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From comprehension to communication: bringing Ideological and Political Theory courses to life—reflections on *How to Explain the "Principles" in Ideological and Political Theory Courses*

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Abstract. *How to Explain the "Principles" in Ideological and Political Theory Courses* provides a profound exposition of the essence of Ideological and Political Theory (IPT) courses and explores their practical implementation. As a matter of fundamental national importance, the essence of IPT courses lies in reasoning—that is, using young people's concerns, the needs of the nation, and the transformations of the times as entry points to integrate academic theory, moral reasoning, and philosophical insight. Centered on the question of how to effectively explain the principles embodied in IPT courses, the book develops a methodological framework that progresses from presenting principles accurately to presenting them vividly, with the aim of unifying theoretical rigor and pedagogical appeal. This requires IPT courses to embody both a firm political orientation and intellectual attractiveness, making abstract principles understandable and emotionally compelling through approaches such as narrative-based teaching. The construction of a discourse system for IPT courses bears directly on young people's values and beliefs, the fulfillment of the fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education, and the cultivation of a new generation capable of shouldering the historic task of national rejuvenation.

Keywords: Ideological and Political Theory courses, reasoning, discourse system, fostering virtue through education

1. Introduction

Ideological and political education is fundamentally an education of human beings, addressing the essential questions of whom to cultivate, how to cultivate them, and for whom they should be cultivated. As the primary channel of ideological and political education, Ideological and Political Theory (IPT) courses shoulder the important mission of helping students "fasten the first button of life correctly" and fulfilling the fundamental educational task of fostering virtue through education. In the context of building China into a strong nation, talent constitutes a core strategic resource. To participate in the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, individuals must first possess a sound political foundation and remain firmly committed to the socialist path.

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Political orientation is the defining characteristic of ideological and political education, while the cultivation of politically competent talent depends on systematic ideological and political education, which requires sustained efforts through the integrated development of IPT education across primary, secondary, and higher education.

Against this backdrop, how to cultivate qualified builders and reliable successors for the cause of socialism through IPT courses has become a defining issue that contemporary ideological and political education must confront. The educational effectiveness of IPT courses is closely related to their ability to understand and respond to students' characteristics and the demands of the times. Xi Jinping observed that "Chinese youth in the new era are more confident, self-reliant, and endowed with a stronger spirit of critical thinking" [1]. In light of these characteristics, together with the realities of an age marked by an explosion of information and increasingly diverse values, IPT courses must uphold their essential function of reasoning. Such reasoning should not remain a one-way transmission of abstract theory but should instead be transformed into concrete and relatable narratives that resonate with students' lived experiences. By conveying faith through faith, inspiring commitment through genuine conviction, and shaping character through personal example, IPT courses can truly bring their principles to life.

To further address this challenge, Jianjun Liu and Ji Qiu argue that the essence of IPT courses lies in reasoning. They maintain that educators in the new era must devote sustained efforts to explaining principles accurately, comprehensively, clearly, concretely, profoundly, thoroughly, and vividly, ultimately achieving the educational goals of communicating with students' hearts, enlightening their minds, nurturing their character, and inspiring their aspirations. These ideas are systematically presented in their co-authored book *How to Explain the "Principles" in Ideological and Political Theory Courses*. Drawing on the teaching experience accumulated by university IPT educators over many years, the book explores innovative approaches to reforming IPT courses in the new era and promotes the continued development of ideological and political education. Centered on the theme of explaining the principles of IPT courses effectively, the book follows the progression from internalizing truth to communicating principles in the classroom. It calls upon IPT educators to master effective pedagogical methods, strengthen their academic foundation, and elevate their intellectual and moral cultivation, thereby guiding students to internalize external principles as personal convictions and translate them into concrete actions. In this way, IPT courses can genuinely come alive. Moving beyond the mere summarization of teaching experience toward pedagogical innovation, *How to Explain the "Principles" in Ideological and Political Theory Courses* presents educational insights whose significance transcends time and offers substantial value for both IPT educators and pre-service teachers.

2. Grounded in principles: constructing the discourse system of Ideological and Political Theory courses

2.1. The essence of Ideological and Political Theory courses lies in reasoning

The emergence of Ideological and Political Theory (IPT) courses represents the Sinicization and adaptation of Marxism to the Chinese context within the field of education, embodying a human-centered educational philosophy. Specifically, both the theoretical interpretation and pedagogical reflection inherent in IPT courses naturally reflect the educational logic that "man makes his own life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness" [2]. Through the objective activity of teaching IPT courses, instructors convey beliefs, moral character, and wisdom to students, guiding them to develop a sound worldview, outlook on life, and value system through subtle yet profound moral cultivation, while maintaining a firm commitment to the socialist

ideology. Under this educational logic, the development of IPT courses is inherently progressive. Through continuous reflection and refinement, they steadily evolve toward approaches that are more responsive to students' needs and better equipped to contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This evolution is inseparable from the essential nature of IPT courses and reflects the demands of the new era regarding what should be taught, how it should be taught, the professional competencies that IPT educators should possess, and how they should continually elevate their own intellectual and moral cultivation.

Against this backdrop, *How to Explain the "Principles" in Ideological and Political Theory Courses* argues that IPT courses must not remain at the superficial level of transmitting knowledge from one individual to another. Instead, "the essence of ideological and political theory courses lies in reasoning" [3]; they are "politics courses that explain politics through academic reasoning" [4]. What, then, are the "principles" that IPT courses are expected to explain? In Chinese, *li* (理) denotes rationality grounded in objective laws, while *dao* (道) signifies purposefulness and normative orientation. Together, *daoli* (道理), or "principles", refers to the essential nature and underlying laws governing phenomena—objective truths that exist independently of human will, such as the historical cycle of political development and the laws governing the Communist Party of China's governance. The inclusion of the act of "explaining" in the concept of "reasoning" underscores that IPT courses are neither purely political education nor abstract theoretical instruction. Rather, they are courses characterized by constructive interaction between teachers and students and by the integration of rational analysis with ideological guidance. An excellent IPT course is, in essence, an effective exercise in reasoning. Educators must first internalize both *dao* and *li* before they can communicate them persuasively. Building upon an understanding of students' characteristics, they should address contemporary students' questions concerning ideals and reality, the relationship between individual aspirations and collective responsibilities, and the connections between the nation and the wider world. In doing so, they should reconcile theoretical doctrines with practical issues, clearly explain the principles underlying China's development path, governance model, institutional foundations, theoretical framework, and national aspirations, and ultimately transform the traditional model of "teachers explaining while students listening" into one in which students actively articulate ideas and teachers engage in continuous reflection, thereby enhancing the educational effectiveness of IPT courses.

2.2. Comprehensively understanding the connotations of "reasoning"

How to Explain the "Principles" in Ideological and Political Theory Courses emphasizes that the principles communicated in IPT courses are neither abstract nor superficial. Rather, they should be firmly grounded in five interrelated dimensions—rationality, thought, objective laws, politics, and moral cultivation. By refining the discourse system along these dimensions, IPT courses can demonstrate their political orientation, theoretical depth, and disciplinary richness, ultimately achieving the educational goals of convincing students through reason and inspiring them through genuine emotional engagement.

First, political orientation constitutes the defining characteristic of IPT courses [5], which means that the discourse system of IPT courses must be grounded in rationality, objective laws, and politics. Only value guidance supported by sound reasoning and compelling evidence can genuinely resonate with students. Accordingly, IPT courses should explain the fundamental laws governing social development, the Party's advanced theories, and its historical course of struggle on the basis of rational analysis and objective principles. Such narratives are not mere compilations of historical facts nor simple appeals to patriotic sentiment. Rather, they guide students to understand the logical progression of "what it is", "why it is", and "how it should be addressed", allowing rationality to guide emotion and thereby enabling ideological and political education to reach students intellectually, emotionally, and behaviorally. Moreover, the rationality and

objective laws discussed in IPT courses are intrinsically rooted in the socialist framework. As such, they naturally strengthen students' identification with the nation and facilitate the progression from explaining rationality and objective laws to cultivating political understanding.

Second, intellectual depth is the source of the distinctive appeal of IPT courses, making thought and moral cultivation the core components of their discourse system. As the book observes, "thought is the soul of knowledge" [4]. To "teach thought" requires instructors to build upon the Marxist principles embedded in the curriculum, revealing the internal logic, methodological foundations, and contemporary significance of socialist theories. In this way, students are guided to appreciate the power of truth and to acquire the intellectual tools needed to understand and transform the world. The authors further emphasize that the ultimate objective of reasoning in IPT courses is to cultivate students' moral convictions and spiritual character [4]. Teaching thought ultimately serves the broader purpose of teaching students how to conduct themselves as responsible members of society. It helps them reflect upon the fundamental questions of "Who are we?", "Where do we come from?", and "Where are we going?", thereby fostering a sense of national identity and social responsibility. This process enables students to move from detached observers to active participants in national development, strengthening the educational mission of IPT courses. By connecting the teaching of ideas with the cultivation of character, the intellectual dimension of IPT courses integrates knowledge acquisition, competency development, and value formation into a coherent whole, endowing these courses with the power to resonate deeply with students' minds and hearts.

3. Student-centered approaches: improving the pedagogy of Ideological and Political Theory courses

If the essence of Ideological and Political Theory (IPT) courses lies in reasoning, how can these profound and far-reaching principles be effectively communicated and genuinely internalized by students? *How to Explain the "Principles" in Ideological and Political Theory Courses* argues that explaining the principles of IPT courses is not a matter of personal preference or improvisation. Rather, it requires a systematic methodology encompassing seven interrelated dimensions: explaining principles accurately, comprehensively, clearly, concretely, profoundly, thoroughly, and vividly. Among these, *accurately* constitutes the starting point; *comprehensively*, *clearly*, and *concretely* represent the basic requirements; *profoundly* and *thoroughly* signify more advanced objectives; while *vividly* represents the highest level of pedagogical achievement. These seven requirements are closely interconnected and embody the integration of three dimensions of IPT teaching: pedagogical skills (*shu*), academic scholarship (*xue*), and educational philosophy (*dao*).

3.1. Explaining the principles of IPT courses through the "four explanations"

First, accuracy serves as the prerequisite for strengthening IPT educators' capacity to cultivate students' moral character and political conviction. *How to Explain the "Principles" in Ideological and Political Theory Courses* emphasizes that explaining principles accurately means presenting them with precision—without factual errors or ideological distortion [4]. This requires IPT educators to maintain a firm political stance, develop a profound understanding of the fundamental principles of Marxism and the Party's innovative theoretical achievements, clarify the logical relationships among key concepts, comprehend the dialectical connections between different theoretical frameworks, and establish a precise understanding of what these principles actually entail. On this basis, educators must thoroughly master the teaching materials while identifying the convergence between contemporary social developments and students' lived realities, thereby laying a solid foundation for effectively telling China's stories. Although accuracy may appear straightforward,

it in fact places rigorous demands on teachers' theoretical competence and political literacy. An authentic IPT classroom leaves no room for hesitation or uncertainty. As the principal facilitator of learning, the teacher must fully understand and skillfully apply every concept and theoretical proposition. This is the first step toward earning students' trust, establishing authority in the classroom, and ultimately fulfilling the fundamental educational mission of fostering virtue through education.

Second, comprehensiveness, clarity, and concreteness form the foundation for helping students establish a coherent cognitive framework. As the book points out, IPT education is a systematic undertaking, and improving its quality requires adherence to systems thinking through coordinated and comprehensive advancement [4]. Accordingly, explaining principles comprehensively entails constructing an integrated curriculum grounded in a holistic and dialectical perspective, making effective use of thematic teaching resources, and presenting both the conceptual content and historical development of key principles through the integration of teaching, learning, and assessment. Explaining principles clearly requires teachers to present ideas with logical coherence and linguistic accessibility, enabling students to analyze theoretical concepts and internalize their significance through plain and understandable language. Explaining principles concretely emphasizes seeking truth from facts by integrating theory with practice, thereby strengthening the problem-oriented and targeted nature of classroom instruction. In essence, effective teaching should extend beyond the mere transmission of knowledge to the construction of a multidimensional world of meaning that students can understand, experience, and trust. Systematic explanation establishes students' cognitive framework; clear explanation removes barriers to understanding; and practical explanation connects theory with the realities of contemporary society. Only by mastering these essential pedagogical competencies can educators genuinely help students grasp the overall structure of theoretical knowledge, appreciate the intellectual appeal of IPT courses, and naturally develop value identification with the principles being taught.

3.2. Realizing the educational value of IPT courses through the "three explanations"

Enabling students to *know* is only the foundational objective of IPT courses; their ultimate purpose is to guide students toward *understanding* and *embracing* the principles they learn. To ensure that these principles genuinely shape students' thinking and actions, educators must go beyond basic explanation by presenting them profoundly, thoroughly, and vividly. Students should come to understand not only what the principles are, but also why they take their present form, why they deserve to be understood, and why they should be put into practice in everyday life. Such an approach helps reconcile the relationship between theoretical doctrines and practical problems, enabling students to move from passive recipients of theory to active communicators and practitioners. Ultimately, IPT courses can achieve their educational goals of "communicating with students' hearts, enlightening their minds, nurturing their character, and inspiring their aspirations" [4].

First, pursuing profound and thorough explanation enhances the persuasive and guiding power of IPT courses. The misconception of "reducing the course to simple political propaganda" [6] is closely related to ineffective teaching methods. Some instructors merely recite theoretical content from textbooks without enabling students to understand why particular principles are valid or how theory informs practice. Therefore, explaining principles profoundly requires educators to examine the scientific laws and theoretical foundations upon which these principles are based [4], revealing the worldview and methodology embedded within them. In doing so, students are guided through a progressive cognitive journey from understanding *what* something is, to *why* it is so, and ultimately *how* it should be applied in practice.

Explaining principles thoroughly represents the highest level of theoretical exposition [4]. IPT courses encompass not only broad themes such as Marxism and the correct worldview, outlook on life, and values, but also practical wisdom concerning personal growth, ethical conduct, and everyday life. Thorough explanation

therefore requires a problem-oriented approach that integrates grand theoretical principles with the practical concerns of daily living, broadens students' comparative perspectives, and effectively tells China's stories. In terms of instructional design, it seeks to unite theoretical rigor with emotional warmth, intellectual depth with rich knowledge, and conceptual analysis with compelling case studies. By directly addressing students' ideological questions, it overcomes the limitations of rigid reasoning, superficial generalization, and disconnection from reality, enabling comprehensive theoretical explanations to respond effectively to contemporary social challenges.

Second, vivid explanation represents the highest pedagogical ideal, activating the living vitality and emotional appeal of the principles taught in IPT courses. As the book argues, explaining principles vividly is the ultimate stage of effective IPT instruction and the key to transforming these courses from intellectually inaccessible discourse into subtle yet deeply influential moral education [4]. Regardless of whether they teach in primary schools, secondary schools, or universities, IPT educators must first inspire themselves. Only teachers who are genuinely passionate can ignite students' curiosity and establish the emotional foundation necessary for vivid instruction.

At the same time, vivid explanation emphasizes effective communication. Teachers should tailor their instruction to students' characteristics, allowing principles to come alive through engaging narratives, respectful dialogue, and thoughtful critical discussion. Future IPT classrooms should no longer be spaces dominated by one-way theoretical lecturing but should instead become dialogical environments that integrate cognition, emotion, and moral commitment. To achieve this, educators must understand their students' learning habits and make full use of new educational resources, innovative pedagogical approaches, and emerging technologies. By presenting China's stories within the context of the profound transformations unseen in the world for a century in ways that resonate with students, teachers can encourage reflection on questions such as "What is happening in today's world?" and "How should we respond?" Through this process, students are guided to recognize their own responsibilities, construct a meaningful sense of identity, and develop informed responses to the questions facing both their generation and their era. In this way, IPT courses can truly realize their educational mission of communicating with students' hearts, enlightening their minds, nurturing their character, and inspiring their aspirations [4].

4. Guided by reflection: strengthening the value-oriented function of Ideological and Political Theory courses

Ideological and Political Theory (IPT) courses are not merely knowledge-based classes devoted to transmitting correct political theories and values. Rather, they are dynamic, collaborative spaces jointly constructed by teachers and students, where the pressing questions of the times intersect with the realities of everyday life. At their core, outstanding IPT courses are those that explain principles effectively by striking an appropriate balance among students' concerns, the demands of the times, and the needs of the nation. They must answer two fundamental questions: What principles should IPT courses communicate, and what kind of reasoning can genuinely resonate with students? This distinctive nature endows IPT courses with their status as a matter of fundamental national importance. By cultivating students through the integration of reason and emotion, IPT courses strengthen their sense of national identity and belonging while contributing to the broader goal of building China into a strong modern socialist country.

First, the principles taught in IPT courses are not abstract doctrines detached from reality. Rather, they are defined jointly by young people's concerns, the nation's needs, and the transformations of the times, serving as responses to pressing contemporary issues. In the digital and intelligent era, online media have fundamentally

reshaped relationships between individuals, communities, and the wider world. While providing unprecedented opportunities for personal expression, they have also challenged the traditional foundations of collective identity. Influenced by the overwhelming flow of complex and often conflicting information, adolescents whose values are still developing can easily lose their sense of self and become swayed by external influences. Consequently, answering the questions "Who am I?", "What should I do?", and "Where should I go?" is not merely an individual concern but also an essential requirement for realizing the Chinese Dream and fulfilling the nation's expectations for its younger generation. IPT courses must therefore provide clear and compelling explanations that address the fundamental questions of "Where should young people devote their energy? To whom should they dedicate their feelings? And how should they invest both their emotions and their commitment?" [4]. In doing so, they help young people establish their place within the cause of national rejuvenation, strengthen their convictions amid the increasingly blurred boundaries between the virtual and the real, and fully demonstrate the significance of this matter of fundamental national importance.

Second, the principles conveyed in IPT courses are not empty abstractions but living truths shaped by the past, the present, and the future. They derive their vitality from the historical process of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In response to the identity confusion arising from the diffusion of Western governance models and value systems, IPT courses should effectively explain Marxism by reviewing China's historical path, comparing it with the developmental trajectories of other countries, and looking ahead to the nation's future. Through this process, students are better equipped to respond to the questions facing China, the world, the people, the present era, and their own generation. Indeed, whether one speaks of "principles" (*daoli*) or "academic reasoning" (*xueli*), their persuasive power ultimately stems from great social practice. IPT courses originate from practice and ultimately return to practice. Accordingly, the principles they teach must remain firmly rooted in real-world experience, thereby enhancing the courses' persuasive power and emotional appeal while contributing to the construction of a modern socialist country and demonstrating the contemporary significance of this matter of fundamental national importance.

Third, IPT courses should be both intellectually enriching and engaging in presentation so as to strengthen their value-guiding function. In the *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Karl Marx observed: "Theory becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses", and "theory is capable of gripping the masses only when it is radical" [2]. Emotional resonance is an indispensable bridge through which theory reaches the human heart. The distinctive appeal of IPT education therefore depends upon emotionally engaging narratives that employ appropriate expressive techniques and vivid supporting materials to transform abstract ideas into concrete experiences, animate theoretical concepts, bring history to life, and render profound philosophical insights accessible to students. As the concrete embodiment of theoretical depth, narrative pedagogy creates meaningful learning contexts in which abstract principles are embedded within vivid historical episodes, inspiring role models, and thoughtful analyses of real-world issues. By appealing to students' intuitive perceptions, it evokes empathy, stimulates imagination, and establishes meaningful connections between theoretical principles and the lived experiences of both teachers and students. In this way, students are guided to reflect critically on the relationships between the individual and society and between the self and the world, thereby fully realizing the value-guiding function of IPT courses.

5. Conclusion

The essence of ideological and political theory courses lies in reasoning, embodying the dual educational principles of convincing students through reason and inspiring them through emotion. Moving progressively

from explaining principles accurately to explaining them vividly, *How to Explain the "Principles" in Ideological and Political Theory Courses* consistently addresses the concerns of young people and the challenges of the present era. It calls upon IPT educators to combine rigorous theoretical scholarship with genuine emotional expression, integrate rational analysis with humanistic care, and become effective narrators capable of communicating the principles of IPT courses in compelling ways, thereby demonstrating the significance of this matter of fundamental national importance. Accordingly, IPT educators and pre-service teachers alike should take the book as an important guide, striving to achieve a genuine understanding of theoretical principles, develop firm conviction in them, and apply them effectively in educational practice. They should actively explore IPT classrooms that are both intellectually rigorous and engaging in presentation. Only in this way can the principles taught in IPT courses illuminate the growth and development of the younger generation through both intellectual depth and human warmth, while contributing to the continued advancement of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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