subculture and Value Guidance”; third, promote the construction of interdisciplinary courses, such as opening elective courses such as “Social Psychology and Ideological and

Political Education” and “Theoretical Communication from a Communication Perspective”.

4.3.3. Optimize resource allocation

In terms of teacher team building, we will implement the “Ideological and Political Teachers’ Capacity Improvement Plan” improve teachers’ theoretical innovation and practical guidance capabilities through “theoretical training classes”, “digital technology training” and “practical mentorship system”; establish a “universities-party and government agencies-enterprises” talent flow mechanism, and introduce part-time teachers with rich practical experience, such as inviting role models of the times and moral models to serve as off-campus ideological and political mentors.

5. Conclusion

The construction and improvement of the theoretical system of ideological and political education in colleges and universities in the new era is a long-term and arduous task, which is related to the implementation of the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. Faced with the opportunities and challenges of the new era, it is necessary to face up to the problems existing in the current theoretical system, such as the lag in the times and pertinence, the poor mechanism of practical transformation, and the insufficient innovation momentum and guarantee. We should start from aspects such as enhancing the times and pertinence, improving the practical transformation mechanism, and strengthening the disciplinary support and resource guarantee system, so as to build a “three-dimensional collaborative” system framework.

Through a series of measures, the theoretical system of ideological and political education in colleges and universities can better respond to the needs of the times, cultivate more new people of the times who are capable of shouldering the responsibility of national rejuvenation, and lay a solid foundation for consolidating the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological field and building a powerful education country with Chinese characteristics.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Xi J, 2019, Ideological and Political Courses Are Key Courses for Implementing the Fundamental Task of Cultivating Morality and Educating People. *Qiushi*, 2019(17): 4–16.
- [2] Zheng Y, 2020, Review and Prospect of Theoretical Innovation of Ideological and Political Education. *Journal of Ideological and Theoretical Education*, 2020(1): 21–27.
- [3] Liu J, 2021, The Construction Logic of the Theoretical System of Ideological and Political Education. *Journal of Marxism Studies*, 2021(2): 125–134.
- [4] Wu Q, 2022, Theoretical Implications and Practical Requirements of the Construction of “Big Ideological and Political Courses.” *China Higher Education*, 2022(9): 12–15.
- [5] Torney-Purta J, 2020, Civic Education and Youth Political Participation in a Global Context. *Comparative Education Review*, 64(2): 289–312.
- [6] Banks J, 2019, *Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice*. New York: John

Wiley & Sons.

- [7] Ministry of Education, 2023, Standards for the Construction of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Education Institutions (2023 Edition).
- [8] Gao D, 2021, The Dilemma of Moral Education from the Perspective of Instrumental Rationality. *Educational Research*, 2021(5): 53–61.
- [9] Luo Y, 2020, Ideological and Academic Attributes of Ideological and Political Education. *Journal of Ideological and Theoretical Education*, 2020(7): 4–9.
- [10] Lin C, 2021, Research on the Core Competencies of Chinese Students' Development. *Educational Research*, 2021(1): 26–37.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.