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Generative Artificial Intelligence in Ideological and Political Education: A Comparative Review of Chinese and International Scholarship (2023-2025)

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping higher education, offering opportunities and challenges for value-oriented teaching. In China, ideological and political theory courses (IPCs) serve both to transmit knowledge and foster civic responsibility, moral values, and national identity, making their integration with AI especially consequential. Drawing on peer-reviewed articles and policy documents from 2023-2025, this study synthesizes Chinese and international perspectives. Domestic research highlights value–policy frameworks, classroom innovation, and risk–governance models, but remains largely normative, unevenly attentive to regional differences, and limited in empirical validation. International scholarship emphasizes critical AI literacy, task-based pedagogy, democratic participation, and safeguards for fairness and transparency. These studies often use surveys and longitudinal analysis, yet remain Western-centric and insufficiently focused on equity in developing contexts. Comparative analysis reveals consensus on AI's potential to enhance personalization, interactivity, and immersion, while affirming teachers' indispensable role. Divergences persist in value orientation, methodological rigor, and governance priorities. This review contributes by bridging Chinese and international perspectives, identifying gaps, and outlining a research agenda on longitudinal designs, cross-cultural comparisons, teacher development, and governance innovation.

Keywords

Generative AI; ideological and political education; civic education; AI literacy; educational governance

1. Introduction

The rapid rise of generative AI—encompassing large language models, multimodal systems, and adaptive platforms—is reshaping higher education. While AI enhances personalization and efficiency, its integration into value-oriented curricula such as civic education in the West and ideological and political theory courses (IPCs) in China raises ethical, ideological, and governance concerns. IPCs carry a dual mission: transmitting knowledge and fostering socialist core values, national identity, and virtue cultivation. Policy initiatives such as the Education Digitalization Action Plan and smart campus programs have made IPCs a key arena for AI-enhanced education. Chinese scholarship emphasizes personalized content, immersive environments, and governance models, but remains largely

normative, with limited empirical validation. International research stresses critical AI literacy, task-based pedagogy, and safeguards, using stronger empirical designs but focusing on Western contexts. This article builds comparative dialogue, synthesizes findings, identifies convergences and gaps, and proposes a future agenda spanning methodological, theoretical, and practical dimensions.

2. Domestic Scholarship: A Critical Review of Recent Research

Chinese scholarship on generative AI in IPCs has expanded rapidly in recent years. Four themes dominate the literature: value–policy orientation, mechanism–pathway models, classroom paradigm reconstruction, and risk–governance frameworks. While these studies provide valuable theoretical and policy insights, they remain largely normative, insufficiently validated by empirical evidence, and inattentive to institutional variation.

2.1 Value–Policy Orientation

A substantial body of research stresses that AI in IPCs must be steered by value rationality rather than technological rationality. National policy frameworks such as the "Education Digitalization Action Plan and the Guidelines for Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education" embed ideological imperatives into AI adoption (Yan, 2025; Li, 2025). These contributions clarify how values can be institutionalized, thereby safeguarding ideological security in the digital age. However, this line of research often remains principle-driven, with limited attention to how value rationality can be operationalized in practice—for example, through embedding values in algorithmic design, curating annotated ideological corpora, or developing measurable indicators of value alignment. Moreover, it tends to assume uniform institutional capacity, overlooking disparities between well-resourced universities and local colleges. Future scholarship will need to translate value frameworks into specific classroom practices and design scalable, context-sensitive models that can adapt to diverse institutional environments.

2.2 Mechanism–Pathway Models

Another stream investigates how AI can be integrated across the instructional cycle. Scholars commonly propose a four-stage process that includes student profiling, personalized delivery, immersive learning environments, and dynamic evaluation (Wang, Zhang, & Lan, 2025; Luo, 2025). The key contribution lies in the conceptualization of full-cycle integration, which moves beyond fragmented or isolated applications and envisions AI as embedded throughout the teaching process. Yet such models frequently display technocentric bias, implicitly assuming that technology adoption will automatically yield better outcomes. Empirical classroom trials are scarce, and assumptions of universal digital readiness undermine generalizability. More robust evidence is required, ideally through a combination of surveys, controlled experiments, and classroom observations, to assess feasibility in different types of institutions.

2.3 Classroom Paradigm Reconstruction

A third cluster of studies explores how AI reshapes pedagogical paradigms. Approaches based on narrative, task, role, and dialogue suggest that immersive simulations and AI-mediated interaction can heighten engagement and improve knowledge transfer (Wang et al., 2025). These works highlight AI's capacity to re-energize classroom participation and mitigate challenges such as student disengagement. At the same time, concerns have been raised that overdependence on virtual environments may weaken real-world civic participation and diminish the human dimension of classroom interaction (Li, 2025). Engagement gains achieved through simulation could come at the expense of authentic practice. A more balanced model that combines digital immersion with offline civic activity may be necessary to ensure that technological innovation strengthens, rather than substitutes for, lived social practice.

2.4 Risk–Governance Frameworks

Governance is another prominent theme in domestic scholarship. Researchers typically identify four categories of risk: value dilution, algorithmic bias, data security, and teacher–student role dislocation (Li, 2025; Yan, 2025). To address these concerns, proposals frequently advocate a risk identification–dynamic monitoring–tiered response system that includes data governance, algorithm audits, and content oversight (Wang et al., 2025). These

frameworks provide a holistic vision that moves beyond fragmented approaches. Yet many of them remain normative extrapolations, formulated without empirical validation in real-world misuse scenarios. They often privilege state and institutional authority while giving less attention to teachers and students as active participants in governance. Furthermore, domestic debates rarely engage with international discussions on fairness, transparency, and participatory models (U.S. Department of Education, 2023; Picasso et al., 2024). Moving forward, more case-based and comparative research is needed to test governance strategies in varied contexts and to explore transitions from control-oriented systems toward more collaborative models that incorporate multiple stakeholders.

2.5 Synthesis

Domestic research provides an important foundation by articulating value imperatives, conceptualizing instructional pathways, experimenting with classroom paradigms, and designing governance frameworks. Nevertheless, the literature remains constrained by normative dominance, insufficient empirical validation, and limited cross-cultural engagement. Future progress will require not only empirical grounding but also greater integration of Chinese experiences into global debates, thereby situating domestic scholarship within broader conversations about the role of AI in education.

3. International Scholarship: Thematic Review and Critical Analysis

International research on generative AI in civic and moral education has expanded considerably since 2023. Compared with the policy-driven and normative orientation of Chinese studies, international scholarship tends to be more empirical, pluralistic, and critical. Four major themes emerge: policy and governance, AI/data literacies, classroom paradigm innovation, and learning outcomes with pedagogy.

3.1 Policy and Governance

Policy-level studies emphasize institutional safeguards designed to align AI adoption with public values. The U.S. Department of Education (2023), for instance, highlights principles of privacy, fairness, transparency, and accountability, calling for multi-level coordination across federal, state, and institutional actors. These works contribute by offering governance frameworks that help schools evaluate risks and adopt AI responsibly. However, such studies often remain normative and prescriptive, with little longitudinal evidence of implementation, and they may underestimate the difficulties faced by under-resourced institutions. For China, the lesson is that governance should not stop at central directives but be translated into concrete mechanisms at the institutional level, such as tool admission protocols, teacher–student usage guidelines, and accountability procedures.

3.2 AI/Data Literacies

Another central theme concerns AI and data literacy, widely regarded as critical to preparing students for responsible citizenship. Picasso, Gueorguieva, and Chen (2024) argue for integrating authentic, real-world tasks that enable students to recognize algorithmic bias, assess fairness, and reflect on ethical implications. The key contribution is the linkage of technical proficiency with civic responsibility, pushing AI literacy beyond functional competence. Yet most of these studies are based on small-scale pilot projects or case analyses, lacking longitudinal depth or cross-cultural validation. The implication for China is that IPCs should not only train students in the use of AI tools but also cultivate critical reflection on their social and political consequences, embedding such reflection into assessment and learning outcomes.

3.3 Classroom Paradigm Innovation

Sharples (2023) introduces the idea of "social generative AI," suggesting that AI should be viewed as a co-learning partner in dialogic education rather than as a passive tool. This perspective emphasizes AI's capacity to support collaborative inquiry through knowledge mapping, structured argumentation, and dialogic interaction, thus shifting the pedagogical focus from efficiency to collaboration. These contributions are conceptually significant, but empirical classroom testing remains limited, leaving questions about how such practices translate across contexts. For China, this work suggests the potential of using AI to facilitate debates, collaborative knowledge construction, and value clarification, positioning AI as an enabler of dialogue rather than as a substitute for human interaction.

3.4 Learning Outcomes and Pedagogical Strategies

Empirical studies in Europe provide evidence of how different pedagogical approaches shape students' engagement with AI. Petko, Zeller, Müller, and Rüth (2025) demonstrate that restrictive strategies, such as banning or limiting AI, have little educational impact, while "critical–productive" approaches—combining critical evaluation with creative application—significantly enhance students' critical thinking and responsible AI use. This research provides rare quantitative evidence linking pedagogy to measurable learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the findings are context-specific, drawn mainly from Switzerland and Germany, which are highly digitized educational systems. For China, the implication is that IPC pedagogy should move beyond prohibitionist models and design critical–productive tasks—such as AI-assisted essays, policy briefs, or structured debates on social issues—that foster both skill acquisition and value internalization.

3.5 Synthesis

International research advances the debate on AI in education by stressing governance safeguards, critical literacies, collaborative pedagogies, and empirical grounding. At the same time, it remains Western-centric, short on longitudinal data, and inattentive to equity issues in developing contexts. For China, these insights underscore the need to operationalize governance at the institutional level, embed critical AI literacy into IPC curricula, experiment with AI as a co-learning agent in dialogic classrooms, and adopt critical–productive pedagogies that link critique with creativity. By situating domestic experiences within these global discussions, Chinese scholarship can not only learn from but also contribute to the construction of a globally relevant framework for AI in civic and moral education.

4. Discussion and Implications

4.1 Convergences

Chinese and international scholarship converge on three central points. Both agree that AI is not value-neutral and requires ethical and pedagogical oversight (Li, 2025; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). There is also consensus that AI can enhance personalization, interactivity, and immersion, thereby enriching value-oriented learning (Wang et al., 2025; Sharples, 2023). Finally, both literatures emphasize the irreplaceable role of teachers in guiding value formation, providing emotional connection, and fostering critical reflection.

4.2 Divergences and Tensions

Despite these areas of consensus, significant divergences remain. In terms of value orientation, Chinese studies prioritize ideological security and national strategy (Yan, 2025), whereas international scholarship emphasizes pluralism, democratic participation, and civic responsibility (Picasso et al., 2024). Methodological differences are also evident: domestic research is primarily normative and policy-driven, while international work relies more heavily on empirical methods, including surveys, experiments, and longitudinal studies (Petko et al., 2025). Governance approaches diverge as well, with China favoring centralized, top-down models and international debates stressing multi-stakeholder participation and transparency. These differences reveal a deeper tension between AI as a guardian of unity and AI as a facilitator of diversity.

4.3 Research Gaps

Taken together, both bodies of literature reveal three notable gaps. Domestic research, though conceptually rich, lacks systematic empirical validation and often assumes institutional homogeneity. International scholarship, while empirically stronger, is geographically concentrated in Western contexts and insufficiently attentive to equity challenges in developing countries. Theoretical development also remains fragmented, as pedagogy, technology, and ethics are frequently addressed in isolation rather than as interdependent dimensions.

4.4 Theoretical Implications

The findings suggest opportunities for theoretical advancement. The Chinese concept of "bidirectional empowerment" could be extended into a broader framework of education–technology co-evolution, highlighting the dynamic interplay between technological and value rationalities. Integrating international perspectives on critical AI literacy

with China's emphasis on value alignment may yield hybrid models that balance reflective critique with ideological guidance. Further development of a human–AI collaborative paradigm would clarify the complementary roles of teachers and AI systems in co-producing knowledge, skills, and values.

4.5 Practical and Policy Implications

Practical and policy implications are equally pressing. Pedagogically, IPCs should transition from efficiency-driven applications to human–AI collaborative tasks, such as structured debates, governance simulations, and civic engagement projects that combine digital immersion with real-world practice. At the institutional level, universities need tiered governance mechanisms that include AI tool admission criteria, algorithm audits, and the development of value-annotated corpora aligned with cultural and ideological expectations. Teacher training programs should strengthen competencies in AI ethics, critical pedagogy, and reflective practice, enabling educators to act as both integrators of digital tools and custodians of value education. At the international level, China should participate more actively in global dialogues, sharing its governance-oriented experiences while also learning from global practices that emphasize fairness, transparency, and participatory governance.

5. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

5.1 Overall Assessment

This review synthesized domestic and international scholarship on generative AI in value-oriented education, focusing on IPCs in China. Domestic research has clarified value imperatives, instructional pathways, classroom paradigms, and governance frameworks, but remains normative and weakly supported by empirical evidence. International studies emphasize critical literacy, task-based pedagogy, democratic participation, and institutional safeguards, but remain Western-centric and inattentive to equity in developing contexts. Across both domains, convergence exists on AI's potential to enhance personalization, interactivity, and immersion, as well as on the centrality of teachers. Divergences persist in value orientation, methodological rigor, and governance approaches.

5.2 Future Research Agenda

Future inquiry should progress along three dimensions. Methodologically, research must move beyond normative reasoning through longitudinal, mixed-method, and comparative designs that capture AI's long-term influence on student values, critical thinking, and civic responsibility. Comparative studies should test international findings in China and examine how China's practices enrich global understanding. Theoretically, the concept of "bidirectional empowerment" can evolve into a co-evolution framework where technological and value rationalities interact. Hybrid models that integrate China's emphasis on value alignment with global perspectives on critical AI literacy may balance ideological guidance and reflective critique, while a human–AI collaborative paradigm can clarify complementary roles in knowledge and value formation. Practically, IPC pedagogy should employ AI-assisted debates, policy papers, and civic projects, supported by tiered governance, algorithm audits, shared corpora, regional equity measures, and teacher training focused on AI ethics and reflective pedagogy.

5.3 Outlook

Generative AI is unlikely to replace teachers but will increasingly act as a collaborative partner under value-oriented guidance. With stronger empirical foundations, refined theoretical models, and comprehensive governance systems, IPCs can evolve from instrumental assistance to genuine value-oriented empowerment. China's emphasis on governance, policy alignment, and ideological security provides distinctive contributions to global debates, while international practices in literacy, participation, and equity can enrich China's domestic reforms. Together, these perspectives point toward the construction of a globally relevant and context-sensitive framework for AI in civic and moral education—one that advances not only efficiency but also the deeper goals of value cultivation and civic responsibility.

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