

REVIEW

The Development of the English Public Speaking Course in Chinese Higher Education: From Localization to Indigenization

Yunxue Guo ¹ , Maslawati Mohamad ^{1*} , Zarina Othman ² 

¹ Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Malaysia

² School of Liberal Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The English Public Speaking (EPS) course in China, despite a relatively short history of just over 30 years, now has become an important English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course in China's higher education curriculum. This course not only aims to enhance students' English communication skills for engagement in global communication but also to cultivate their ability to tell China's stories on the international stage. This study reviews the development of the EPS course in China from its early emergence to its current status, with a particular focus on how it has been localized to better align with national development goals and students' needs. Initially influenced by Western pedagogical approaches, the course has been adapted to Chinese cultural and educational contexts under the guidance of national policies and educational reforms. Key initiatives, such as the construction of "Golden Courses," the integration of ideological and political education, and the introduction of the Understanding Contemporary China textbook, have collectively contributed to the formation of an EPS course with distinctive Chinese characteristics. By tracing the localization process of the EPS course, this study reveals how national strategies have steered the course's development, highlighting its strategic role in cultivating globally competitive talents. This localization experience may also provide insights for other contexts seeking to align public speaking education with national development priorities.

Keywords: English Public Speaking (EPS); Higher Education Curriculum; Localization; National Development; Chinese Characteristics

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Maslawati Mohamad, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Malaysia; Email: maslawati@ukm.edu.my

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1. Introduction

With the rapid expansion of globalization and China's growing involvement in international communications, there is an increasing need for high-level communication talents to voice China's perspective, especially in English^[1,2]. As a crucial component of international communication and closely tied to the development of communication skills, English Public Speaking (EPS) emerges as a key method for cultivating talents with strong English communication abilities^[3-7]. Moreover, proficiency in EPS is essential for students' success in education, career, and future development in a globalized economy^[8]. The course of EPS can provide a structured platform for cultivating this essential skill.

The EPS course is a relatively new addition to the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum in China's higher education^[7-9]. With a short history of just over three decades, the EPS course has experienced remarkable development, closely aligning with China's educational reforms and policies. Substantial efforts have been made to establish its position in China's higher education, localize it to better suit Chinese students' needs, and develop new textbooks tailored to China's development goals. However, despite these advancements, comprehensive review exploring the full scope of EPS development, especially its unique Chinese characteristics, remains limited.

This study examines the three-decade development of the EPS course in China, from its introduction to the present day. It aims to give a comprehensive overview of how China's national policy directives and ideological-cultural integration have shaped the EPS course's shift from localization to indigenization. Ultimately, this study presents a unique Chinese developmental paradigm that offers valuable insights for educational systems seeking to adapt global pedagogies to local contexts.

Furthermore, since modern public speaking (PS) is deeply rooted in Western rhetorical traditions, it is crucial for countries where English is a foreign or second language to adapt EPS courses in ways that uphold their cultural identity and educational values^[10]. Such adaptation helps mitigate the dominating Western intellectual influences that have often dictated English-language instruction globally^[11]. China's experience in developing localized EPS course could offer valuable insights for other countries on how to integrate

their cultural contexts while focusing on developing effective communication skills. By exploring different approaches to course localization, EFL educators could find ways to balance international standards with local traditions, ensuring that EPS courses remain effective and culturally meaningful.

2. Emergence of the EPS Course in China: From Competition to Classroom

The earliest recorded EPS course in China dates back to 1924 when Professor Yang Yinqing taught Debating and PS to English majors at Peking University^[12]. In addition, Xiamen University also offered this course as required by scholar Lin Yutang during his tenure from 1926 to 1927^[13]. However, the courses soon disappeared from the curriculum, and for nearly 70 years, no higher education institutions in China offered EPS courses^[14]. It was not until in 1991 that Su, a Chinese teacher who had experienced the PS course during his studies in the U.S., reintroduced EPS at Heilongjiang University.

Su believed that oral English can be divided into dialogic and monologic^[15]. While dialogic skills are often emphasized, monologic speech, such as lectures, presentations, and especially EPS, is frequently neglected, limiting students' ability to express their thoughts in standard English coherently. He suggested that cultivating EPS would effectively enhance students' monologic speaking skills^[15]. Recognizing that the curriculum for English majors at Heilongjiang University lacked sufficient emphasis on monologic skills, he introduced an EPS course in 1991, drawing from his experiences studying and teaching PS in the U.S. Over the next five years, he continually refined the teaching content and methods, improving its teaching effectiveness.

Given the attribute of EPS course as a skill-based practical course, Su insisted the acquisition of EPS skill depends on students' practice of exemplary speeches given by famous speakers^[15]. Hence, he highlighted the necessity of incorporating exemplary speeches from English-speaking countries as part of the teaching content. Through teachers' analysis and demonstration of these speeches, students were provided with explicit models to guide the preparation and delivery of their speeches. As for the teaching method, he proposed four principles, including teacher demonstration,

student-centeredness, feedback for speech performance, and discussions on exemplary speeches.

Similar to Su's consideration^[15], Wang introduced the EPS course at Beijing International Studies University in 1997^[16]. After joining Beijing Foreign Studies University in 1999, she continued promoting EPS for English learners. Compared to Su's approach^[15], Wang developed a more comprehensive approach^[16]. Drawing on Western EPS textbooks and considering China's cultural context and student needs, she compiled her own textbook, which covered essential skills to help students become effective communicators. Adapting the Toastmasters' model to Chinese classrooms, Wang encouraged students to engage in small-groups where they rotated as speaker, feedback provider, or coordinator, applying Krashen's "i + 1" input principle through analyzing renowned speeches and exemplary works^[16]. Her approach emphasized context-based teaching to enhance students' adaptability while balancing language improvement with EPS skill development.

By using classic Western English speeches and textbooks as the primary teaching materials, and incorporating Western methods for teaching EPS, Su and Wang found that EPS is beneficial in motivating students' enthusiasm for speaking and cultivating their communication skills, indicating its potential as a foundational course for monologic communication training^[15,16].

Motivated by similar pedagogical beliefs, Yuan integrated EPS training into her classroom instruction at South-Central Minzu University in 2000, believing that EPS could effectively transform students' so-called "dumb English"^[17]. Her approach emphasized practice-oriented learning through structured speech preparation, classroom performance, and peer evaluation. A questionnaire conducted among students revealed that EPS training significantly improved students' listening, speaking, and writing abilities, as well as their logical thinking in English^[17]. Yuan's findings further demonstrated that EPS serves not only as a tool for oral fluency enhancement but also as a comprehensive approach to developing students' overall communicative competence.

While pioneers like Su and Wang were laying the practical foundations for EPS within their classrooms, broader national developments were creating a powerful external impetus for its expansion. With the acceleration of China's reform and opening-up in the late 20th century, combined

with China's growing interaction with the Western world, the demand for English and English professionals in society grew significantly^[14,18,19]. In 1996, China Daily launched the 21st Century Cup National English Speaking Competition, followed by the CCTV Cup English Speaking Contest in 2002, co-organized by CCTV and FLTRP. Winning these competitions not only created opportunities for overseas study but also enhanced the reputations of the universities the participants represented^[18]. These events contributed to the broader interest in the establishment of the EPS course in China's higher education system^[11,20,21].

Despite this enthusiasm, the initial adoption of EPS was relatively slow. From 1991 to 1999, only four universities in mainland China offered EPS courses^[13,14]. Between 2000 and 2005, fewer than 20 universities provided the course. A major turning point came in 2005 with the first national EPS workshop held in Beijing. Inspired by the success of these national competitions, the three-day event, led by Professor Lucas, aimed to equip teachers with pedagogical strategies and professional guidance for EPS instruction^[14,19]. This workshop stimulated a rapid expansion in the number of universities offering the course. Two years later, in 2007, the First National Symposium on EPS brought together educators from across China to exchange teaching practices and pedagogical insights, marking a new phase in EPS development^[22]. During this symposium, Professor Lucas further elaborated on the significance of EPS in China's English language curriculum, arguing that equipping university graduates with effective EPS skills was vital to enhancing China's global competitiveness in the twenty-first century^[23]. To better support Chinese EPS teachers, he proposed a pedagogical framework focusing on both the elements of the EPS course and instructional methods for its teaching in China. It is important to note, however, that his proposed method of systematic instruction was largely grounded in Western educational paradigms. Despite these contextual differences, Lucas's pedagogical philosophy played an important role in shaping the early development of EPS education in China. For a long period afterward, his framework guided the theoretical construction, curriculum design, and classroom practice of EPS across Chinese universities, laying the groundwork for the course's initial establishment and future localization.

The institutional advancement of EPS was reinforced by broader macroeconomic developments. As China joined

the World Trade Organization in December 2001, the demand for business professionals with EPS skills increased significantly^[11,21]. In response, the Ministry of Education (MOE) issued the College English Curriculum Requirements (CECR) in 2007, prioritizing the cultivation of English communication skills^[24].

Thus, rooted in the popularity of national EPS contests, driven by China's strategic demand for English communication talents, motivated by its role in career success, and supported by educational policy, EPS has evolved into an integral component of China's higher education, serving as a key vehicle for cultivating students' English communication competence^[7,11,21,25].

3. Localization of the EPS Course: From Imitation to Adaptation

Although EPS courses are derived from PS practices widely used in Western higher education, directly replicating Western methods is impractical due to differences in teaching objectives, course nature, and context in China. Unlike Western PS courses typically offered as part of communication studies programs, the EPS course in China places emphasis on both rhetorical competence and language acquisition under the framework of EFL curriculum^[11,26]. This fundamental difference necessitates its localization in terms of teaching approaches and materials to meet Chinese students' specific needs^[11,14,26].

3.1. Localizing EPS Textbooks

After 2005, as more Chinese higher education institutions began offering EPS courses, the demand for high-quality textbooks increased^[19]. To address this, FLTRP introduced *The Art of Public Speaking (8th ed.)* in 2004, a best-selling American textbook written by Lucas, followed by Fudan University Press in 2007. Originally designed for Western learners, Chinese educators and students soon discovered that the exemplary speeches, illustrative examples, and speech topics provided by the textbook were deeply rooted in Western culture, which posed significant cultural and practical challenges for Chinese learners.

Therefore, a Chinese Edition, in collaboration with Lucas, was specially tailored for Chinese learners in 2010. The 13th edition further integrated content and video resources of

competitive speeches, along with case analyses of Chinese students' speech competitions in 2021. Over the years, the textbook has been repeatedly updated, adapting to Chinese students' preferences and incorporating cultural elements. This progression reflects the continuous effort to localize EPS teaching materials to China's educational needs, establishing a strong foundation for the EPS course development.

Although many Chinese higher education institutions adopted Lucas' works, some developed their own teaching materials, as the language complexity, content, and topics in *The Art of Public Speaking* were often less suitable for Chinese students^[27]. This led to a wave of original, localized textbook compilation. Xiamen University developed *An Introduction to Public Speaking in English*, to complement other relevant materials, including *The Art of Public Speaking*^[13]. Chen from Hunan Normal University, explicitly recognizing the inadequacy of imported texts, created *A Coursebook for Oral English*. This textbook is strategically divided into *Basic Skills Training* for dialogic communication and *Public Speaking and Debate* for EPS^[27]. EPS teachers at Renmin University of China adopted a hybrid approach, adapting highly-relevant Western textbooks into *A College Public Speaking Coursebook*^[28].

These localized teaching materials shared one common philosophy that they preserved the core elements of the textbook, including the steps of writing a manuscript and delivery techniques to ensure alignment with global standards. Meanwhile, they incorporated the localized content on speech writing, rhetoric, and grammar to better meet the needs of Chinese students. Some textbooks even added bilingual annotations for key knowledge points, cultural explanations, and multimedia resources, making it a practical and culturally adapted resource for EPS teaching in China^[28].

3.2. Establishing EPS as a Standalone Course

In the initial phase of integrating EPS into China's higher education curriculum, it was often offered as an elective due to its exclusion from the 2000 Syllabus for English Majors in Higher Education revised by MOE^[19,26,28,29].

Although earlier scholars discussed adapting EPS in China, Wan was the first to explicitly use the word of "localization"^[30]. Considering the Chinese talent market, societal demands, and the characteristics of Chinese universities, Wan designed a detailed EPS teaching framework outlining the

teaching objectives, content, methods, and assessment^[30]. However, the teaching content was drawn heavily from *The Art of Public Speaking*. The teaching approach combined several commonly used methods, including teacher demonstration, speeches analysis, feedback provision, and various students' speaking activities.

Although some teachers employed innovative methods to adapt the EPS course, they failed to establish a clear, unified, and comprehensive theoretical positioning, whether the EPS course should be viewed primarily as a language skills course, a professional communication course, or a cross-cultural competence course^[26,29]. To address this ambiguity, Chen proposed incorporating EPS into the English Major curriculum as part of broader teaching reform efforts^[29]. Later, Lucas, Tian, and Wan explicitly identified it as an EFL course while discussing its localization in China^[11,26,30]. Both Tian and Chen argued that the EPS course was not just an advanced speaking course but also a holistic course integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing to enhance students' overall English communication skills^[26,29]. By defining its EFL nature, they tried to develop self-designed teaching framework instead of directly adopting Western teaching pedagogy. In particular, they provided a solid theoretical foundation for the teaching approach embedded within their frameworks.

Building on Bachman's Communicative Language Ability Model and Lucas's seven elements of PS, Chen proposed an EPS Communication Model as a theoretical foundation for EPS teaching^[29]. In this model, he viewed EPS as a dynamic and interactive communicative process that integrates language knowledge, strategic competence, psychophysiological mechanisms, and context of language use^[29]. This model highlights that the effectiveness of EPS depends not only on the speakers' mastery of language knowledge but also on their strategic competence to adjust speech content and delivery in response to audience feedback and situational context. Based on this model, Chen further developed a three-dimensional teaching framework that emphasizes the sociocultural nature of language, cognitive development in language, and humanistic educational principles. Accordingly, the design of teaching content, classroom activities and assessment should be aligned with this framework^[29].

Similarly, Tian observed that the EPS course's na-

ture and corresponding teaching approach remained unclear, which she identified as a fundamental issue requiring urgent attention in localizing EPS in China^[26]. To address this, she proposed an output-driven integrated teaching approach suitable for the EFL context with output-driven focusing on writing and delivering of the speech while integrated teaching incorporating the skill of listening and reading. According to her, this teaching framework is grounded in three major theories of second language acquisition, including Swain's Output Hypothesis, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and Gass and Selinker's Integrated View^[26]. Within this framework, language output is the central task of the EPS course while comprehensible input lays the critical foundation for accurate and meaningful language output. The Integrated View argues that input and output are indispensable, emphasizing output's importance in enhancing input comprehension. By explaining the concept and implementation of this approach, Tian endeavored to construct a systematic and pragmatic framework for EPS teaching within the EFL context during its localization^[26].

Influenced by constructivist principles and related learning theories, several other scholars also developed localized instructional frameworks to further systematize EPS teaching. Among them, Yang proposed a two-stage instructional model for EPS under the guidance of Anderson's cognitive development theory, integrating behaviorist and constructivist perspectives. The model comprises an imitation stage and an autonomous speaking stage, conceptualizing speech learning as a process of transforming declarative knowledge, such as speech theory and rules, into procedural knowledge which are speech skills and adaptive competence^[31]. Furthermore, drawing on Krashen's "i + 1" Input Hypothesis, Yang emphasized that teaching content should be comprehensible yet challenging, diverse in form, knowledge-enriching in substance, and delivered through multi-sensory channels to effectively facilitate learning in EPS classrooms^[31]. Guided by constructivist learning theory, autonomous learning theory, cooperative learning theory, and micro-teaching theory, Huang developed a CIA Model, which emphasizes the dynamic interaction among collaboration, interaction, and application^[32]. The model positions students as the center of learning while recognizing teachers' guiding role, aiming to develop students' critical thinking, psychological resilience, and language competence through

a specially designed three-module teaching content system comprising Creative Thinking, Critical Writing, and Cracking Speaking^[32].

With the issuance of the Outline of the National Program for Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (2010–2020) (referred to Outline) by China's State Council in 2010^[33], scholars recognized the need to establish the EPS course in higher education to align with the goals and proposals outlined in the document. The Outline emphasized the critical role of higher education in cultivating internationally minded, highly skilled professionals capable of global communication and competition, which aligns with the strategic objectives of the nation's economic and social development. It also stressed the significance of educational reform and development by adopting advanced global educational concepts and practices.

It is argued that EPS directly contributes to the goal of enabling students to actively engage in international communication and competition^[28,34]. As it could equip students with essential skills, such as English communication skills, logical reasoning, and presentation skills, all of which are key attributes indispensable for success in international communication and competition^[28,34].

Integrating the EPS course into China's higher education curriculum is consistent with the Outline's emphasis on adopting and localizing advanced foreign teaching ideas and practices. Jia further suggested that higher education institutions, as key implementers, must reform foreign language education to meet the nation's demand for skilled professional^[28]. He concluded that integrating EPS addresses the development needs of national education, higher education institutions, and students' personal skill growth^[28].

3.3. Expanding EPS through Integration with Other Courses

While some teachers viewed EPS as a standalone course and established a relatively comprehensive teaching framework, others experimented with integrating EPS into different courses to develop specific skills during its initial localization stage^[28]. For instance, EPS activities were incorporated into the Comprehensive English Course, with the first 15 minutes of each class dedicated to students' English speech activities, followed by a feedback session involving

both the teacher and peers^[35]. This approach significantly enhanced students' confidence in English communication and fostered a greater interaction between teachers and students.

Similarly, EPS activities were also integrated into the English Movie Appreciation Course, aiming to cultivate students' overall English language proficiency^[36]. By engaging students in imitating classic English speeches from movies, delivering speeches on assigned topics inspired by movies, and practicing EPS skills, it demonstrated that EPS as an extended English teaching activity is both feasible and operational.

In another instance, EPS was embedded into English writing classes to enhance students' English writing skills^[37]. In addition to integrating EPS activities into different courses, it was also frequently paired with English Debate as part of its localization process. Some teachers viewed EPS and English Debate as a single independent course, while others adopted English debating as an activity within the EPS course to encourage students' engagement and creativity. No matter which form, they all aimed to develop students' English communication skills.

3.4. Integrating EPS into Higher Education Curriculum

Through Chinese teachers' and scholars' active exploration, supported by relevant policies, the EPS course was officially incorporated as a compulsory course in the National Standards for the Quality of Undergraduate Professional Teaching in General Colleges and Universities released by China's MOE in 2018^[38]. This milestone marked a significant step in the localization of the EPS course, highlighting its importance within China's higher education curriculum. This milestone marked a significant step in the localization of the EPS course, highlighting its importance within China's higher education curriculum. Since its inclusion in China's higher education, considerable improvements have been made in its teaching methods, teaching materials, curriculum design, and related academic research, reflecting dedicated efforts to localize it to meet China's development needs. The growing interest in EPS also aligns with China's long-standing tradition of appreciating the rhetorical art of PS, further integrating Western methodologies with Chinese cultural and educational contexts.

4. Advancement of the EPS Course: Towards National Standards and Global Competitiveness

China has a well-established tradition of developing medium- and long-term plans for higher education^[37]. In 2010, the Outline was approved at a State Council executive meeting, providing strategic guidance from a high-level perspective for the development goals and planning framework of China's higher education from 2010 to 2020^[33]. Under this strategic guidance, the series of Double First-Class Initiatives were successfully launched.

While the various development goals for higher education set forth in the Outline were gradually completed, China has also targeted the 2030s by formulating a new medium- and long-term plan for education modernization. This effort responded to the United Nations' 2015 initiatives, the Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Education 2030 Framework for Action^[39]. On February 23, 2019, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued China's Education Modernization 2035, aligning with the strategic layout for the overall development of China till 2035^[40]. Grounded in addressing current needs while aiming for long-term progress, it outlines ten strategic tasks aimed at advancing education modernization, including following Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, building a world-class education sector with Chinese Characteristics, and improving the cultivation process of first-class talents and their innovation capability.

Guided by the medium- and long-term plans for higher education, a series of initiatives has been issued, including First-Class Courses, ideological and political education, and the "Three-into" Pilot Reform. As an essential part of China's higher education curriculum, the development of the EPS course is undoubtedly influenced by these initiatives.

4.1. Advancing toward "Golden Course" Standards

In June 2018, the National Conference on Undergraduate Education in the New Era, convened by China's MOE, introduced the concept of "Golden Courses." In November of the same year, Wu Yan, then Director of the Higher Education Department of the MOE, elaborated on the construc-

tion standards for "Golden Courses" during the 11th China University Teaching Forum, emphasizing their advanced, innovative, and challenging characteristics^[41]. At its core, the "Golden Courses" aims to guide education back to its essence, focusing on holistic education. As a highly comprehensive and interdisciplinary subject, the EPS course embodies this essence, fostering students' holistic competence, including core skills, cross-disciplinary knowledge, and critical thinking^[25,41-43]. It aligns closely with the "Golden Course" framework, which prioritizes high-level, challenging content and holistic education principles, showcasing the great potential to become a "Golden Course"^[43]. In October 2019, the MOE issued the Implementation Opinions on the Construction of First-Class Undergraduate Courses, aiming to develop 10,000 national and 10,000 provincial high-quality undergraduate courses within 3 years, referred to as the "Double Ten Thousand Plan"^[44]. This initiative officially renamed "Golden Courses" to "First-Class Courses," emphasizing the comprehensive development of first-class undergraduate courses with advanced teaching objectives, rigorous and challenging teaching content, and innovative teaching methods that integrate modern information technology and promote interactive, exploratory, and personalized learning experiences^[6,25,43]. Within the framework of "Golden Courses", teachers are expected to lead innovation, while students serve as the primary focus of educational activities^[43].

In response to this, blended learning based on Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) or Small Private Online Courses (SPOC) has become a primary teaching reform approach for the EPS course^[45-50]. Blended learning, which integrates offline learning with technology-mediated online learning, has developed rapidly in recent years with the guidance and support of the Chinese government^[43,51]. Since early 2020, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and China's active implementation of the "Double Ten Thousand Plan" has further popularized blended learning based on MOOC or SPOC in China's higher education^[43,52,53]. With the potential to provide students with a more personalized and flexible learning experience, blended learning has reversed traditional teacher-led instruction by encouraging students to engage in self-directed learning outside of class and actively participate in discussions during class^[45,47].

Positioning blended learning as an enhancement of ed-

educational theory that leverages the advantages of diverse learning resources, Guo argued that blended learning can effectively address several issues found in traditional classroom instruction, such as limited class hours, challenging teaching materials, and students' diverse proficiency levels and learning needs^[46]. Implementing a systematically designed blended learning model that emphasizes learner autonomy, holistic development, and practical application, he found that the approach enhanced students' interaction, engagement, and confidence. By integrating online and face-to-face instruction, the model helps overcome the constraints of traditional classrooms while creating a supportive, resource-rich environment that fosters students' EPS competence and overall communicative ability^[46].

The effectiveness of blended learning in EPS instruction received further validation from Ge, Fan, and Zhang^[54]. Their model integrated SPOC-based online instruction with practice-oriented face-to-face teaching, offering students greater autonomy and flexibility. The online platform provided modular learning resources to support students' self-paced study, while classroom sessions focused on task-based activities, live speech performance, and structured peer feedback. This coordinated approach not only ensured sufficient input and practice opportunities but also enhanced students' autonomous learning ability, strengthened interaction and peer feedback, and improved their overall engagement and EPS performance^[54].

This method redefines the relationship between teachers and students, positioning students as active participants in the learning process while teachers assume the role of facilitators. Aligning with the principles of "Golden Courses" and "First-class Courses" frameworks, blended learning becomes an effective approach for advancing the EPS course, which emphasizes innovative teaching practices and prioritizes learners as the main focus of educational activities^[47,50].

4.2. Integrating Ideological and Political Education into the EPS Course

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, the principle of "cultivating virtue and nurturing talent" has become a cornerstone of China's higher educational philosophy and practice^[55]. In 2014, Shanghai took the lead in integrating ideological and political education into all courses, which not only refers to moral education but also to fostering cultural

identity, national consciousness, and students' ability to understand and communicate China's development narratives. In 2016, this approach was elevated to national significance when President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of ideological and political education in higher education at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education. He highlighted its fundamental role in determining what kind of talents are being cultivated, how they are cultivated, and for whom they are cultivated, and called for higher education to integrate ideological and political education throughout the entire teaching to ensure holistic education^[56].

In 2017, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued policy guidelines, followed by the MOE's the implementation outline for deploying and promoting the integration of ideological and political education across higher education institutions nationwide^[57]. By being formally incorporated into the national documents, what began as a local practice has been transformed into a national strategic deployment, becoming an important concept and innovative practice in China's higher education^[58].

In May 2020, the MOE further issued new guidelines to comprehensively promote integrating ideological and political education into higher education. These guidelines emphasize the need for higher education institutions to deepen educational and teaching reforms, integrating ideological and political education into all disciplines and courses. The aim is to fully leverage the educational potential of each course, enhancing the quality of talent cultivation. This integration requires all courses to actively dig into ideological and political elements inherent within them, such as patriotism, ethical norms, and scientific and humanistic spirit, to achieve a cohesive unity among value shaping, knowledge transmission, and ability cultivation^[58]. Under such a context, how to effectively integrate the ideological and political elements into all aspects of classroom teaching has become a hot topic in EPS teaching reform^[59]. Meanwhile, some noticed that the EPS course still faces issues like insufficiently advanced learning objectives, inadequate challenge in teaching content, and a lack of innovation in teaching approaches^[6]. In response, many scholars and educators have suggested adopting the Production-oriented Approach (POA) to achieve a natural integration of value shaping, knowledge transmission, and ability cultivation^[6,42,47,59–61].

The POA, introduced by Chinese scholar Wen Qiufang and instilled with Chinese characteristics, addresses issues in China's foreign language education^[62]. By emphasizing language production as the goal, it highlights the importance of providing students with opportunities to apply what they have learned and focuses on the nurturing function of language teaching. Grounded in the teaching theories of learner-centeredness, the integration of learning and application, and holistic education, the POA closely aligns with the requirements of ideological and political education in courses^[62–64]. As the integration of learning and application theory addresses the disconnect between learning and application. Meanwhile, holistic education emphasizes that language education should not only develop students' comprehensive language proficiency but also focus on moral, intellectual, and emotional aspects to achieve humanistic goals. Through seamlessly combining language learning objectives with ideological and political education goals, the POA promotes the achievement of the organic unity of value shaping, knowledge transmission, and ability cultivation, enabling the EPS course to acquire the functions of cultivating virtue and nurturing talent^[59,60,64]. Moreover, following the POA framework, the teaching procedure for EPS is structured into three key stages: motivating, enabling, and assessing, with each designed to systematically develop students' language use, content generation, and structural organization in speech production^[42,63]. In addition, all three stages offer ample opportunities for fostering students' ideological and political development, allowing organic integration of ideological and political education into teaching objectives, content, and assessment^[64].

Building upon the theoretical foundations of the POA, several empirical teaching practices have been developed to demonstrate its applicability in the EPS course, particularly in integrating ideological and political elements into language instruction. He and Zhang proposed a Theme-based Integrated Production (TIP) model that combines the three core stages of the POA, motivating, enabling, and assessing, with theme-based learning^[63].

In the motivating stage, students are given an authentic output task centered on socially meaningful themes such as environmental protection, innovation, or China's development stories, which reflect core ideological and political values. In the enabling stage, scaffolded activities are de-

signed around the same theme, with carefully selected materials that guide students to explore relevant cultural and moral dimensions while developing linguistic, rhetorical, and organizational skills. In the assessing stage, teacher evaluation, peer feedback, and self-reflection are integrated to help students refine their speech performance and deepen their understanding of both language and values^[63].

This model demonstrates how the POA can effectively link linguistic development with ideological and moral cultivation, achieving the unity of value shaping, knowledge transmission, and ability cultivation in EPS instruction.

4.3. Developing EPS Textbook with Chinese Characteristics

At the CPC centenary ceremony in 2021, President Xi Jinping introduced the concept of Chinese modernization, which was further emphasized in the 20th CPC National Congress report. It highlighted that the modernization of higher education with Chinese characteristics is a key driver for achieving Chinese modernization^[65]. Advancing high-quality development in higher education is vital for providing robust support to achieve Chinese modernization. As an integral part of higher education, foreign language education has been tasked with fostering both language competence and cultural-political awareness. Within this context, EPS, as a core course for enhancing students' communicative competence, has gained renewed significance^[7,66].

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China's higher foreign language education has consistently made significant efforts to strengthen its sense of responsibility in serving the nation's strategies^[57]. During the process of advancing higher education development, three major tasks have been established: upholding the principle of cultivating virtue and nurturing talent, innovating the curriculum system, textbook system, and knowledge system, and making use of the richness of Chinese traditional culture and contemporary achievements to emphasize the Chinese perspective^[57,64]. In order to accomplish the three major tasks and further enhance the role of higher foreign language education in serving China's national strategies, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and the MOE launched the "Three-Into" Initiative at the end of 2019. This pilot reform aims to integrate the multilingual editions of Xi Jinping: The Governance of China into universities, textbooks, and classrooms.

It compiles speeches, talks, addresses, question and answer sessions, directives, and congratulatory letters by President Xi Jinping, offering students insights into various aspects of China to get a better knowledge of national conditions, development path, Chinese wisdom, and Chinese culture^[67].

As Wu Shixing, Deputy Director of the Department of Higher Education of MOE, explained, this “Three-Into” reform is, first and foremost, a proactive response to the Party and the nation’s developmental needs^[68]. Furthermore, aligned with the strategic tasks outlined in China’s Education Modernization 2035, the “Three-Into” initiative supports the pivotal role of higher education in transforming China into a strong educational powerhouse. As emphasized by President Xi Jinping during the Fifth Collective Study Session of the 18th Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee in 2023, higher education is a key driver of this transformation. In the context of accelerated global changes and increasingly complex international relations, the “Three-Into” initiative seeks to address challenges that China faces in international communications. To cultivate high-quality foreign language professionals with a strong sense of patriotism, a global perspective, and professional expertise who can effectively tell China’s stories on the international stage, the “Three-Into” initiative contributes to strengthening China’s international communication capacity and effectively conveying China’s voice. In doing so, it aims to project a credible, lovable, and respectable image of China on the global stage^[68].

To comprehensively advance the “Three-Into” initiative, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee officially launched a compilation program for *Understanding Contemporary China* series of multilingual textbooks with the MOE, based on the multilingual editions of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, in September 2021. Led by Beijing Foreign Studies University, with the participation of 251 foreign language experts and scholars from multiple universities nationwide, the multilingual series of textbooks covering nine foreign languages was published by FLTRP in 2022. As one of the most important courses to equip students with strong communication skills, the EPS course was included in the *Understanding Contemporary China* textbook series^[66]. Tailored to China’s educational landscape by incorporating Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era with the development of EPS skills, its textbook *Understanding Contemporary*

China: A Public Speaking Course addresses the previous overemphasis on EPS skills while placing insufficient focus on value and ideological content^[69]. With the aim of cultivating students’ ability to effectively tell China’s stories to the international community with enhanced EPS skills, this textbook integrates topics such as the Chinese Dream, ecological civilization, and community with a shared future, guiding students to articulate Chinese perspectives in English with intercultural awareness and rhetorical competence, while retaining the core skills and foundational knowledge of EPS. The emergence of the *Understanding Contemporary China* textbook marks a significant advancement in the development of EPS course^[5,65,66].

To support the nationwide adoption of this textbook for the EPS course, a national-level virtual teaching and research section was established, accompanied by extensive teaching resources such as teacher manuals, instructional PowerPoints, and teaching design cases. Additionally, explanatory videos on how to use the textbook were created and a digital learning platform was developed, helping students internalize the core ideas presented in the textbook and articulate them in English.

The launch of *Understanding Contemporary China: A Public Speaking Course* represents an innovative step in establishing an independent knowledge system for the EPS course, with distinctive Chinese characteristics^[59]. The primary focus of teaching EPS has currently shifted from skill-based performance to an integrated approach that emphasizes students’ value shaping, knowledge transmission, and ability cultivation^[5,55,66,67]. This shift is expected to enhance students’ ability to engage in global communication and tell China’s story more effectively to the world, presenting a real and objective China^[66].

5. Conclusions

This review goes through the 30 years development of the EPS course in China, emphasizing how it has transformed from a skill-focused course to one that integrates ideological, political, and cultural elements aimed at value shaping, knowledge transmission, and ability cultivation in alignment with national educational goals. As one important form of monologic communication, EPS was initially viewed as an effective way to cultivate students’ English communication

skill. Under the widespread influence of various English speech contests and the support of successive educational policies, EPS has been gradually incorporated into higher education curricula. As China's demand for globally competent communicators increased, it evolved into a formal EFL course with distinctive Chinese characteristics. Throughout this process, Chinese educators have actively explored how to localize the EPS course through the adaptation of its teaching content and approaches. Now, this process has shifted from localization to indigenization, marked by development of textbooks with Chinese characteristics and the systematic integration of ideological and political elements into the curriculum. This transition has ultimately established an autonomous and culturally grounded educational framework in line with China's educational modernization agenda and national developmental strategies.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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