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"Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng"—An Innovative Educational Reform Rising in Chinese Higher Education

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Abstract

A national education and teaching reform has been kicked off in Chinese higher education to incorporate ideological & political education into all courses, which is called "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng". Whereof, ideological & political education elements contained in courses are deeply explored and corresponding educational functions are given full play, and all staff, whole process and all courses of higher education are involved. An innovative transform, from the isolated "Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng" to a three-dimensional "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng", is being on the way. Explicit and implicit educations are being integrated organically, and ideological & political education shall run through the whole process of higher education. That is, all courses shall carry ideological & political education, and ideological & political education shall be embodied in all courses. This paper reports on the concept, essence, origin, and national promotion of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng".

Keywords

Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng, Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng, Education and Teaching Reform, Ideological and Political Education, Chinese Higher Education

1. Introduction

With the deepening of China's reform and opening up, the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. At the same time of making great achievements in economic and social development, China is also faced with certain social contradictions and ideological challenges (Sun, 2015; Guo, 2013; Li, 2006; Li, Yang, & Shi, 2017; Wang, 2017; Ren, 2012; Guo, 2018a; Zhu

& Yu, 2010). The blending and collision of diversified cultures and values inevitably lead to the formation and spread of various social trends of thought, which are producing impacts on people's ideology, value orientation, faith & belief, and behavior orientation (Zheng, 2015; Zhao, 2010; Wu & Wan, 2019; Qin & Jin, 2019; Guo, 2018b; Zhang & Zhang, 2016). Especially, bad cultural thoughts, wrong conceptions of value, and etc. may negatively impact the view of world, view of life, and view of value of college and university (hereafter "college" is used to represents college, university and other schools of higher education) students.

Traditionally, ideological & political education in higher education is carried out by the "Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng" (i.e. ideological & political theoretical courses), which generally includes 4 courses such as *Introduction to the Basic Principles of Marxism, Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Essentials of Chinese Modern History,* and *Ideological & Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis.* They mainly introduce Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Important Thought of Three Represents, Scientific View of Development, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for A New Era. "Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng" has been the essential characteristic of Chinese socialist higher education, the main channel of ideological & political education, and the compulsory core courses for college students.

In the new era, the traditional "Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng" has encountered new problems and pressures. The multi-cultures brought by globalization are impacting the mainstream status of Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, the Theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, and etc. in the field of ideology. The single approach and monotonous form of traditional "Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng" teaching produce weak attractiveness and effectiveness, and make it hard to effectively cultivate socialist core values as mainstream thought in college students. The content is somewhat abstract, the teaching method is perhaps outdated, and there may be a lack of connection with the current reality. Students may have misunderstandings of ideological & political education, and even extreme views on it. Some may think that the courses are just moral preaching and force-feeding of old ideas that constrain their freedom of thought. Besides, traditional "Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng" was "fighting alone" and bore alone the important task of ideological & political education, either actively or passively. Colleges lacked of comprehensive systems of ideological & political education.

Therefore, it is particularly important and urgent to comprehensively strengthen and improve the ideological & political education in higher education, which is of fundamental, strategic and overall significance in the new era. It bears on the future and destiny of the Communist Party of China, bears on the long-term stability of the Chinese nation, and bears on the national cohesion and unity. "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" reform in higher education rises in response to the situations described above.

2. The Concept and Essence of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng"

"Ke-Cheng" means courses, "Si-Zheng" means ideological & political education, and "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" means all courses carry ideological & political education, and ideological & political education is embodied in all courses (Qiu, 2017; Qiu, 2018; Zhao, 2019; Gao & Zong, 2017a; Dong, 2018; Gao & Zong, 2017b; Zhang, 2018; Yang, 2018).

"Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" is not a certain course or the adding of one or more courses. It is a teaching reform and innovation with rich connotation and profound significance. It means to run Marxist theory through the whole process of teaching, to deeply explore the ideological & political education elements contained in all courses, and to give full play to the ideological & political educational function of each course. Each course shall play the role of ideological & political education at the same time of fulfilling its own specific mission. Ideological & political education shall be incorporated into all courses to establish a three-dimensional system of ideological & political education involving all staff, whole process and all courses. All kinds of courses in colleges shall go in the same direction as the original "Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng". "Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng" is the "main channel" of ideological & political education, and other courses function as "microcirculations". "Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng", working as the main channel, carries out explicit ideological & political education using clear-cut instruction. Other courses, working as the microcirculations, carry out implicit ideological & political education in the form of penetration to embody, digest and sublimate what the former has done. And then, a synergistic effect shall be realized.

3. The Origin of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng"

3.1. National Policy Background

The Communist Party of China (hereinafter referred to as "the Party") has always attached great importance to ideological & political work. It has been the good tradition and political advantage of the Party, and provides strong ideological guarantee and spiritual strength for the consolidation, development and prosperity of the cause of socialism. Since the Sixteenth National Congress of the Party held in 2002, with Comrade Hu Jintao as the general secretary, the CPC Central Committee has made new strategic deployments for strengthening and improving ideological & political education on college students. And since the Eighteenth National Congress of the Party held in 2012, with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core, the CPC Central Committee attaches great importance to ideological & political work in colleges and universities, and has made a series of new major decisions and deployments.

Typical state-level documents concerning ideological & political education on college students issued in these periods include (People's Daily, 2004; People's Daily, 2015; People's Daily, 2017; The Website of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017a; The Website of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017b; The Website of the Ministry of Education

of the People's Republic of China, 2018): 1) Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Education on College Students issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in October 2004 (referred to as "No. 16 Central Document"). It deeply analyzed the situation and task of ideological & political education on college students in China, fully expounded the guiding ideology, basic principles, basic requirements, main approaches and methods for strengthening and improving the ideological & political education on college students, and put forward clear requirements for the construction of ideological & political theoretical courses in colleges, 2) Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Propaganda and Ideological Work in Colleges and Universities under the New Situation issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in January 2015 (referred to as "No. 59 Central Document"). It emphasized that, ideological work is an extremely important task for the Party and the country; as the forefront of ideological work, colleges and universities shoulder the important task of studying, researching and propagating Marxism, task of cultivating and carrying forward socialist core values, and task of providing talent guarantee and intellectual support for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. 3) Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities under the New Situation issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in February 2017 (referred to as "No. 31 Central Document"). It emphasized that, strengthening and improving ideological & political work in colleges and universities is a major political task and a strategic project, as it concerns the fundamental issue of what kind of colleges and universities to run and how to run them, concerns the leadership of the Party over colleges and universities, and concerns the successors to the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. 4) Opinions on Deepening Reform of the Educational System and Mechanism issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in September 2017. It emphasized the necessity of building an integrated moral education system that is led by the socialist core values. 5) Implementation Program for Improving the Quality of Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities and Some Opinions on Strengthening the Course Construction of "Situation and Policy" in Colleges and Universities in the New Era issued by the Ministry of Education in 2017 and 2018. These two documents promoted the nationwide generalization of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng".

The report delivered at the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China put forward that (Xi, 2017) "To develop education, we should fully implement the Party's educational policy, carry out the fundamental task of cultivating talents with noble morality, strengthen and improve the ideological & political work, and strengthen educational guidance, practical cultivation and institutional guarantee with a view of cultivating new people who shall undertake the great task of rejuvenation of the nation." At the national conference on ideological and political work of colleges and universities 2016, General Secre-

tary Xi Jinping clearly pointed out that all kinds of courses should go in the same direction with ideological & political theoretical courses to form a synergistic effect (The Website of the Ministry of Defense of the People's Republic of China, 2016).

3.2. First Exploration of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng"

For implementing the deployments of the CPC Central Committee concerning ideological and political education work, Shanghai began exploration as early as 2005 (Jiang, 2018; Zhu, 2018; Pan & Qiu, 2016; Deng & Yan, 2016; Dong, 2016; Xu, 2016; Jiang, 2016). After over ten years' exploration and construction, the concept of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" was first put forward in Shanghai, and then accepted by the state. Therefore, it has been promoted from local practice and exploration to a national strategic deployment. And now, it is promoted to generalize nationwide.

The "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" of Shanghai has gone through the stages of standardization of teaching, theoretical exploration, reform deepening, and generalization. In 2005, the "05 Plan" was implemented and embodied as standardization of teaching. In 2008, a complete "4 + 1" styled ideological & political curriculum system had formed. In 2010, all schools, colleges and universities in Shanghai participated in the national educational reform pilot of "Integration of Moral Education in Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Colleges and Universities" to make an overall design of the educational content and mechanism, which had laid the theoretical foundation of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng". In 2014, Shanghai comprehensive educational reform was launched, the mechanism arrangement and working system for "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" had formed, and the concept "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" was formally put forward. In 2016, Shanghai's advanced experience, whereof, ideological & political theoretical courses played the core role, comprehensive literacy courses served as the support, and specialized courses functioned as radiation, was incorporated into the No. 31 Central Document (Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Propaganda and Ideological Work in Colleges and Universities under the New Situation issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in February 2017). In 2017, the connotation of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" was incorporated into the document of Opinions on Deepening Reform of the Educational System and Mechanism issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in September 2017, and "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" was thus promoted from local practice and exploration to a national strategic deployment. In 2018, the Ministry of Education issued Implementation Program for Improving the Quality of Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities and Some Opinions on Strengthening the Course Construction of "Situation and Policy" in Colleges and Universities in the New Era, and then "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" began to generalize nationwide.

The original ideological & political theoretical courses also got reform and innovation. In the "4 + 1 + X" style, "4" represents the original four courses of

Introduction to the Basic Principles of Marxism, Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Essentials of Chinese Modern History, and Ideological Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis, "1" represents the course of Situation and Policy, and "X" represents the optional courses of "China Series".

The "China Series" is in the form of "Unique Feature for Each College". Typical examples are as follows: "Zhi-Guo Li-Zheng (governing the country)" of Fudan University; "Zhong-Guo Dao-Lu (Chinese road)" of Tongji University; "Zhong-Guo Zhi-Hui (Chinese wisdom)" of East China Normal University; "Fa-Zhi Zhong-Guo (China ruled by law)" of East China University of Political Science and Law; "Qi-Huang Zhong-Guo (China featured with traditional Chinese medicine)" of Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine; "Shi-Jie Zhong-Guo (China in the world)" of Shanghai Foreign Studies University; "Zhong-Guo Zhi-Zao (Wisdom and manufacture of China)" of Shanghai Institute of Technology; "Jin-Xiu Zhong-Guo (Splendid China)" of Donghua University; and etc. The "China Series" has more than 50 courses in total, which are hot courses pursued by college students.

4. The National Promotion of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng"

Along with the issuances of *Implementation Program for Improving the Quality of Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities* and *Some Opinions on Strengthening the Course Construction of "Situation and Policy" in Colleges and Universities in the New Era* by the Ministry of Education in 2018, "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" began to generalize nationwide.

As of the end of 2018, nearly all schools, colleges and universities of higher education (hereafter "colleges" is used to represents higher education institutions) had initiated the teaching reform of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng", even as a political task. And now, it is in full swing. The party committee of each college is the leadership body of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" reform and construction, must treat it as an important political task, and must do this work with high sense of political responsibility. Educational staff has been motivated to actively participate in the reform. Relevant research programs of different levels have been set up and funds have been provided.

With the rising of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng", relevant research gets booming. **Table 1** shows the literatures concerning "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" since 2014 and as of Sep. 16, 2019 searched in CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure). The big volume and its rapid increase of literatures concerning "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" in the past three years fully reflect the booming of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" and educators' enthusiasm in it and recognition of it.

5. Conclusion

All courses carry ideological & political education, and ideological & political education is embodied in all courses. "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" is an innovative educational

Table 1. Literatures concerning "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng".

Source	With the term of "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng (课程思政)" in			
	Title	Topic	Abstract	Keywords
Journals	Total: 1177	Total: 3368	Total: 1448	Total: 1101
	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 808	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 2127	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 977	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 760
	2018: 333	2018: 736	2018: 409	2018: 311
	2017: 36	2017: 209	2017: 58	2017: 30
	2016: 0	2016: 131	2016: 3	2016: 0
	2015: 0	2015: 90	2015: 0	2015: 0
	2014: 0	2014: 75	2014: 1	2014: 0
Dissertations	Total: 4	Total: 66	Total: 25	Total: 6
(Master's and Doctor's)	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 3	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 27	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 16	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 4
	2018: 1	2018: 11	2018: 8	2018: 2
	2017: 0	2017: 12	2017: 1	2017: 0
	2016: 0	2016: 5	2016: 0	2016: 0
	2015: 0	2015: 8	2015: 0	2015: 0
	2014: 0	2014: 3	2014: 0	2014: 0
Proceedings	Total: 6	Total: 14	Total: 16	Total: 6
	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 3	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 3	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 11	2019 (as of Sep. 16): 4
	2018: 3	2018: 5	2018: 5	2018: 2
	2017: 0	2017: 1	2017: 0	2017: 0
	2016: 0	2016: 2	2016: 0	2016: 0
	2015: 0	2015: 3	2015: 0	2015: 0
	2014: 0	2014: 0	2014: 0	2014: 0
Newspapers	Total: 59	Total: 139		
	2019 (as of Sep. 16):	2019 (as of Sep. 16):		
	16	58		
	2018: 24	2018: 45		
	2017: 15	2017: 25		
	2016: 4	2016: 7		
	2015: 0	2015: 4		
	2014: 0	2014: 0		

reform in the new era for comprehensively strengthening and improving ideological & political education on college students. And a three-dimensional "Da Si-Zheng (meaning big Si-Zheng, comprehensive/all-around ideological & political education)" involving all staff, whole process and all courses is being established. "Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng" enjoys clear historical background, urgent demand, firm policy support, and educators' broad acceptance. We have reason to believe that it will have great development and will promote the ideological & political education to a new level. Educational reform is always on the road. It needs educators' active exploration, daring innovation, and warm communication.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix: Corresponding English Names of Some Chinese Concepts and Documents

Chinese concepts/documents	Corresponding English names	
课程思政	Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng	
思政课程	Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng	
《关于进一步加强和改进大学生思想政治教育的意见》	Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Education on College Students	
《关于进一步加强和改进新形势下高校宣传思想工作的意见》	Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Propaganda and Ideological Work in Colleges and Universities under the New Situation	
《关于加强和改进新形势下高校思想政治工作的意见》	Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities under the New Situation	
《关于深化教育体制机制改革的意见》	Opinions on Deepening Reform of the Educational System and Mechanism	
《高校思想政治工作质量提升工程实施纲要》	Implementation Program for Improving the Quality of Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities	
《关于加强新时代高校"形势与政策"课建设的若干意见》	Some Opinions on Strengthening the Course Construction of "Situation and Policy" in Colleges and Universities in the New Era	
《马克思主义基本原理》	Introduction to the Basic Principles of Marxism	
《毛泽东思想和中国特色社会主义理论体系概论》	Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics	
《中国近现代史纲要》	Essentials of Chinese Modern History	
《思想道德修养与法律基础》	Ideological Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis	
《形势与政策》	Situation and Policy	
"中国系列"	China Series	
《治国理政》	Zhi-Guo Li-Zheng	
《中国道路》	Zhong-Guo Dao-Lu	
《中国智慧》	Zhong-Guo Zhi-Hui	
《法治中国》	Fa-Zhi Zhong-Guo	
《岐黄中国》	Qi-Huang Zhong-Guo	
《世界中国》	Shi-Jie Zhong-Guo	
《中国智造》	Zhong-Guo Zhi-Zao	
《锦绣中国》	Jin-Xiu Zhong-Guo	