

Exploring the Role and Methods of Ideological and Political Education in Promoting International Understanding and Cultural Respect

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Abstract: The landscape of higher education in China is undergoing a significant shift, with internationalization becoming a top policy priority. Ideological and political education (IPE) plays a crucial role in shaping well-rounded graduates. It goes beyond simply imparting knowledge; it fosters self-directed learning, moral development, and professional preparedness. Our study explored how students at Nantong university perceive the impact of IPE programs on their international understanding and cultural respect. The survey results (n=42) indicated a moderate level of interest in current events and global issues, along with a general appreciation for cultural differences and a belief that learning fosters tolerance. However, student perceptions of IPE effectiveness were mixed. While some students felt IPE programs increased their understanding of other cultures and promoted international understanding, others expressed concerns about a limited global perspective and a focus on national identity within the curriculum. Students desired more emphasis on practical skills for intercultural communication and interaction, along with opportunities for critical thinking. While IPE programs seemed to contribute to a broader awareness of global issues and an appreciation for cultural diversity, some students felt a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Keywords: China, Ideological and Political Education, Culture, Respect and International

1. INTRODUCTION

Ideological and political education (IPE) plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and a shared sense of national identity in contemporary China (Holbig, 2015). This emphasis on shared values resonates with historical and contemporary trends in other higher education systems. For instance, the UK's Robbins Report (1963) identified a key function of universities as transmitting a common culture and fostering responsible citizens. However, the 21st century has witnessed a shift, with some countries, including the UK, prioritizing universities' "instrumental

purpose" – producing skilled workers – over more fundamental aims (McCowan, 2019). This prioritization can come at the expense of open-ended inquiry, a hallmark of a robust university education. The debate highlights the complex relationship between knowledge production, economic needs, and the broader goals of university education.

IPE plays a crucial role in shaping well-rounded graduates. It goes beyond simply imparting knowledge; it fosters self-directed learning, moral development, and professional preparedness (Gómez Zerméño & Franco Gutiérrez, 2018). In the Chinese context, Course Ideology and Politics Education (CIPE) takes this concept further. CIPE prioritizes moral education and political values within the curriculum and teaching methods (Pang et al., 2020). This approach aims to integrate these principles across all disciplines, creating a synergistic effect that cultivates graduates who are not only skilled in their chosen field but also possess strong moral character. The influence of popular culture on college students is undeniable. This widespread cultural phenomenon, often associated with mass production and market trends, has become a prominent feature of contemporary society. Its characteristics, including its commercial nature, emphasis on reproducibility, and focus on broad appeal, raise concerns about its potential impact on university campuses. In light of these concerns, it becomes essential to re-evaluate IPE for college students in this new era. By incorporating critical analysis of popular culture into IPE, educators can equip students with the tools to navigate this cultural landscape. This approach can lead to the development of more effective and well-rounded IPE strategies, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive improvement in educational quality.

The rise of the internet age necessitates a deeper exploration of IPE research. This urgency stems from the need to develop a strong IPE curriculum that functions as a cohesive unit. An effective IPE curriculum should be built on several key principles: promoting the advancement of IPE theory, fostering collaboration among educators, addressing shared challenges, establishing a common language for discourse, and upholding a core set of values. The evolving economic landscape, coupled with the growing influence of diverse socialist thought, presents both opportunities and challenges for IPE in Chinese universities. Enhancing the effectiveness of IPE for college students remains a top priority for government, educational institutions, and the Communist Party. This focus on IPE stems from the recognition that today's college students are increasingly exposed to a wider range of information and perspectives due to the globalized world and advancements in communication technology (Liu,

2021). These changing social dynamics necessitate a more diversified approach to IPE, ensuring its content and delivery methods remain relevant and engaging for students.

Scholars have actively explored innovative approaches to IPE. The emergence of the "internet plus" concept has spurred research into integrating technology into IPE. These studies examine the content and principles of "internet plus IPE," aiming to leverage the power of the internet to strengthen the impact of ideological and political education (Yu, 2021). Additionally, research has delved into crisis management strategies for IPE. This work explores preventative measures (early warning), intervention techniques (treatment), recovery plans, and evaluation methods for student crises. By addressing potential challenges, these strategies can contribute to the stability and well-being of universities (Gui, 2021). IPE plays a multifaceted role in Chinese universities. Scholars such as McCormick highlight its influence on students' worldviews and political beliefs (McCormick, 2017). Furthermore, research by Ping and Cunningham suggests that IPE fosters not only political awareness but also aligns student values with the morals (Cunningham et al., 2021; Ping et al., 2004). McCormick emphasizes IPE's role as a key mechanism for transmitting and developing mainstream Chinese culture and ideology (McCormick, 2017). The rise of information technology necessitates a re-evaluation of how IPE is delivered to university students. As (Ma, 2018; Zhang, 2022) points out, today's students, often referred to as "digital natives," have grown up immersed in the online world. Universities must adapt their IPE strategies by understanding the unique characteristics of various media formats (Li, 2017; Ren & Zhao, 2023). This understanding can guide the development of innovative IPE models tailored for the digital age. Furthermore, recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the need for IPE to be relevant and timely (Cao, 2021). Universities should explore ways to integrate lessons learned from the pandemic into IPE curriculum, fostering a deeper understanding of such experiences.

College English plays a vital role in shaping well-rounded graduates. To strengthen the connection between English language learning and ideological and political education, fostering students' cultural confidence is crucial. This confidence stems from a strong foundation in cultural awareness. Therefore, incorporating the richness and depth of Chinese culture into the English curriculum becomes essential. Chinese culture encompasses a vast array of elements, spanning both time-honoured traditions and the dynamic aspects of modern society. This includes China's unique social structure, political system, economic model, and ongoing

social initiatives. By integrating cultural content from various periods and levels into the English curriculum, students can develop a systematic understanding of their own culture within an English language learning environment (Li, 2018). Building on this foundation, educators can then highlight the distinctive characteristics and strengths of Chinese culture. This process fosters a stronger sense of cultural identity among students and ultimately helps them establish a robust cultural confidence. In turn, this confidence contributes to their overall development as well-rounded individuals (Belyalova & Yem, 2023).

1.1 Rationale and Objective

IPE in Chinese universities plays a multifaceted role, shaping students' worldviews, political beliefs, and values. While traditionally focused on national identity and social cohesion, IPE can also be a powerful tool for fostering international understanding and cultural respect. In an increasingly interconnected world, promoting these values is crucial for fostering peaceful and productive global interactions. Our study seeks to explore the role and methods of ideological and political education in promoting international understanding and cultural respect.

2. METHODS

2.1 Study Design

Our study adopted a mixed methods approach to explore the role and methods of IPE in promoting international understanding and cultural respect among university students. The approach combined quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The study was conducted at Nantong University, China. Participants were recruited from undergraduate students enrolled in various degree programs. A total of 45 students participated in the study aged at least 18 years, including 15 international students and 30 Chinese students. The research protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Nantong University. All participants provided written informed consent before participating in the study. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process.

2.2 Data Collection

The self-administered questionnaire distributed to all 45 participants

explored their existing levels of international understanding and cultural respect, as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of IPE programs in promoting these values. A total of 42 completed surveys were retrieved, resulting in a response rate of approximately 93%. The survey was administered online using a secure platform to facilitate easy access for participants and efficient data collection. A link to the survey, along with a detailed information sheet explaining the study's purpose, participant rights, and confidentiality measures, was distributed to participants via email. The survey consisted of 20 questions with 8 questions on their perceptions of the effectiveness of IPE programs in promoting these values and 12 questions on levels of international understanding and cultural respect. The survey took 8 to 12 minutes to complete with a variety of response scales such as multiple choice, Likert scale and open-ended questions.

Two separate focus groups were conducted for 30 minutes, one with international students and another with Chinese students. Each group consisted of 7-8 participants. A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate discussions, with questions exploring students' experiences with IPE programs, their perceptions of how IPE shapes their understanding of other cultures, and any suggestions they might have for improving the curriculum in this regard. The focus group discussions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis

All quantitative data from the surveys were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistical tests (t-tests) to identify potential differences in scores between international and Chinese students. All statistical analyses were conducted in GraphPad Prism at a statistical significance of 5%. Qualitative data from the focus groups were analysed thematically using a coding approach. Transcripts were reviewed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to students' experiences with IPE and its impact on their intercultural understanding.

3. RESULTS

The survey participants consisted of 42 students, with a slightly higher representation of males (57.1%) compared to females (42.9%). The majority of respondents were domestic students from China (71.4%), while

international students comprised 28.6% (see Figure 1). In terms of academic year, the distribution was fairly even with Freshmen (23.8%), Sophomores (35.7%), Juniors (28.6%), and Seniors (11.9%) (see Figure 2).

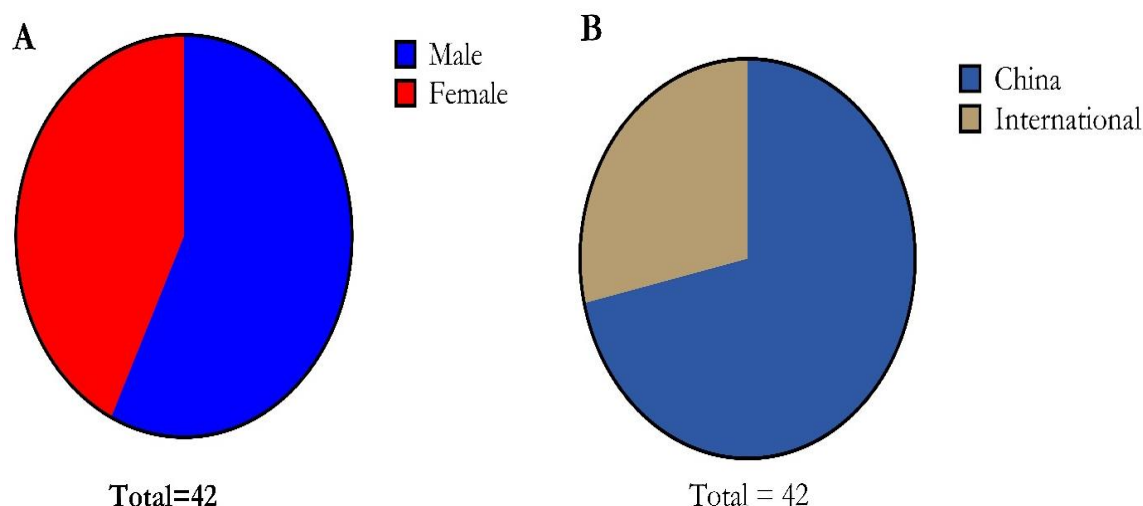


Figure 1: Pie Chart Distribution of the Participant Demographics based on Gender (Males/Females) and Nationality (Chinese/International students).

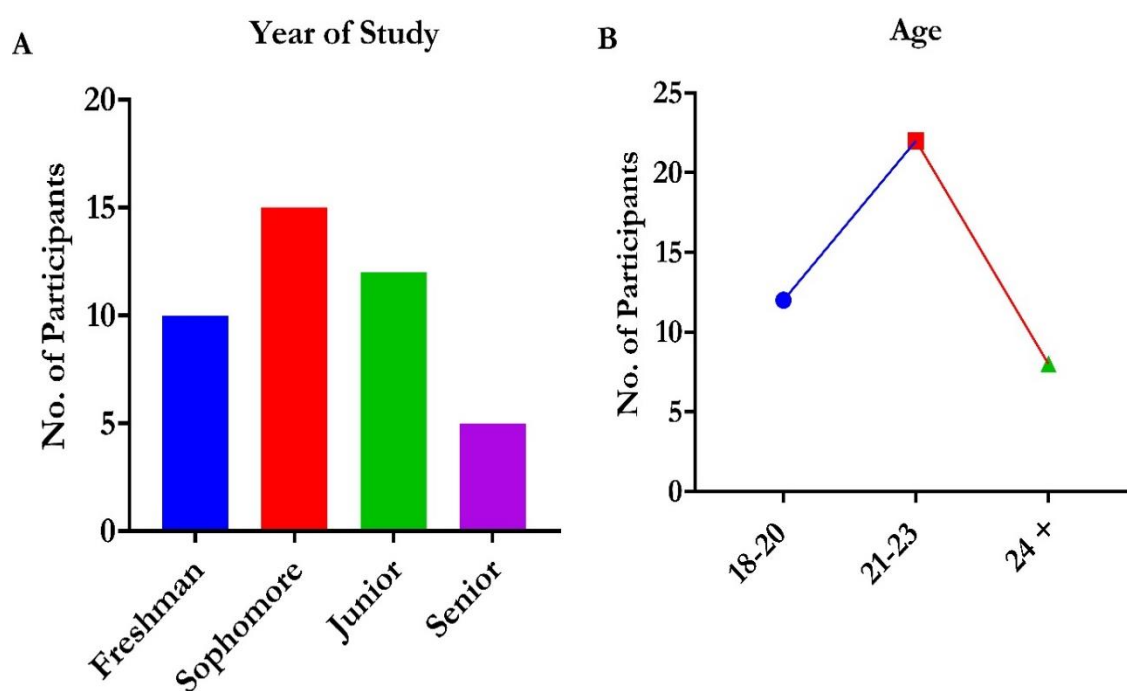


Figure 2: A column chart distribution of participants based on year of study (A) and a line chart of the distribution based on age categories (B).

In Figure 2, the survey included students across a range of ages, with the majority falling between 21-23 years old (52.4%), followed by 18–20-year-olds (28.6%), and those 24 and above representing 19.0% of the participants.

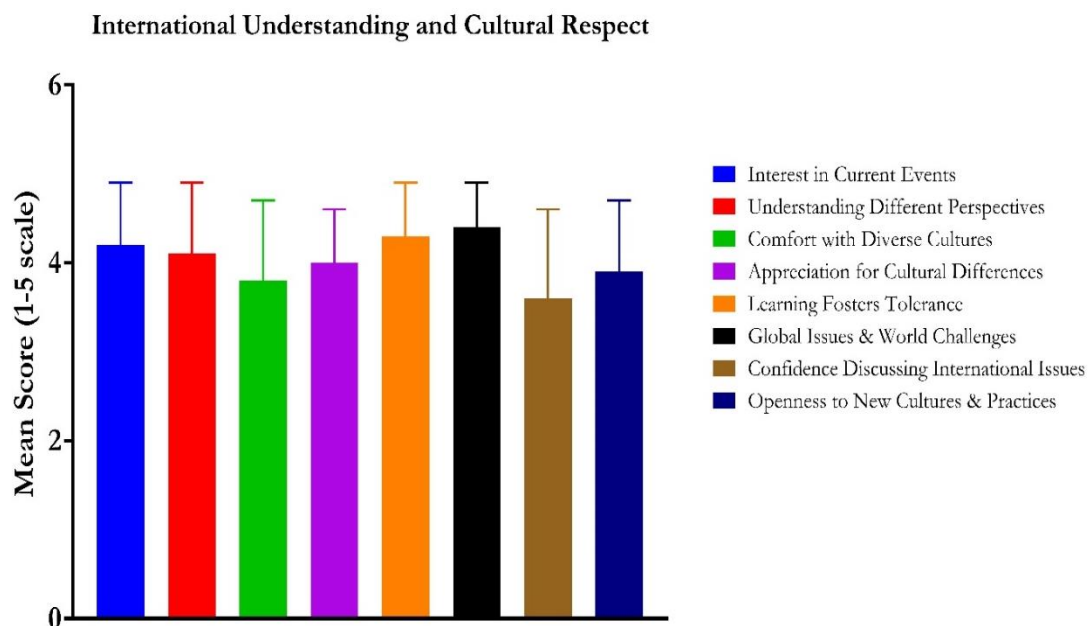


Figure 3: Comparative Bar Charts Showing the Descriptive Statistics for Measures on a Likert Scale (1-5) related to International Understanding & Cultural Respect

In Figure 3, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), survey respondents reported a moderate to high level of interest in various aspects of international understanding and cultural respect. The mean scores ranged from a high of 4.4 for "Learning Fosters Tolerance" ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 0.6$) to a low of 3.6 for "Confidence Discussing International Issues" ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.0$). Overall, students expressed interest in current events ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.7$), understanding diverse perspectives ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.8$), appreciating cultural differences ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.6$), and openness to new cultures ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.8$).

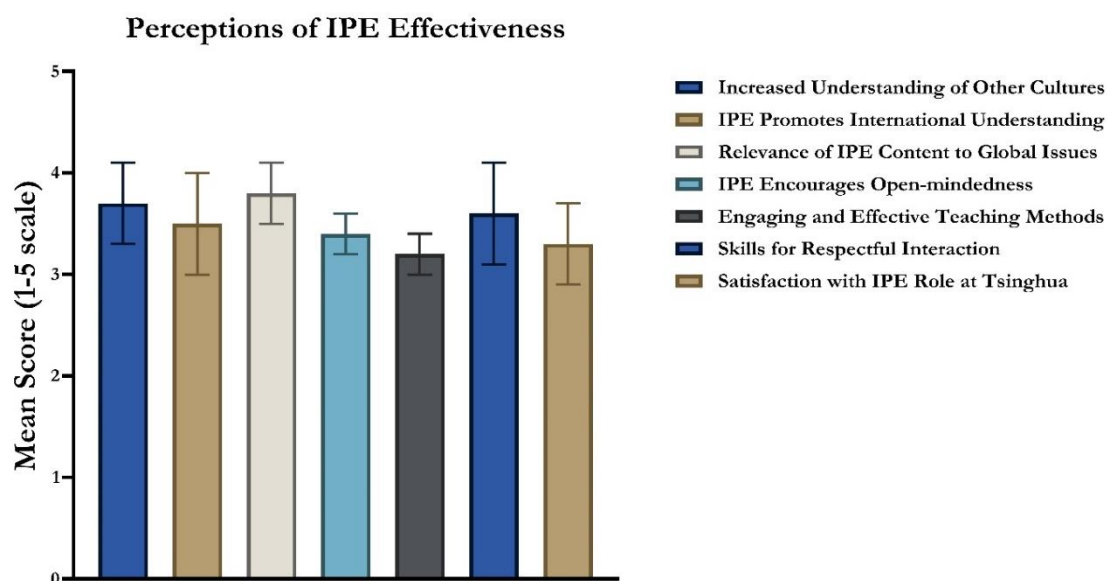


Figure 4: A comparative bar chart of the perceptions of IPE effectiveness based on survey responses on a Likert Scale (1-5).

In Figure 4, examining student perceptions of IPE effectiveness, the survey revealed generally moderate scores (1-5 scale). Students felt that IPE programs somewhat increased their understanding of other cultures ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 0.4$) and promoted international understanding ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.5$). The content's relevance to global issues received a slightly higher rating ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.3$). While students acknowledged IPE's potential to encourage open-mindedness ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.2$), the teaching methods were viewed as less engaging and effective ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 0.2$). There was a more positive perception regarding skills for respectful interaction ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 0.5$). Overall satisfaction with IPE's role at Tsinghua University remained moderate ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 0.4$).

Table 1: Paired t-tests of IPE Effectiveness between Freshman and Senior Levels

Statement	Freshman (Mean)	Senior (Mean)	t- value	p-value (2- tailed)
Increased Understanding of Other Cultures	3.5	3.9	-1.1	0.28 (Not Significant)
IPE Promotes International Understanding	3.3	3.7	-1.4	0.18 (Not Significant)
Relevance of IPE Content to Global Issues	3.6	4	-1.3	0.21 (Not Significant)
IPE Encourages Open-mindedness	3.2	3.6	-1.5	0.16 (Not Significant)
Engaging and Effective Teaching Methods	3	3.4	-1.2	0.25 (Not Significant)
Skills for Respectful Interaction	3.4	3.8	-1.4	0.18 (Not Significant)
Satisfaction with IPE Role at Tsinghua	3.2	3.5	-1	0.32 (Not Significant)

In Table 2, when comparing Freshman and Senior student responses, no statistically significant differences were found in perceptions of IPE program effectiveness. The p-values for all statements ranged from 0.16 (IPE Encourages Open-mindedness) to 0.28 (Increased Understanding of Other Cultures), indicating that the observed mean score differences between Freshmen and Seniors could be due to chance. For instance, Freshman students reported a mean score of 3.5 for IPE increasing their understanding of other cultures, while Seniors reported a mean score of 3.9 (t-value = -1.1, p-value = 0.28).

Table 2: Paired t-Test Comparing Domestic vs. International Students - Interest in Current Events

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-statistic	p-value
Domestic (n=30)	4	0.6	1.23	0.22
International (n=12)	4.5	0.8		

In Table 3, examining potential group differences, domestic students (n=30) and international students (n=12) reported similar mean scores (1-5 scale) on a measure of interest in current events and global issues (M = 4.0, SD = 0.6 for Domestic; M = 4.5, SD = 0.8 for International). A paired samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference (t-statistic = 1.23, p-value = 0.22), suggesting comparable levels of interest in these topics between the two groups.

Table 3: Themes Related to IPE Content and Curriculum

Theme	Description	Quotes
Focus on National Identity	Emphasis on Chinese history, culture, and values.	"IPE programs mostly focus on China's role in the world, not so much on understanding other cultures."
Limited Global Perspectives	Lack of in-depth exploration of diverse viewpoints and international issues.	"We don't often discuss current events from different perspectives."
Need for More Practical Application	Desire for IPE to equip students with skills for intercultural communication and interaction.	"IPE could be more helpful if it provided practical skills for interacting with people from different backgrounds."

In Table 3, thematic analysis of focus group discussions revealed several key themes related to IPE content and curriculum. A recurring theme was the focus on national identity, with students expressing that IPE programs primarily emphasized Chinese history, culture, and values ("IPE programs mostly focus on China's role in the world, not so much on understanding other cultures.").

Participants also highlighted limited global perspectives, suggesting a lack of in-depth exploration of diverse viewpoints and international issues ("We don't often discuss current events from different perspectives."). Finally, a strong theme emerged regarding the need for more practical application. Students expressed a desire for IPE to equip them with skills for intercultural communication and interaction ("IPE could be more helpful if it provided practical skills for interacting with people from different backgrounds."). These themes suggest a potential gap between

the current IPE curriculum and students' needs for developing a more comprehensive understanding of the world and the ability to interact effectively in an increasingly interconnected global context.

Table 4: Themes Related to IPE Teaching Methods and Learning Environment

Theme	Description	Quotes
Passive Learning Styles	Predominance of lectures and rote memorization.	"Most IPE classes are lectures; it would be more engaging to have discussions or group projects."
Limited Opportunities for Critical Thinking	Discouragement of questioning or challenging official narratives.	"We don't feel comfortable expressing different viewpoints in IPE classes."
Importance of Open and Inclusive Discussions	Students' desire for safe spaces to discuss sensitive topics and diverse perspectives.	"IPE could be more effective if it encouraged open discussions about different cultures and ideas."

In Table 4, the focus group discussions highlighted themes related to IPE's teaching methods. Students pointed to the prevalence of passive learning styles characterized by lectures and rote memorization ("Most IPE classes are lectures..."). They felt there were limited opportunities for critical thinking, suggesting discomfort with questioning established narratives ("We don't feel comfortable expressing different viewpoints..."). A key theme emerged around the importance of open and inclusive discussions. Students desired safe spaces to explore sensitive topics and engage with diverse perspectives ("IPE could be more effective if it encouraged open discussions..."). These themes suggest a need for IPE to move beyond traditional methods and create a more interactive and critical learning environment.

Table 5: Themes Related to IPE's Impact on International Understanding and Cultural Respect

Theme	Description	Quotes
Increased Awareness of Global Issues	IPE programs contribute to a broader understanding of the world.	"IPE has helped me become more aware of global challenges and how they connect to China."
Appreciation for Cultural Diversity	Exposure to different cultures fosters empathy and tolerance.	"IPE classes have made me more interested in learning about other cultures and traditions."
Limited Impact on Personal Interactions	Students express a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical application.	"I understand different cultures in theory, but I still feel unsure how to interact with people from different backgrounds."

In Table 5, examining the impact of IPE on intercultural understanding, focus group discussions revealed a mixed picture. Some students expressed an increased awareness of global issues, appreciating how IPE programs connected these challenges to China's role in the world ("IPE has helped me become more aware..."). Exposure to diverse cultures fostered a general appreciation for cultural diversity, with students showing interest in learning more ("IPE classes have made me more interested..."). Students acknowledged a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, feeling unsure about interacting with people from different backgrounds. These findings suggest that IPE programs could benefit from incorporating strategies to bridge the gap between theory and practice, equipping students with the skills to navigate intercultural interactions effectively.

4. DISCUSSION

Our findings indicated a moderate level of interest in current events, global issues, and understanding diverse perspectives. Students expressed appreciation for cultural differences and a belief that learning fosters tolerance. However, there were mixed perceptions regarding IPE's effectiveness. While some students felt IPE increased their understanding of other cultures and promoted international understanding, others noted limitations in content relevance and teaching methods. The success of IPE for college students hinges not only on internal factors but also on the external environment. Drawing on Marxist philosophy, which emphasizes the interplay of internal and external forces in development, we recognize the importance of a positive social context for effective IPE (Alami et al., 2023; Blaney & Inayatullah, 2021).

The contemporary world is characterized by a complex interplay of trends: political multipolarity, economic globalization, and cultural pluralism. China itself is undergoing a period of social transition, with increasing diversity in social and economic spheres. This diversification fosters a wider range of values, orientations, and perspectives among individuals. As a result, students exhibit a greater variability in their perception of reality and aspirations for self-worth. In this dynamic environment, shaping positive public discourse becomes crucial. Relevant social institutions must employ flexible and adaptable methods to promote the Party's principles, policies, and leadership. By fostering a constructive social environment that reinforces core values, IPE can be significantly

enhanced.

University campuses should foster a spirit of harmony by actively promoting academic, artistic, and recreational activities. Encouraging student participation in these activities strengthens their self-learning, self-education, and self-management skills, which in turn, create a strong foundation for effective ideological and political education (IPE). The internet's ubiquitous presence has significantly expanded communication channels. However, its convenience comes with challenges. The spread of vulgar, violent, and superstitious content can negatively influence students' thinking and behaviour. Educators must leverage the internet's strengths – its timeliness, universality, and interactivity – to guide students towards healthy online habits. This includes implementing network monitoring to create a safe online environment, establishing dedicated websites promoting positive and healthy information, and providing appropriate guidance for responsible internet use (Li, 2018).

In our thematic analysis of focus group discussions revealed student desires for a more comprehensive IPE curriculum. A recurring theme was the emphasis on national identity, with a call for a broader exploration of diverse viewpoints and international issues. Students also expressed a need for IPE to move beyond passive learning styles and create a more interactive and critical learning environment that fosters open discussions about sensitive topics and cultural perspectives. Ideological and political education (IPE) is recognized as a critical element in fostering well-rounded students and forms a core objective of higher education in China. However, despite receiving sufficient attention within the national higher education landscape, the effectiveness of IPE remains a concern. This ineffectiveness manifests in two key ways: Firstly, students often demonstrate a lack of strong political awareness and commitment. Despite extended periods of specialized study, they may struggle to grasp the guiding principles upheld by the Party and the nation. Consequently, their identification with the socialist cause and national and patriotic sentiments might remain superficial, expressed primarily through words rather than a deeper understanding. Secondly, students' overall learning motivation appears insufficient. Ideally, IPE should aim to comprehensively enhance students' political literacy and moral character, laying a strong foundation for their long-term development (Chen, 2019). However, current methods seem to fall short of achieving this objective.

China has undoubtedly achieved significant progress in recent years, but social challenges remain. The growing market economy has brought issues like materialism, individualism, and consumerism, negatively impacting

social development. Traditional moral values are weakening, highlighting the need to address personal, family, professional, and social ethics through education. Furthermore, cultural influence plays a crucial role in the global arena. As China strives for modernization, there's a concern that traditional culture may be neglected, potentially hindering its ability to resonate with contemporary audiences and even generating negative perceptions. The question of how to strengthen cultural identity and leverage cultural strengths for international competitiveness becomes a vital concern for Chinese education (Pang et al., 2020).

Our findings alluded that the landscape of education is constantly evolving, necessitating ongoing curriculum reform to keep pace with a changing world. This reform plays a vital role in fostering international exchange and cultural integration, which are hallmarks of human progress. However, aggressive cultural dominance and undue ideological influence can disrupt a nation's cultural identity and core values. Therefore, educational institutions have a responsibility to intervene through strategic curriculum reform. Universities can achieve this by moving beyond rigid course structures. Optimizing content to highlight a nation's rich cultural heritage and core ideological principles is crucial. However, this emphasis shouldn't come at the expense of a multicultural perspective. A well-designed curriculum should cultivate cultural confidence in students while fostering a well-rounded understanding of diverse global perspectives. Ultimately, such reforms contribute significantly to IPE by shaping students with a strong sense of identity and the ability to navigate an interconnected world.

We found that focus group discussions highlighted a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical application. While IPE programs seemed to contribute to an increased awareness of global issues and appreciation for cultural diversity, students felt unprepared for real-world intercultural interactions. These findings suggest that IPE programs could benefit from incorporating strategies to bridge this gap and equip students with the skills for effective intercultural communication and interaction in an increasingly interconnected global context. Ideological and political education (IPE) is undergoing a period of significant transformation in China. Research in this field has become increasingly expansive and multifaceted in recent years, with scholars exploring a wide range of topics (Li & Fu, 2020). A key focus lies in integrating IPE effectively into classroom teaching. This involves not only the content itself but also the roles of teachers, students, and the overall teaching system (Li & Fu, 2020). Technology is playing an increasingly prominent role in IPE. Academics

are exploring innovative methods for delivering IPE content, including utilizing media and information technology platforms (Shen & Zhang, 2013). Studies (Zeng & Sutummawong, 2023) suggest that these "internet plus technology" approaches can have a significant impact on student learning compared to traditional methods. Furthermore, researchers are investigating new methods for evaluating the effectiveness of IPE in the classroom. Proposals include student performance evaluation and models based on extension theory (Lina et al., 2015; Yu, 2015). Previous research suggests that CIPE can be effectively integrated into classrooms that emphasize traditional culture and cultural competency. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of the values embedded within a society's cultural heritage. Additionally, incorporating elements of aesthetics into IPE activities can enhance their compatibility, relevance, and effectiveness for college students (Yi & Dan, 2020). Studies have shown that exploring aesthetics in the classroom environment can address potential psychological shortcomings students may face, encourage their creative potential, and ultimately guide them towards a more fulfilling life. Effective IPE hinges on a multi-pronged approach. Developing educators' expertise and fostering their passion for the subject are crucial first steps (Zhang, 2022). Furthermore, utilizing a diverse range of resources and methodologies that combine theory with practical application is essential. This can involve incorporating modern technology and addressing contemporary issues that resonate with students. Engaging students actively through interactive teaching methods can significantly enhance the dynamism of IPE. Additionally, creating a comprehensive educational platform that leverages the full potential of various media can broaden the reach and impact of IPE.

The recent trend of reduced funding for humanities programs in universities like Japan and the UK (Barnett, 2017) raises concerns about the underlying motivations. This shift can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it might reflect a prioritization of "neoliberal logic," where disciplines with perceived higher market value gain favour. Secondly, it could represent a strategic decision to limit the influence of critical thinking within universities. However, it's important to note that these funding reductions don't necessarily translate into direct mandates regarding political or social ideologies. In contrast, Vietnam, a nation with a similar political structure to China, requires all undergraduates to participate in national defence education alongside humanities and social science studies (Harman et al., 2009). This highlights the varying approaches to shaping student perspectives within higher education systems. The role of higher

education in shaping student perspectives goes beyond fostering critical thinking. In the Philippines, universities actively collaborate with industry to enhance student employability and conduct relevant research, while also emphasizing the development of critical leadership skills (Trinidad & Leviste, 2021). This example highlights the potential for universities to fulfil a multifaceted mission. Similarly, civic or citizenship education programs at the school level often aim to cultivate patriotism (Jerome, 2012; Race, 2020; Vincent, 2019). However, as (Shapiro, 1984) suggests, educational institutions can sometimes resemble "conduits for the settled ideology," potentially prioritizing the transmission of established values rather than fostering open discussion and critical examination of those values.

The Chinese prioritizes IPE in universities as a means of shaping the values and perspectives of the younger generation. This emphasis on IPE reflects the party's role in developing a coherent ideological framework and promoting its vision within the student body. Through IPE, the Chinese aims to solidify their power structure and cultivate widespread acceptance of its core values. China's national narrative, marked by historical experiences of foreign invasion and civil war, provides a strong rationale for prioritizing national unity and stability in education. This focus resonates widely within China (Li, 2018). However, the Chinese leadership faces a balancing act: ensuring continued economic development, which has flourished in recent decades due to China's opening to the global market, while maintaining social and political stability.

The Chinese leadership views ideological consistency with China's political economy as vital for maintaining internal stability and social cohesion (Yi & Dan, 2020). Their underlying belief is that sustained political and social stability fosters economic growth and a peaceful, prosperous society. In this context, universities play a critical role in prioritizing IPE for students. Through IPE, China aims to influence the thoughts and actions of the next generation, ensuring alignment with the party's vision for the country. IPE occupies a prominent position in Chinese universities, serving as a key pathway for students to gain knowledge in social, political, and economic theories. It also fosters an understanding of China's history and national culture. IPE is delivered through a variety of methods, including formal lectures. The focus on IPE for undergraduates has resulted in a well-established system within universities. This system integrates compulsory theoretical courses, moral education initiatives, and broader educational activities, ultimately shaping the daily lives of students.

5. CONCLUSION

Our study investigated how students at Nantong University perceive the impact of Ideological and Political Education (IPE) programs on their international understanding and cultural respect. The results indicated a moderate level of student interest in global issues and a general appreciation for cultural diversity. However, perceptions of IPE effectiveness were mixed. Students expressed a desire for IPE to provide more opportunities to develop practical skills for intercultural communication and critical thinking. Thematic analysis of focus group discussions supported these findings. Students highlighted the need for IPE to move beyond a focus on national identity and incorporate a wider range of global perspectives. There was a call for more interactive teaching methods and safe spaces to discuss sensitive topics and diverse viewpoints. While IPE programs seemed to contribute to an awareness of global issues and appreciation for cultural differences, some students felt a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The study's generalizability is limited by the sample size and focus on a single university in China. Additionally, relying solely on self-reported data may introduce bias. Future research could explore the long-term impact of IPE programs on graduates' intercultural competencies. Studies could also compare IPE programs across different universities to identify effective practices for promoting international understanding and cultural respect within a globalized context. Examining how IPE curriculum and teaching methods can be adapted to bridge the gap between theory and practice would be valuable.

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