

**Accounting the Specifics of Studying Social Disciplines in China
in Methodological Work with Master's Students
of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences**

L. G. Titarenko, Lee Yuhang

Belarusian State University,

Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Department of Sociology,

larissa@bsu.by

Abstract. In China's the study of social sciences at high school and university differs from Belarus. Belarusian university staff have to take into account these specifics when teaching Chinese students. All the basic social and political courses are studied in Chinese high school. They are mandatory. At the university level only students enrolled in social sciences continue their study, while the rest do not study social sciences. As Chinese master students coming to Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences usually do not have bachelor degree in social sciences, Belarusian staff has to use special methods of teaching to cover this gap and help Chinese students get knowledge for Master degree.

Keywords: social sciences; mandatory courses; university education; Chinese master students of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences.

The system of studying social sciences in China differs greatly from Belarusian approach to study social sciences at the secondary and higher education levels. Belarusian school children study social sciences for several years – first, on the basis level, and then on the advanced level. As a result, they get knowledge on society, economic development and the basic principles of law in the country. Additionally they study history to learn about the country and the world. Political science and/or ideology are not the school subjects.

As for China, the social sciences education in high school includes the core course on ideology and politics of People's Republic of China that covers political, economic, cultural life in the country as well as dialectical materialism and socialism with Chinese characteristics. This course has to provide knowledge how to analyze social phenomena within the framework of Marxist theory and make the young Chinese good citizens of their country. A second mandatory course is History: it is taught from the angle of the dominant ideology as well. Upon graduation from high school Chinese young people have good knowledge of ideology and Chinese politics and a vague knowledge of social sciences beyond the limits of Marxism. Their knowledge on foreign countries is also limited: personally young people prefer to learn about the countries of their own interests (like the US) and their neighbors (Japan, South Korea).

At the university level the social science disciplines are mainly taught in case a young student selects one particular social discipline as his/her major. For example, sociology major will study sociological theory (including Western classical theories and Chinese social thought history), social research methods, social statistics, urban and rural sociology, social stratification and mobility, etc. Only few universities have this major field. Students majoring in social work are focused on social welfare policies and welfare practice, social work ethics, community governance, and non-profit organization management in China. A few universities also offer major in anthropology where students study the field survey methods, and the research areas include ethnography and cultural diversity. Also, there exist faculties for several other disciplines that are close to social sciences: economics, political science, law, international relations, linguistics, and cultural studies.

However, all undergraduate students regardless of their major fields must learn a public course of ideological and political theory. This course includes advanced study of basic principles of Marxism, introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, Modern and Contemporary History of China, Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Foundation of Chinese society. This is the main channel of national ideological education in Chinese system of higher education.

As a result of ideology-oriented education in high school and strong ideological component at the university system of education, Chinese graduates with Bachelor degrees – if they are not majoring in social sciences – have a limited social knowledge. For many practical reasons they want to continue education and get a master degree. Chinese universities can absorb only one third of Bachelor graduates in the existing master programs. That is why Chinese young people go abroad in order to get a master degree. According to statistics, currently around 12,000 Chinese students are enrolled in Belarusian system of higher education, and almost one third of them study at Belarusian State University [2]. Unfortunately, their level of English is not perfect; therefore they have to study more than students studying in native languages. When they come to the faculty of philosophy and social sciences to get master degree within 10 months, there are three major obstacles: (a) adaptation to Belarusian environment (it takes 2–4 weeks), (b) improvement of social knowledge (this process continues up to the end of their study, because almost 90 % of Chinese students have degrees that are far from the subject they selected at the faculty of philosophy and social sciences, and their previous knowledge is not enough for master study), and (c) proficiency in English (it almost demands

several months of improvement, especially if the students have got their bachelor degrees some years ago).

All the above mentioned specific factors, related to Chinese students in BSU, have to be taken into account by the teaching staff. Our staff has to find the appropriate methods of teaching and special tools of communication with Chinese students. They have to change the methods that Chinese students used at home: mainly reading the texts and writing summaries, learning by heart all the facts, and listen attentively the teachers' lectures in classes.

On the basis of personal experience and comparison of our students with Chinese students, it is possible to say that Chinese students are often afraid of asking the questions during the lectures, even when they do not understand something. This tendency is typical for the Chinese female students. They prefer to copy/write down the statements of the lecturer and email their own questions to the teacher later. This means that their level of understanding of oral English speech is not enough for successful learning and understanding. For this reason, Chinese students always prefer presentations: they can follow presented materials on a screen, copy slides, and read them again at home. Only if this method does not help them in comprehensive understanding the materials, they put questions.

Next method that helps in teaching for Chinese students is case study. In China students usually had several cases that their teachers used to illustrate the theory. It is common in China to provide the cases in teaching social theory (Marxist theory or Chinese socialism theory). For this reason Chinese students expect the cases in master studies in Belarus as well. If these cases are clear for them and close to their social practice, they will really help in the learning process. It is better to prepare such cases in advance and use in each class, asking the students to select their own cases following the models presented by the teachers.

Method of visualization of information is considered to be innovative for Belarusian students – at least, it is a new one in comparison with traditional lecture or questions-answers seminars. Chinese students like visualization very much, for them it is a MUST method: it is in high use in China. For example, it is used in the form of short videos. Many teachers in China open their classes with 4-5 minutes video where students can get a brief overview of a lecture. Such videos motivate the students to learn new materials and see the logics of the class. Also, documentary clips are popular in China. Both videos and clips stimulate the students' activities and develop their thinking.

Frankly, for Chinese students this method already became a routine. According to some Chinese sources of information, short videos are broadly

used in all levels of education because of a high level of digitalization of schools and universities.

As for the universities, the Ministry of Education in China encouraged the necessity of digital innovation in social sciences, and some universities immediately introduced the new interdisciplinary courses that integrate social science and informational technologies. Such courses can be a good model for teaching Chinese master students at Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences: it will be effective and innovative. However, for introduction of such courses the technological level of Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences needs some improvement (for example, organizing some online multimedia classrooms, providing new digital terminals for teaching). It is important to do because the construction of new educational facilities and equipment can basically support the development of smart education and effective digital education environment.

Chinese digital scholars constructed the national online education platforms (Chaoxing Learning, Yu Classroom) that function in sociology classes for distributing questionnaires for students and conducting the tests in class. Such equipment can be appropriate in teaching all the students, including Chinese master students, because they often complain when using technological facilities of BSU (both in class and dormitory where Internet is not stable). Chinese students like to study at BSU, they highly respect the professional level of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences staff; however, they wonder why the best university in Belarus suffers from technological shortages

As the informational technologies are very popular, Chinese students suffer from limited internet connection in BSU, as well as from the impossibility to use their Chinese digital tools and platforms. Perhaps they need extra explanation from curators on this situation (limited Internet, problems with Internet tools in classes) in order to have a higher level of satisfaction from their learning.

China has advantages in the Artificial Intelligence tools already implemented in education: recently Chinese news agency reported about the AI programs started in Beijing [3]. Of course, this is only the beginning of the programs on integration AI technology and teaching at the Chinese system of education, and the Chinese students enrolled currently at the master programs at the BSU, including our faculty, were not involved in the AI implementation because they graduated from the universities with bachelor degrees some years ago. Still, Chinese students are aware of these programs and expect something similar when studying in Minsk. Chinese advancement in the AI in education (especially the programs on integration of the AI and social sciences) can be viewed as a future path for integration of Belarusian IT scholars and specialists

of Ministry of education with the same goal: full integration of the AI in the educational process. Probably, some advanced Chinese students who are familiar with this process of the development of the AI in China can share their information with Belarusian scholars during their stay in Minsk.

References

1. Overview of Required Courses in Ideology and Politics in High School // Portal Baidu.com [Electronic resource]. Mode of access: [https:// baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1823657262125798323&wfr=spider&for=pc](https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1823657262125798323&wfr=spider&for=pc). Date of access: 20.02.2025 (in Chinese).

2. В БГУ учится около 4 тыс китайских студентов из более чем 5,5 тыс иностранных обучающихся – ректор (There are about 4,000 Chinese students studying at BSU out of more than 5,500 foreign students. – Rector) // Republican portal SB.BY [Electronic resource]. Mode of access: <https://www.sb.by/articles/rektor-bgu-v-universitete-iz-bolee-5-5-tysyachi-inostrannykh-obuchayushchikhsya-4-tysyachi-studenty-.html>. Date of access: 07.03.2025.

3. CCTV News // WeChat Official Account [Electronic resource]. Mode of access: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_30342556. Date of access: 07.03.2025.

Innovative VR Technology's Application Prospects in Teaching Social Science Courses at Chinese Universities

L. G. Titarenko, Minawa Saidongla

Belarusian State University,

Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Department of Sociology,

larissa@bsu.by

Annotation. Recently, some Chinese universities have started to apply innovative information technologies in the teaching process. Virtual Reality technology (VR) is one of such innovations. Its application to social sciences at the university level opens the new horizons in teaching methods and approaches to education because it integrates social sciences with advanced technologies. According to Chinese scholars, this technology has a great potential in the process of development of students' analytical thought, creativity and proactivity. As a result, university graduates are better prepared to the innovative tasks in their future practical professional activity.

Keywords: virtual reality technology; social sciences; Chinese universities; innovative teaching methods.

With the rapid development of technology, Virtual Reality can be presented as an emerging technology that delivers a computer-generated simulation of the environment that may be interacted within an apparent real-time manner. VR technology has been already employed in a variety of industries, including medical training [1], engineering and entertainment [2].