
An Analysis of Pathways for Integrating Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture Education into the Ideological and Political Classes for College Students in Dongguan

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Abstract: This study investigates the current situation and optimization pathways for integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture (ETCC) into ideological and political classes (IPC) in universities and colleges in Dongguan, Guangdong Province. Using a questionnaire survey, 431 valid responses were collected from college students and analyzed through descriptive statistical methods (SPSS 25). The results show that students demonstrate a moderate level of knowledge about ETCC but relatively strong emotional identification and recognition of its educational value. The integration of ETCC into IPC has achieved preliminary effectiveness in enhancing students' cultural confidence, national identity, and moral awareness. However, several challenges remain, including fragmented teaching content, traditional teaching methods, and limited student autonomous learning motivation. Based on these findings, the study proposes several improvement pathways, including optimizing the content supply system, innovating teaching methods, strengthening the integration of school-local cultural resources, and improving teacher capability support. This study provides empirical evidence and practical suggestions for promoting the deeper integration of ETCC education into IPC in universities and colleges.

Keywords: Excellent traditional Chinese culture (ETCC); Ideological and political classes (IPC); College students; Teaching integration; Universities and colleges in Dongguan

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture (ETCC) into ideological and political classes (IPC) has become an important direction for educational reform in China. As the spiritual heritage of the Chinese nation, ETCC contains rich philosophical ideas, moral values, and humanistic spirits, which can help students understand the historical roots of socialist core values, strengthen their cultural identity, and enhance their sense of national responsibility. In the context of globalization and rapid social change, exploring effective ways to incorporate ETCC resources into IPC has therefore become a meaningful academic and practical issue.

This study, focusing on colleges and universities in Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, examines how ETCC is

currently integrated into IPC and how students perceive this integration. Through empirical investigation, this research explores students' cognitive understanding and attitudes toward ETCC, evaluates the current teaching practices and educational effects of ETCC integration in IPC, identifies the main problems and underlying causes, and finally puts forward the feasible pathway suggestions in the implementation process. This study not only enriches theoretical discussions on the relationship between ETCC and IPC, but also provides practical references for teaching reform and policy development in Dongguan universities and colleges.

2. Literature review

2.1. Education of ETCC

ETCC has long been regarded as an important foundation for moral education in China. Scholars generally agree that ETCC embodies the spiritual heritage and value system of the Chinese nation, including core ideas such as harmony, benevolence, righteousness, and respect for learning^[1,2]. These cultural elements provide rich ideological resources for cultivating students' moral character, cultural identity, and sense of social responsibility. In recent years, with the national emphasis on cultural confidence, research on ETCC education in universities and colleges has gradually increased. Many studies emphasize that integrating traditional cultural education into higher education can help students better understand the historical continuity of Chinese civilization, strengthen their cultural identity, and form correct values in the context of globalization and cultural diversity^[3,4]. At the same time, scholars have also pointed out that ETCC education should not remain at the level of simple knowledge transmission but should emphasize value interpretation, cultural experience, and contemporary transformation so that traditional cultural ideas can be meaningfully connected with modern social life and students' personal development^[5,6].

2.2. Integration of ETCC into IPE

With the promotion of ideological and political education (IPE) reform in China, especially after the concept of "curriculum ideological and political (CIP)" was proposed, the integration of ETCC into IPE has become an important research topic. Many scholars argue that ETCC and socialist core values share strong conceptual compatibility^[7,8], which makes ETCC a valuable resource for enriching IPE. Through the interpretation of classical texts, historical figures, and traditional virtues, IPC can provide students with deeper cultural foundations and historical perspectives for understanding contemporary social values. Meanwhile, research has also explored practical approaches for integration. Some studies highlight the construction of demonstration courses that combine traditional cultural content with IPE, allowing cultural elements to be embedded into specific teaching modules^[9,10,11]. Other scholars emphasize the importance of utilizing regional cultural resources—such as local folk traditions, historical heritage, and cultural symbols—to enhance students' emotional engagement and sense of identity^[12,13,14]. What is more, the integration of second-classroom activities, including cultural lectures, campus cultural festivals, and intangible cultural heritage experience programs, has been widely discussed as a way to expand learning beyond the classroom and improve students' experiential understanding of ETCC^[15]. Despite these explorations, some studies also point out practical difficulties, such as superficial integration, fragmented content design, insufficient teacher preparation, and limited evaluation mechanisms^[16,17].

2.3. IPC teaching reform in universities and colleges

In recent years, scholars have conducted extensive research on IPC teaching reform in universities and colleges in order to improve the effectiveness and attractiveness of IPE^[15,16]. Traditional lecture-centered teaching methods have been criticized for being overly theoretical and lacking interaction, which often results in limited student engagement. As a result, many researchers advocate for innovative teaching approaches, including problem-based learning, case analysis, blended learning, and digital teaching platforms^[18,19]. These reforms aim to make IPC more student-centered and more closely connected with real-life social issues. In addition, the concept of integrating classroom teaching with practical activities

has gained increasing attention. Universities and colleges are encouraged to combine theoretical instruction with social practice, cultural activities, and community engagement, enabling students to experience ideological and political values in real-life contexts. The use of digital media platforms and online learning environments has also been explored as a means of enhancing the accessibility and interactivity of IPC^[20]. Overall, these studies highlight the importance of improving teaching design, strengthening teacher professional development, and creating diversified evaluation mechanisms to enhance the overall quality of IPC in universities and colleges.

2.4. Research gap

Although existing research has provided valuable theoretical insights and practical suggestions, several limitations remain. First, from a methodological perspective, many studies rely primarily on theoretical discussions or case descriptions, while empirical research based on systematic data collection—such as large-scale questionnaires and interviews—remains relatively limited. As a result, some conclusions lack sufficient empirical evidence and detailed analysis of student perspectives. Second, most existing studies focus on the “supply side” of education, emphasizing how teachers and institutions design and implement the integration of ETCC into IPC. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the “demand side,” particularly students’ cognitive foundations, attitudes toward ETCC, learning experiences, and perceived learning outcomes. Since students are the central participants in the educational process, their perceptions and responses are crucial indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of integration strategies. Thus, further empirical research focusing on students’ perspectives is needed. Based on these considerations, this study focuses on college students in Dongguan universities and colleges and conducts empirical investigation to analyze their understanding of ETCC, their attitudes toward its integration into IPC, and their evaluation of current teaching practices. By examining these issues from the perspective of student experience, the study aims to provide more evidence-based insights for optimizing the integration of ETCC into IPC.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts an empirical research design to investigate the current status and optimization pathways of integrating ETCC into IPC in colleges and universities located in Dongguan City, Guangdong Province. The research framework follows a logical progression of current situation description, problem identification, cause analysis, and pathway optimization. First, the study examines students’ cognitive understanding, attitudes, and learning experiences related to ETCC integration through quantitative data collection. Second, statistical analysis is used to identify existing problems and weak links in teaching practice. Third, the underlying causes of these problems are explored by combining empirical findings with relevant theoretical perspectives in IPE and ETCC education. Finally, based on the analytical results, practical and feasible optimization pathways are proposed to enhance teaching effectiveness. This design ensures systematic analysis and strengthens the practical relevance of the research outcomes.

3.2. Research method

The study primarily employs the questionnaire survey method, which is suitable for collecting large-scale data efficiently and understanding students’ perceptions, attitudes, and evaluations within a relatively short period. The questionnaire consists of nine dimensions: 1) demographic information, 2) cognitive understanding of ETCC, 3) value identification, 4) perceived current status of classroom integration, 5) teaching methods and classroom experience, 6) learning outcomes and educational effectiveness, 7) learning engagement and autonomous learning tendencies, 8) perceived integration barriers, and 9) students’ preferred integration approaches along with open-ended suggestions. Most items were measured using a five-point Likert scale to ensure comparability and statistical operability.

3.3. Participants

The participants of this study were full-time college students enrolled in higher education institutions in Dongguan city, including both comprehensive universities and higher vocational colleges. The survey was administered online and distributed through student communication networks across multiple institutions to ensure broad participation. A total of questionnaires were collected, among which 431 valid responses were retained after data screening (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 431)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	260	60.32%
	Female	171	39.68%
Grade Level	Freshman	145	33.64%
	Sophomore	147	34.11%
	Junior	107	24.83%
	Senior	25	5.80%
	Postgraduate	7	1.62%
	Major Category	Science & Engineering	203
	Humanities, History, Philosophy	108	25.06%
	Economics & Management	43	9.98%
	Arts & Sports	32	7.42%
	Teacher Education	25	5.80%
	Others	20	4.64%
University Type	Comprehensive University	362	83.99%
	Higher Vocational College	68	15.78%
	Others	1	0.23%
Student Leader	Yes	220	51.04%
	No	211	48.96%
Prior Exposure to ETCC	Yes	284	65.89%
	No	147	34.11%

The sample in this study demonstrates reasonable representativeness across key demographic variables. Male students accounted for 60.32% of respondents, while females accounted for 39.68%. Freshmen and sophomores formed the majority of the sample, reflecting the curriculum structure in which ideological and political courses are mainly offered in lower grades. Students from science and engineering majors represented the largest proportion (47.1%), followed by humanities and social sciences (25.06%), with additional representation from economics, management, arts, and sports disciplines. Comprehensive institutions accounted for 83.99% of respondents. Furthermore, 65.89% of participants reported prior exposure to ETCC courses or related activities, indicating a certain level of cultural learning background among respondents.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

Data in this study were collected through an online questionnaire platform to improve accessibility and response efficiency. After data collection, invalid or incomplete responses were removed to ensure data quality. The remaining valid data were

processed using professional statistical analysis software (SPSS 25). The analysis procedures mainly included descriptive statistical analysis and reliability and validity testing. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and present overall trends through means, frequencies, and percentage distributions. Reliability analysis was conducted to examine internal consistency of the measurement scales (The results show that Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of each dimension and the whole scale is all over 0.80), while validity analysis assessed whether the questionnaire effectively measured the intended research constructs (The results indicate the validity of the scale is good, covering KMO = 0.92, $P < 0.001$). Through these analytical procedures, the study provides reliable empirical evidence regarding students' perceptions and experiences of integrating ETCC into IPC.

4. Results

Based on the statistical analysis of 431 valid questionnaires, this study presents a comprehensive picture of Dongguan college students' cognition and value identification concerning ETCC, as well as the current situation, influencing factors, and student expectations about its integration into IPC.

4.1. Current situation of Dongguan college students' cognition of ETCC

4.1.1. Level of knowledge mastery

The survey results indicate that Dongguan college students demonstrate a moderate level of knowledge mastery of ETCC. On a five-point Likert scale, the mean score for students' understanding of basic cultural concepts and core content reached 3.11, with 48.96% of respondents selecting "agree" or "strongly agree," suggesting that nearly half of the students believe they possess foundational ETCC knowledge. Then, regarding the ability to identify representative figures and their major ideas—such as Confucius, Mencius, and Wang Yangming—the mean score was 3.06, indicating that while some students can recognize key cultural figures, their understanding remains relatively superficial. For higher-order cognitive ability, namely distinguishing elements of ETCC suitable for contemporary development from those less adaptable to modern society, the mean score was 3.04. These findings reflect that although students generally possess basic cultural awareness, the depth, systematic understanding, and critical inheritance ability of ETCC still require further enhancement.

4.1.2. Emotional attitudes and value identification

Compared with the moderate evaluation of knowledge mastery, students possess more positive emotional attitudes and stronger value identification toward ETCC. Most respondents agreed that ETCC has positive significance for contemporary college students' personal development ($M = 3.16$), and more than half expressed willingness to actively learn and disseminate ETCC ($M = 3.11$). Notably, 86.31% of students consented ETCC should constitute an important component of IPE, reflecting a high level of acceptance of cultural education within the student population. Furthermore, students generally recognized the spiritual consistency between ETCC and socialist core values ($M = 3.16$) and showed willingness to practice virtues such as integrity, filial piety, and courtesy in daily life ($M = 3.13$). These results indicate that students not only show emotional affinity toward ETCC but also connect it with mainstream social values, providing a favorable psychological foundation for deeper educational integration.

4.2. Current status of integrating ETCC into IPC

4.2.1. Integration frequency and main forms

Students' perceptions of the frequency with which ETCC is integrated into IPC vary considerably, suggesting differences across courses and instructors and indicating that normalized integration has not yet been fully achieved. In terms of instructional forms, teachers have adopted diverse approaches. The most commonly perceived methods include the use of historical cases, storytelling, and interpretation of classical texts ($M = 3.16$), as well as multimedia resources such as short videos and micro-cases ($M = 3.14$). Additionally, some instructors guide students to connect classroom learning

with Dongguan's local cultural resources and urban cultural phenomena ($M = 3.11$) or assign practical tasks such as field visits, investigations, and volunteer activities related to ETCC ($M = 3.10$), though these practices appear less frequent than classroom-based approaches.

4.2.2. Student evaluation of integration effectiveness

Overall, students hold a generally positive evaluation of the effectiveness of integrating ETCC into IPC ($M = 3.15$). Students reported improvements in several educational dimensions, including enhancement of national identity and cultural confidence ($M = 3.10$), increased collective consciousness and social responsibility ($M = 3.12$), and stronger willingness to follow moral norms in value judgment and behavior ($M = 3.20$). Moreover, integration contributed modestly to improving students' acceptance and interest in IPC ($M = 3.06$). Although these results confirm the positive educational value of cultural integration, the overall scores—mostly ranging between 3.1 and 3.2—demonstrate that substantial room remains for improvement in both depth and effectiveness.

4.3. Factors affecting ETCC integration effectiveness

4.3.1. Teaching content factors

Problems related to fragmentation, preachiness, and weak relevance to real life emerged as prominent issues. Students perceived that ETCC content sometimes appeared overly didactic (reverse-item $M = 2.84$) and lacked systematic organization (reverse-item $M = 2.81$). Additionally, insufficient connection with students' real-life concerns was identified (reverse-item $M = 2.90$). These issues are interrelated: fragmented content limits deep understanding, preachy delivery reduces acceptance, and lack of real-life relevance weakens educational appeal. In the survey on improvement priorities, content systematization ranked first (41.76%), highlighting it as the most urgent direction for instructional optimization.

4.3.2. Teaching method factors

Teaching methods directly affect students' classroom engagement. Students reported that instructional approaches remain relatively traditional, and classroom interaction levels were evaluated as only moderate ($M = 3.12$). Despite the use of multimedia tools, teacher-centered instruction still appears dominant, while interactive, inquiry-based, and experiential learning methods remain insufficiently developed. Students' preferences provide clear guidance for innovation. The most favored integration approaches include film and short-video materials (66.36%), historical figures and narrative cases (65.89%), and accessible interpretations of classical texts (62.41%). These preferences suggest that students value vivid, story-based, and easily understandable teaching formats that make abstract theories more engaging.

4.3.3. Student subject factors

Students' own learning engagement is the internal cause affecting internalization effect. Insufficient autonomous learning motivation exists, with obstacles of utilitarianism and difficulty-aversion. Data shows that the mean score for students "actively consulting ETCC materials related to classes before/after class" is only 3.03, with low enthusiasm for extracurricular autonomous learning. Some students believe that "ETCC is far from my study and employment, with low practical value" (reverse-item $M = 2.78$). This utilitarian view of learning to some extent weakens their internal motivation for learning ETCC. In addition, "difficulty in understanding ETCC classic texts is high, affecting learning effect" (reverse-item $M = 2.77$) also reflects the difficulty-aversion generated by some students due to insufficient classical Chinese foundation or background knowledge, constituting a cognitive obstacle in the learning process.

4.4. Students' needs and expectations for ETCC integration

Student feedback reveals clear expectations for future ETCC integration. Among preferred cultural themes, patriotism and responsibility ranked highest (66.59%), followed by integrity, friendliness, and rule awareness (60.32%) and labor spirit and craftsmanship spirit (52.90%). These preferences indicate that contemporary college students closely associate

personal development with national progress while valuing moral character and professional dedication. Meanwhile, students also expressed strong interest in practical and localized learning experiences. Many hoped that IPC would incorporate Dongguan's local cultural resources through field teaching at cultural sites and expanded practical activities such as intangible cultural heritage investigations and volunteer services. These expectations suggest that effective integration should extend beyond theoretical classroom instruction toward experiential learning that connects culture with real-life contexts, enabling students to perceive, understand, and internalize ETCC through direct participation.

5. Discussion

5.1. Comparative analysis of research results with existing studies

The core findings of 431 questionnaires from Dongguan universities and colleges both highly agree with and present unique regional cultural variable differences compared to similar sample studies in China in recent years.

- (1) Knowledge of ETCC: Dongguan students obtained a mean score of 3.11 in their understanding of basic ETCC concepts, indicating a moderate level of knowledge mastery. This finding is consistent with nationwide observations that university students generally possess fragmented cultural knowledge rather than systematic understanding. Previous studies have similarly noted that traditional culture education in higher education often remains at an introductory cognitive level due to limited curriculum depth and insufficient integration mechanisms (Xiong, 2023; Li, 2025)^[3, 7]. The convergence of findings suggests that superficial familiarity with ETCC constitutes a relatively stable national pattern rather than a region-specific phenomenon.
- (2) Recognition of the educational value of ETCC: In this study, 86.31% of respondents agreed that ETCC should serve as an important component of ideological and political education (IPE). This result corresponds with broader research emphasizing the consensus regarding the educational significance of traditional culture in cultivating values and moral identity among university students (Zhongjian, 2025; Chen, Chen & Li, 2017; Ren, 2017)^[1, 2, 8]. Existing literature argues that ETCC provides essential cultural resources for strengthening value education and fostering socialist core values within higher education systems (Li, 2025)^[7]. The consistency across studies indicates that recognition of ETCC's educational value has reached a nationwide consensus and shows limited variation across regions.
- (3) Educational effectiveness of integration: All quantitative indicators measuring the educational effectiveness of ideological and political classrooms (IPC) in Dongguan fall within the range of 3.10–3.20, which remains noticeably lower than the higher effectiveness levels reported in broader national or theoretical studies emphasizing successful cultural cultivation models (Hsu & Wu, 2015; Ji, 2019)^[6, 16]. This gap suggests that although economically developed regions such as the Pearl River Delta possess strong educational resources, these advantages have not automatically translated into deeper classroom internalization of cultural values. Similar research highlights that effective integration requires pedagogical innovation and sustained cultivation processes rather than material or institutional advantages alone (Hu & Liu, 2024; Li, 2025)^[7, 9].
- (4) Integration of local culture: Existing scholarship predominantly emphasizes a dual-path framework of “national cultural narratives—school-based resources” in integrating traditional culture into ideological and political education (Yu, 2024; Yang, 2021)^[10, 15]. However, 66.59% of Dongguan students expressed a preference for using local culture to interpret national cultural values, highlighting the importance of regional cultural experience in value transmission. This finding resonates with studies emphasizing the educational role of local wisdom and regional cultural identity in strengthening students' cultural belonging and engagement (Wijayanti, 2025; Ma, 2023)^[12, 14]. The results therefore introduce an expanded “national–urban–school-based” three-level resource framework, enriching existing theoretical models and offering a new analytical perspective for future regional comparative research (Zheng, 2024)^[13].

5.2. Main problems of integrating ETCC into IPC

Despite the initial success of integrating ETCC into IPC in Dongguan universities and colleges, several structural challenges still hinder the full realization of its educational potential.

- (1) Fragmentation and logical absence in content design: This is one of the most core constraining factors. The survey shows that students generally feel integrated content lacks systematicity and natural smooth connection with teaching themes. This fragmentation manifests as ETCC knowledge points being fragmentary patched onto the IPE theoretical framework like patches, lacking organic connections between each other, and failing to form a clear cultural logic main line. For example, in the course “Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis”, different chapters may mention moral concepts in ETCC, but the inheritance relationships and logical connections between these concepts are not clarified. The consequence is that students find it difficult to build holistic, historical cognition about ETCC, and learning remains at the level of “knowing some stories and famous sayings”, unable to deeply understand the essence of its ideological system and its internal connection with contemporary China’s development, greatly reducing educational effects.
- (2) One-way teaching implementation and lack of interaction: Although teaching methods have been updated, the traditional classroom structure—where the teacher delivers content and students passively listen—remains unchanged. Classroom interaction is minimal, and student engagement is largely restricted to answering teachers’ questions. This one-way approach fails to encourage critical thinking, discussion, or ideological exchange. As a result, students do not develop a deep emotional connection or value identification with the content. The student-centered teaching model has not been fully realized, which means that even if the content is accurate, it is unlikely to spark deeper reflection or engagement. Consequently, the appeal of ETCC remains dormant, unable to energize students’ intellectual or emotional commitment.
- (3) Alienation in learning experience and insufficient sense of gain: Due to the above limitations in content and methods, plus some content being distant from real concerns and students’ life experiences, students’ experience in classrooms is not good, easily generating a sense of alienation of “nothing to do with me”. For example, when explaining “craftsman spirit”, if it only stays at the theoretical level without combining with actual cases from Dongguan’s local manufacturing industry, students find it difficult to appreciate its practical significance. When students feel that what they learn cannot explain real confusion or guide personal action, their internal learning motivation weakens, and extracurricular autonomous learning and willingness to practice also decrease accordingly. Ultimately, the sense of gain from education will only remain at the superficial level of scores and knowledge, difficult to transform into firm belief and conscious behavior.

5.3. Analysis of problem causes

The generation of the above problems is the result of complex interweaving of factors at multiple levels, including teachers, courses, students, and the broader institutional environment.

- (1) Teacher-related factors: Some IPC teachers themselves lack systematic and deep knowledge systems of ETCC, existing problems of choice difficulty and interpretation weakness. Meanwhile, how to creatively transform and innovatively develop the essence of ETCC and present it using vivid, interactive, and experiential teaching methods poses higher requirements for teachers’ teaching design and implementation capabilities. The survey item “teachers can use vivid methods to clearly explain the relationship between ETCC and IPE theory” with the mean score of only 3.09 confirms the existence of this challenge.
- (2) Course-related factors: IPE course syllabi in universities and colleges lack top-level design and clear requirements for ETCC integration. Teaching materials lack systematic ETCC content modules or auxiliary readers. Teaching evaluation systems focus more on knowledge assessment, lacking effective evaluation and incentives for ETCC integration.
- (3) Student-related factors: Student groups have uneven foundations in ETCC knowledge. Some students have

not received systematic ETCC education in primary and secondary schools, having objective difficulties in understanding classical Chinese and historical backgrounds, easily generating difficulty-aversion emotions. More importantly, under the influence of utilitarianism and pragmatism trends, some students tend to measure learning value by “whether it is useful” (direct utility for further study and employment), thereby underestimating the great use of ETCC for character cultivation, thinking training, and long-term development. This concept is an important internal obstacle affecting their learning engagement and effect identification.

- (4) Institutional and environmental factors: At the institutional level, effective mechanisms may not yet be established to systematically integrate forces from libraries, cultural clubs, student affairs departments, and other parties to jointly support ETCC teaching in IPC. For example, libraries cannot targetedly purchase teaching resources related to ETCC, and ETCC activities carried out by student clubs are disconnected from IPC teaching. Particularly, the rich local historical and cultural resources of Dongguan (such as The Opium War Museum in Humen, The Keyuan Garden, Hakka and Tanka Culture, Exhibition Hall of Dongguan’s Reform and Opening-up Achievements, etc.) have not been fully exploit and utilized to achieve deep integration of school-local resources, making ETCC education divorced from vivid social and cultural practice and losing an extremely attractive and persuasive educational field.

5.4. Practical pathway suggestions

To break through current bottlenecks and enhance the educational effectiveness of integrating ETCC into IPC in Dongguan universities and colleges, this study proposes the following systematic pathway suggestions based on the logic of “problem—cause—countermeasure”.

5.4.1. Optimization of content supply system

First, teachers in Dongguan universities and colleges need to emphasize reconstructing thematic teaching modules by replacing scattered cultural references with systematic content design, encouraging collaboration between IPE educators and scholars in literature and history to develop serialized ETCC modules aligned with course objectives and teaching logic. Second, teacher should highlight the importance of strengthening contemporary interpretation by connecting traditional cultural ideas with issues that concern modern youth, enabling classical concepts to explain contemporary social phenomena and guide students’ understanding of responsibility, innovation, professional ethics, and ecological awareness. Third, exploring differentiated content supply is necessary. This means that teachers ought to adapt case selection and discussion perspectives according to students’ disciplinary backgrounds and interests while maintaining consistent core values, thereby improving the relevance, precision, and effectiveness of IPE.

5.4.2. Innovation of teaching method carriers

Firstly, instructors or educators should concentrate on the deep application of modern audio-visual media by enhancing their abilities to use films and short videos as tools for critical thinking through structured pre-viewing guidance, in-viewing tasks, and post-viewing discussions, while also encouraging themselves and students to co-create new media works to deepen understanding of ETCC. Secondly, teachers need to advocate strengthening case discussion and text dialogue by promoting multi-perspective analysis of historical cases and adopting interactive methods—such as collaborative learning, intensive reading, and ancient–modern dialogue—to make classical texts more accessible and inquiry-oriented. Thirdly, it is vital to highlight the expansion of practical and experiential teaching through debates, project-based learning (such as exploring Dongguan cultural context), and field investigations, enabling students to engage with cultural themes and intangible heritage in real contexts, thereby enhancing cultural understanding, participation, and value identification through experiential learning.

5.4.3. Integration of school-local resources

On the one hand, universities and colleges in Dongguan city have to systematically develop “walking IPC” by collaborating with local publicity, cultural, and tourism departments as well as museums, memorial halls, cultural heritage sites, and characteristic towns to establish practical teaching bases and themed learning routes related to patriotism education, the spirit of reform and opening-up, and the inheritance of Lingnan culture, thereby extending learning to real historical and cultural spaces (e.g., Humen Fort, Humen Naval Battle Museum, Keyuan Garden, Nanshe Ancient Village, and Songshan Lake High-tech Zone) and strengthening the connection between theory and practice. On the other hand, it is significant to build an “in-class—extracurricular—off-campus” linkage platform by encouraging student organizations to participate in ETCC activities, inviting local cultural experts, intangible cultural heritage inheritors, and moral role models to contribute to teaching, and developing digital teaching case libraries through online platforms, thus enriching educational resources and creating a more open and collaborative teaching ecosystem.

5.4.4. Promotion of teacher capability support

First of all, universities and colleges should establish normalized training mechanisms, such as regular workshops, seminars, and reading programs, to provide systematic learning opportunities for teachers, while also supporting their participation in academic conferences and visiting studies through dedicated funding. Then, it is important to promote interdisciplinary collaboration by forming teaching teams composed of IPC teachers and scholars from literature, history, and philosophy, encouraging collective lesson preparation, teaching observation, and research on integration pathways, thereby fostering a continuous cycle of teaching, research, and innovation. Next, improving teaching evaluation and incentive systems by incorporating ETCC integration into assessment criteria and recognizing outstanding achievements of teachers and teams is also indispensable, which can stimulate educators’ motivation to engage more actively in teaching reform and pedagogical innovation.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of key findings

Based on the analysis of 431 valid questionnaires, this study examines the current situation and optimization pathways of integrating ETCC into IPC in Dongguan universities and colleges. First, college students show a moderate level of knowledge but relatively strong value identification with ETCC. Although their understanding of traditional cultural concepts and figures is not very deep, most students recognize the importance of ETCC and support its integration into IPE. Second, the integration of ETCC into IPC has achieved preliminary results. Teachers have adopted various methods such as historical cases, classical text interpretation, and multimedia resources. Students generally believe that this integration helps strengthen cultural confidence, national identity, and moral awareness, although the overall effectiveness still has room for improvement. Third, several key factors affect the integration effect. Fragmented teaching content, relatively traditional teaching methods, and limited student autonomous learning motivation reduce the depth of learning and value internalization. Finally, students express clear expectations for future improvement, particularly for more engaging teaching forms, stronger connections with real-life issues, and greater use of Dongguan’s local cultural resources and practical activities. To sum up, the study shows that integrating ETCC into IPC has a positive foundation among students, but further efforts are needed in content design, teaching innovation, and practical learning to enhance its educational effectiveness.

6.2. Research limitations and future prospects

This study mainly adopts the questionnaire survey method. While effectively depicting overall situations, it also has certain limitations: First, although the sample has certain representativeness, it cannot cover all universities and colleges and all student types in Dongguan, and the universality of conclusions awaits verification by more samples. Second, quantitative

research has deficiencies in revealing deep mechanisms and capturing complex interaction processes, with insufficient delicate depiction of the micro process of how to effectively integrate, such as how teachers implement thematic module teaching in specific classrooms and students' real interaction situations in practical activities, which have not been deeply explored.

Then, future research can be deepened in the following directions. Firstly, it is prominent to adopt mixed research methods, adding in-depth interviews with teachers and students and classroom observations on the basis of quantitative surveys, to more vividly and meticulously reveal successful experiences, specific challenges, and interaction mechanisms in the integration process. Secondly, it is essential to expand research scope, conducting comparative studies across regional universities and colleges, or comparative analysis of integration models in different types of universities or colleges. Finally, it is required to conduct longitudinal tracking studies, examining the continuous impact of ETCC integration on students' long-term values, cultural identity, and behavior patterns, to more scientifically evaluate its educational effectiveness. Through multi-angle, multi-method continuous exploration, the great practice of integrating ETCC into IPC can be achieved.

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Disclosure statement

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