

Evolution, Essence and Boundary of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” : A Rising Reform in Chinese Higher Education

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Abstract: *“Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng”, the traditional ideological and political education has encountered new challenges and problems in Chinese higher education. As a rising reform in the New Era, “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”, which means that all courses carry ideological and political education, and ideological and political education is embodied in all courses, was originated from Shanghai and then promoted from local practice and exploration to a national strategic deployment in 2018. However, no consensus on the definition of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” has been reached in the academic and practical circles. It can be regarded as not only a new educational concept and an educational method for the whole teaching process but also a type of teaching systems and educational practice activities. In the teaching practice of Chinese Higher Education, “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” must be embodied in Non-ideological and political theory courses, and ideological and political theory courses also need more creativity to better carry out ideological and political education.*

Key words: *Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng, Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng, Ideological and Political Education, “the whole person” Education, Reform in Chinese Higher Education*

Introduction

In recent years, “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”, a new term in Chinese has been popularized in the theoretical and practical circles of Chinese higher education. This term has yet no appropriate English translation. It is translated into “Curriculum Ideological and Political Education” partly (Lingling, L.,2021) and “curriculum ideology and politics” literally mostly in some English papers (Zhao W., Ai Y. P., 2021; Zhou Y.P., 2022). Xi, R. (2022) suggests an optional English translation “Ideological and Political Education Integrated Throughout Curriculum”.

This term originated from “Shanghai Comprehensive Educational Reform Plan (2014-2020)”, a governmental document issued by Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government in 2014. The concept was then accepted by the state and incorporated into the documents of central government. Thereafter, it has been promoted from local practice and exploration to a national strategic deployment. Under the great attention of the state, the discussion and research on “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” have developed explosively, frequently appearing in the media, network, professional and non-professional literature. As of August 2022, there have been 39,855 documents on the subject of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” included in the CNKI database. Despite such a large body of literature on “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” in Chinese and many insights in related research results, there are few studies on this subject in English and many controversies left to be discussed.

Evolution: How is the Reform of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” carried out?

Depending on the situation, the same Chinese word has different meanings and can be translated into different English expressions. “Ke-Cheng” usually means curriculum or course, and “Si-Zheng” means ideological and political education or ideological and political theory; “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” means ideological and political theory courses and “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” means “Ideological and Political Education Integrated Throughout Curriculum”. (Xi, R.,2022) In other words, “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” means that all courses carry ideological and political education, and ideological and political education is embodied in all courses. (Zhou, Z. Q., Guo, L.& Liu, Q., 2019a)

“Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng”: Traditional channel for ideological and political education

The Communist Party of China (hereinafter referred to as “CPC”) has always attached great importance to ideological and 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. Ideological and political education has been an essential part and a distinctive characteristic of Chinese higher education. (Zhou, Z. Q., Guo, L.& Liu, Q., 2019b)

Traditionally, ideological and political theory education in higher education is carried out by “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng”, the explicit ideological and political theory courses. To some extent, “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” was the main, even the sole, channel for ideological and political education. There have been many changes in the ideological and political theory course system in the more than 70 years since the founding of New China, but after the reform and opening up, the “05 plan” has gradually formed a relatively stable course system through the changes of the “85 plan” and the “98 plan”. In the “05 plan”, ideological and political theory courses for undergraduate education include four required courses and two elective courses. (Han, Z. F., Li, C. Y., 2019) The former includes *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*; the later includes *Situation and Policy* and *Contemporary World Economy and Politics*. They are core theoretical courses in higher education mainly introducing 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 the New Era was added to these courses after China had entered the New Era when the 18th National Congress of the CPC held in 2012.

In the new era, traditional “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” has encountered new challenges and problems. The blending and collision of diversified cultures and values imported by globalization inevitably lead to the formation and spread of various social trends of thought, which produce great impacts on the ideology, value orientation, faith and belief, and behavior orientation of people, especially young students. The single approach and monotonous form of traditional “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” instruction may weaken its attractiveness, educational effectiveness and value-guiding force. Ideological and political education needs to be strengthened, the educational effectiveness needs to be improved, and corresponding education and teaching reform is urgently needed. Thus, reform of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” rises at this right moment to establish a comprehensive system of ideological and political education. (Zhou, Z. Q., Guo, L.& Liu, Q., 2019b)

“Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”: A Rising Reform in Chinese Higher Education

As mentioned above, the CPC has always attached great importance to ideological and political work, especially the ideological and political education in higher education. Several typical central documents concerning ideological and political education in higher education has been issued in the new century as following Table 1.

Table 1
Central Documents Concerning Ideological and Political Education
in Chinese Higher Education in the New Century (2004-2020)

Issued Year and Body	Title	Main Points
In October 2004 by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council	<i>Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Education on College Students</i>	It deeply analyzed the situation and task of ideological and political theory 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.
in January 2015 by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council	<i>Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Propaganda and Ideological Work in Colleges and Universities under the New Situation</i>	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.
in February 2017 by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council	<i>Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities under the New Situation</i>	It emphasized that, strengthening and improving ideological and 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.
in September 2017 by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council	<i>Opinions on Deepening Reform of the Educational System and Mechanism</i>	It emphasized the necessity of building an integrated moral education system that is led by the socialist core values.
in 2017 and 2018 by the Ministry of Education	<i>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</i>	These two documents promoted the nationwide generalization of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”.
in May 2020 by the Ministry of	<i>Guiding Outline of Ideological and</i>	It aimed to integrate ideological and political theory education into the talent training system and comprehensively promote

Education	<i>Political Construction of Colleges and Universities</i>	the construction of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” in colleges and universities, so as to give full play to the educating role of each course and improve the quality of talent training in colleges and universities.
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For implementing the deployments of the CPC Central Committee concerning ideological and political education, Shanghai began its own exploration. 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.

In a word, “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”, as a result of Shanghai’s local exploration to implement the central document concerning ideological and political education in higher education, was then accepted by the central government and finally promoted to generalize nationwide in 2018.

Essence: What exactly is “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”?

Although there is a relatively clear reform path from “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” to “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”, no consensus on the definition of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” has been reached in the academic and practical circles. There are several representative definitions of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” as follows.

This first view holds that “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” is a type of courses, and compares it with “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng”, and thus emphasizes the relationship between “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” and “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng”. There are usually two situations in this argument: one is to clearly point out that “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” is a type of courses; the other is to not directly clarify its exact nature, but there is a certain relationship between “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” and “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng”. For example, the academic circle summarizes the relationship between “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” and “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” as “inclusion theory” and “supplementary theory”. Inclusion theory believes that “the relationship between the two is an inclusive relationship” (Zhao J.W., 2018), that means that “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” is include in “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”. Supplementary theory believes that the system of “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” always has its boundaries, which needs to be supplemented by “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”. (Qiu R.F., 2018) Both regard “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” as a concept homogenous with “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng”. At the beginning of the exploration of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”, colleges and universities in Shanghai had launched a series of branded courses such as “Strategy of Great Powers”, and the practice of “transforming ‘Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng’ into adding or opening a few more political courses” (He Y. H., 2019) is an example of taking it as a type of course.

The second view holds that “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” just is a type of “education concept”. (Gao D. Y., Zong A. D., 2017; Min H., 2017; Han X. Z., 2019). It contains two different meanings: one is the concept of curriculum setting, and the other is the concept of ideological and political theory education. The former focuses on “Ke-Cheng (courses)”, emphasizing that “courses carry ideological and political theory education”; the latter focuses on “Si-Zheng (ideological and political theory)”, focusing on ideological and political theory education is embodied in courses”.

The third is view holds that “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” is a type of method for “ideological and political theory education”. Some scholars (He Y. H., 2019) believe that “it is correct to regard ‘Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng’ as a ‘education concept’, but it may be problematic if it is only regarded as an education concept”, it is also a type of educational methods for “Ideological and political theory education” with scientific education concept. Here, the method is the core essence of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”. Another scholar (Liu C. G., 2018) believes that “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” focuses on an educational method, compared with specialized ideological and political theory courses, “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” itself means using a more flexible educational method to carry out ideological and political theory education.

The fourth view holds that “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” is one type of teaching system. Different from the “course type theory” that regards “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” as a type of courses, the “teaching system theory” believes that “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” means the integration of the whole curriculum (all types of course) rather than the single setting of a certain type of course and it is a teaching system containing the goals of ideological and political theory education. (He H., 2017) The teaching system is based on its curriculum system, covering all courses in colleges and universities—including ideological and political theory courses, comprehensive literacy courses, and specialty-based courses in various departments. In addition to the curriculum system, the teaching system of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” also includes corresponding educational plans or training programs.

The fifth view regards “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” as a type of the practical activities. “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” can be interpreted as the ideological and political theory education practice activities carried out by specialty-based courses and general courses, or the educational practice activities that embody ideological and political theory education into in specialty-based courses and general courses. (Zhao J. W., 2019)

The sixth view is the “multiple attributes theory”. This view holds that “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” has the above two and more attributes at the same time. Some scholars believe that “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” is not only a concept of ideological and political theory education, but also a method of it. (He Y. H., 2019) Some scholars believe that it is a new type of educational concepts and practical activities in the whole process of teaching activities based on the whole curriculum. (He H., 2017) The former refers to concept and method, while the latter refers to the triple attributes of concept, method and practice, both of which are typical “multiple attributes theory”.

To sum up, it reveals the attributes of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” from different perspectives to regard “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” as one type of educational concepts, ideological and political theory education methods, or teaching systems, or practical activities, but it is misreading to treat it as a type of courses. It is often said in academic circles that “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” and “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” should go in the same direction and form a synergistic effect. Although “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” means “ideological and political theory courses”, “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” cannot be regarded equivalently as “various courses”. “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” is a beneficial exploration and measure that strives to achieve the unity of teaching knowledge and cultivating talents in the university education process, and ultimately points to the fundamental task of cultivating morality and cultivating people. It is not only the presentation of one new educational concept, but also an educational method for the whole

teaching process including ideological and political theory education, and it is also a type of teaching systems and educational practice activities.

Boundary: Which Courses Require “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”?

“Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” should be embodied in all courses, that is, to make all courses have both the realization conditions and content requirements of teaching knowledge and cultivating morality. In terms of presentation form, explicit and implicit educations should be integrated organically, and ideological and political theory education shall run through the whole process of higher education. In terms of the college curriculum types, not only comprehensive literacy courses but also specialty-based courses require “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”. The ideological and political theory course, as a key type of course in the comprehensive literacy courses that focuses on ideological and political education, is often listed separately. In Chinese Academic circle, it usually refers to ideological and political theory courses, comprehensive literacy courses and specialty-based courses as the trinity curriculum system of ideological and political theory education. The “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” of the three types of courses often show different role expectations and implementation priorities.

“Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” must be embodied in Non-ideological and political theory courses

Non-ideological and political theory courses include comprehensive literacy courses and specialty-based courses. Comprehensive literacy courses are mainly used as the implementation carrier of general education. One of the reasons why comprehensive literacy courses must include “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” is that they have interoperability with ideological and political theory education in content. Some scholars have pointed out that the content of general education can be divided into broad and narrow senses. The general education in the broad sense includes all contents except specialty-based courses, and can divide into formal courses and implicit courses. The former can be divided into common compulsory courses and narrow general education courses. (Pang H. S., 2007) In this sense, the ideological and political theory courses, as one of the components of the common compulsory course, themselves have no differences with the general education courses. The second reason is that general education courses have the same ideological purpose as ideological and political theory education. The basic spirit of comprehensive literacy courses or general education courses is to cultivate the whole person, that is, a person with lofty vision, accommodating knowledge, liberal spirit and beautiful emotion. It is the part of the education as a member of the human race and as a citizen that the student receives in the whole process of education. (Yang C. M., 2004) It is similar to the goal and appeal of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”, that is, they both pursue “the whole person” education, and then they seek to “become talents” education, and finally achieve to shape “a perfect man”.

Specialty-based courses are usually divided into philosophy & social science courses and natural science courses. The courses of philosophy & social sciences aim to reveal the various facts, internal structures and development laws of human social life, and study the basic and fundamental issues related to human development and social development. (Shi L. Y., 2018) They have a certain color of socialist ideology, so they put more emphasis on the awareness to hold the bottom line (Wan L. Y., Yao Y. Z., 2018), that is, the socialist ideology inherent in this type of curriculum is further highlighted and deepened in the process of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”, especially when it involves the courses of western thoughts. It is even more necessary to strengthen the standpoint, viewpoint and method of Marxism, to insist on

self-confidence in the road, theory, system and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Natural science courses can be described as the courses with the least obvious ideology among all courses, they can also play an important role in cultivating the whole person. The focus of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” in natural science courses lies in the scientific thinking that reflects the principles of Marxist philosophy, the scientific spirit of exploring science and pursuing truth, the great feeling of loving the motherland and serving the people, and the scientific ethics of using science to benefit mankind rather than destroy mankind. (Cheng G. Y., 2018) Fully exploiting the ideological and political elements of natural science courses and giving full play to the educating role of natural science courses are not “icing on the cake” for the function of cultivating talents. The two must be placed in an equally important position and either cannot be neglected. Without clear value guidance, education will only slip into a tool for skills training and personal interests; education without values is likely to cultivate anti-educational and anti-human “talents”. (Cui Y. L., Chen S. Y., 2017)

Ideological and political theory courses need more “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”

For a long time, the academic circles have often placed “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” and “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” in the same position. One of the results is the misunderstanding that “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” is only for comprehensive literacy courses and specialty-based courses. In fact, as an educational concept rather than a type of courses, the scope of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” is not limited to the non-ideological and political theory courses, but also the “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” itself. Like other various courses, “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” are specific courses that implement the concept of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” and give full play to the function of morality and cultivating the whole person. (Han X. Z., 2019)

There are two reasons why the ideological and political theory courses need more “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”. Firstly, it depends on the special status occupied by the ideological and political theory courses themselves. The special status of “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” is reflected in the fact that it is an irreplaceable key course for cultivating morality and cultivating the whole person, which is related to solving the fundamental issues of who to train, how to train them, and for whom to train them. (Tang J. L., Li S. C., 2019) Secondly, as mentioned above, the current teaching of “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” faces practical difficulties. The content of this type of courses is relatively outdated, and the absorption and elaboration of new ideas, new concepts and new propositions are not in place; the form of course teaching is too monotonous and the understanding and application of new media, new methods and new means are insufficient; the enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of teachers are not high enough.

Therefore, it is necessary to vigorously strengthen the construction of “course groups” of “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng”. On the one hand, in accordance with the construction concept and requirements of “Da-Si-Zheng (big ideology and politics)”, we should highlight the leading and guiding role of Marxist theoretical disciplines, and strengthen their support force for the construction of “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng”. On the other hand, we should actively explore the integration of “Si-Zheng Ke-Cheng” and philosophy & social science courses especially philosophy, political science, economics, law, ethics and other disciplines closely related to the four main ideological and political theory courses. In addition, it is also an important measure that cannot be ignored to effectively improve the teaching ability and teaching quality of ideological and political theory teachers.

Conclusion

As a rising reform in Chinese higher education in the New Era, “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” is to establish a comprehensive three-dimensional system of ideological and political theory education with all staff, whole process and all courses involved in.

It originated from Shanghai in 2014 and then promoted from local practice and exploration to a national strategic deployment in 2018. The academic circles have different understandings about the concept of “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” from different perspectives. It is regarded as one type of educational concepts, or ideological and political theory education methods, or teaching systems, or practical activities, but it is misreading to treat it as a type of courses. In fact, it is not only the presentation of one new educational concept, but also an educational method for the whole teaching process including ideological and political theory education, and it is also a type of teaching systems and educational practice activities.

In the teaching practice of higher education, “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” must be embodied in Non-ideological and political theory courses on the one hand. In other words, both comprehensive literacy courses and specialty-based courses should carry ideological and political education. On the other hand, ideological and political theory courses themselves, which have faced a great deal of practical difficulties, also need more “Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng”.

“Ke-Cheng Si-Zheng” enjoys clear historical background, urgent demand, firm policy support, and educators’ broad acceptance. With more and more attention by the officials, scholars and practitioners, it will have great development and will promote the ideological and political education to a new level.

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