The Impact of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education on Individual Subjective Career Success: An Empirical Study Based on CFPS (2020)

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Abstract: Ideological and Political Education (IPE) in higher education is a key course for fulfilling the fundamental task of moral education. Using individual-level data from the 2020 China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), this study employs a binary logit model to examine the effects of IPE on individuals' subjective career success (SCS), including intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. The results show that IPE significantly shapes both dimensions of SCS, while the influence on extrinsic success is comparatively weaker. Building on the benchmark regression, this study further explores the role of higher education reform and variations in IPE systems across institutions, and conducts heterogeneity analyses based on Party membership, Internet participation, marital status, and family size. The findings indicate that the effectiveness of IPE is sensitive to heterogeneous factors, particularly family-related conditions. Overall, IPE exerts a stronger influence on intrinsic career success, and theoretically oriented IPE approaches are more effective in fostering intrinsic success.

Keywords: Subjective Career Success (SCS); China Family Panel Studies (CFPS); Logit Model; Ideological and Political Education(IPE)

Introduction

With the rapid socio-economic development, Chinese youth are increasingly embedded in a highly competitive environment shaped by emerging economic forms, diverse external ideologies, and fragmented information landscapes (Lian, 2025). Coupled with the utilitarian orientation of prevailing social evaluation systems, these conditions may distort individuals' psychological and value cognition, fostering short-term and instrumental approaches to career values (Zhuang, 2023). In response, the Chinese government has placed great emphasis on the Ideological and Political Education (IPE) function of higher education, issuing policy documents such as the "Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education under the New Situation"(关于加强和改进新形势下高校思想政治工作的意见) and the "Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Evaluation in the New Era"(深化新时代教育评价改革总体方案). These policies have highlighted the role of IPE in talent cultivation, seeking to correct the overemphasis on technical and professional training at the expense of moral and character development in some universities (Wang, 2024). In this context, IPE is expected to play a normative and guiding role in shaping students' career values (Zhang, 2025). Accordingly, a clearer understanding of the extent and mechanisms through

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which IPE influences individuals' perceptions of subjective career success (SCS) is essential, both for assessing its effectiveness in guiding career cognition and for advancing the core educational mission of moral cultivation in higher education.

Literature Review

This study primarily reviews research on the impacts of ideological education. O'Neill (1981) has emphasized that the ideological character of education is unavoidable, although its effects remain contested. Many scholars emphasize the role of ideological education in fostering critical thinking, civic responsibility, and moral judgment, thereby contributing to social cohesion and public engagement (Alexander, 2005; Glaeser et al., 2007). Other scholars argue that ideological education primarily operates as an instrument of state ideology, aimed at maintaining social order rather than enhancing individuals' value cognition (Apple & Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2024). Research on the impact of IPE in China similarly emphasizes the effectiveness in enhancing individuals' political awareness and civic engagement (Yu & Wang, 2025; Zhao & Zhang, 2024). Meanwhile, given the unique requirements of Chinese policies, scholars have increasingly examined the connection between IPE and university students' employment and career planning (Cheng et al., 2023; Guo, 2024).

Although existing research has generated substantial insights into political identity and social responsibility, comparatively little attention has been devoted to career-related cognition. In practice, IPE not only cultivates political identity and civic responsibility but also plays an important role in shaping individuals' career values. Moreover, while prior studies have offered limited analysis of IPE as a deeper socialization mechanism that shapes individuals' SCS through value formation.

This study draws on individual microdata to examine, at the micro-level, how IPE influences students' perceptions of SCS and its differentiated mechanisms. Specifically, the study aims to contribute in four ways: (1) building an empirical model based on household survey data to analyze the strength and mechanisms of IPE's influence on SCS; (2) distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of career success to compare the pathways through which IPE shapes students' perceptions; (3) conducting heterogeneity analyses across key value-related factors, including Party membership, online participation, marital status, and family size; (4) situating the analysis within the broader trajectory of IPE in Chinese higher education, with attention to expansion policies and curricular reforms.

Theoretical Analysis

In Chinese higher education, IPE extends beyond the development of students' academic abilities and communication skills, and also aims to foster social responsibility, civic awareness, and moral judgment (Hong et al., 2018). The influence of IPE on individual value cognition operates primarily through two mechanisms: knowledge transmission and the embedding of power and values (Ekehammar et al., 1987; Gramsci, 2020).

First, IPE enhances individuals' reflective and critical thinking by deepening the depth of value cognition through knowledge transmission. At the university stage, students' cognitive development typically reaches the formal operational stage, which is characterized by abstract reasoning and reflective thinking (Babakr et al., 2019). Within this context, IPE integrates disciplines such as philosophy, politics, law, and public administration into the curriculum, providing students with systematic knowledge of social processes, value judgments, and theoretical reasoning (Bowyer & Kahne, 2020). Such training strengthens students' capacity for critical analysis and reflection on social issues (Su et al., 2022), thereby fostering higher-order value cognition.

Second, IPE enhances individuals' judgment capacity by broadening the breadth of value cognition through the embedding of power relations and normative values. Beyond formal instruction, IPE responds to domestic and international political contexts to shape students' moral quality, social responsibility, and historical consciousness (Li et al., 2022). Through diverse pedagogical

practices, IPE influences students' value orientations and behavioral patterns (Zhao, 2017), thereby fostering appropriate life goals, coherent value orientations, and civic awareness (Svensson, 2023). This process enhances the precision of students' value judgments by embedding political awareness and normative expectations.

Thus, IPE strengthens students' dialectical thinking and value discernment, thereby shaping their perceptions of career success. Therefore, the paper proposes Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1: *IPE has a positive influence on individuals' SCS cognition.*

At the same time, the formation of personal values is the result of the mutual construction between self-awareness and the social environment, which constitutes a stable system constructed by individuals through the dual mechanisms of internalizing social norms and realizing self-worth during the socialization process (Zhang et al., 2017). From the perspective of cognitive learning theory, value guidance in higher education ideological and political education is fundamentally a process where individuals transform societal demands into internalized value recognition through dialectical thinking (Kong & Guo, 2023). This process is influenced by multiple factors:

First, educational environmental factors exert a significant moderating effect. Exposure to role models and political education can enhance value cognition (Liu & Ren, 2019), whereas the fragmented online environment and "post-truth" discourses may erode students' ability to filter accurate information (Chen, 2020). This cognitive dilemma is particularly pronounced among contemporary university students, with some exhibiting "disengaged learning" and weakened civic responsibility (Wu & Chen, 2022). Second, individual characteristic variables exert differentiated influences. Social role transitions and family structures reshape individuals' value acceptance thresholds through the self-concept system (Tan, 2019), subsequently influencing subjective initiative and leading to divergent cognitive awareness among individuals.

Thus, an individual's SCS is influenced by personal characteristics and educational environments, leading to distinct characteristics in the guidance provided by IPE in higher education. Therefore, the paper proposes Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2: *The magnitude of the effect of IPE on individuals' SCS cognition varies across different individual characteristics and contextual conditions.*

Empirical Analysis

Data Sources

The China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) is a nationally representative social survey project that has been updated biennially since its inception in 2010, with data from six waves currently available to the public (available at: http://www.isss.pku.edu.cn). The CFPS features extensive population coverage, high data reliability, and a large sample size, effectively addressing common challenges in individual-level micro research, such as limited sample sizes, non-standardized sampling procedures, and measurement inconsistency. As a result, CFPS has become a widely used and authoritative data source for analyzing micro-level individual behaviors in China. Given the relatively stable nature of individuals' social value perceptions over short time horizons, this study does not construct inter-temporal panel data. Instead, the 2020 CFPS individual dataset is employed as the primary data source to ensure the robustness and reliability of the empirical analysis. The dataset was cleaned and processed according to CFPS guidelines and technical documentation, applying rational methods and retaining as much valid data as possible, resulting in 22,746 sample records.

Research Model

Given that the variables in this study are binary, a binary logit model is employed, as it is more appropriate for modeling discrete choice outcomes than the conventional Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model. The model specification is presented as follows:

$$\text{logit}(Y_i) = \ln(\frac{p_i}{1-p_i}) = \hat{a}_0 + \hat{a}_1 IPE_i + \hat{a}_2 \text{control}_i + \mathring{a}_i$$

In the model, where *i* refers to the respondent, and P_i denotes the probability of choosing the dependent variable. The explained variable (Y_i) captures individuals' SCS, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. The explanatory variable (IPE) indicates whether the respondent received IPE during higher education. The control variables include health status (health), employment (employ), military experience (military), family size (counts), household type (urban), household income level (income), and ethnicity (ethnicity), where $\mathring{a}_i$ denotes the random error term.

Variable Definition and Measurement

Explained Variable (Y_i)

Subjective career success (SCS) refers to an individual's self-evaluation of employment-related value, shaped by cognitive level, age, career stage, personal aspirations, and the perceived evaluations of others (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Judge et al., 1995). Gattiker and Larwood (1986) further conceptualize SCS as encompassing both intrinsic success, reflected in the perceived value of interpersonal relationships, and extrinsic success, reflected in perceptions of material rewards and wealth. Accordingly, this study selects two items from the CFPS value-perception module. The item "Wealth reflects personal value" (财富就可以反映个人价值) is used to capture extrinsic success, while the item "Social relationships are more important than personal ability" (社会关系比个人能力更为重要) is used to capture intrinsic success.

After variable adjustment, responses are coded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree 1 to strongly agree 5, with higher values indicating stronger agreement with the statements. To facilitate empirical analysis, this study follows Zhou et al. (2014) by transforming the original data into dichotomous variables (where 1-3 are coded as 0 and 4-5 as 1) and trichotomous variables (where 1-2 are coded as 0, 3 as 1, and 4-5 as 2) for for benchmark regression analysis and robustness checks. Moreover, the use of single-item measures to operationalize perceptions of SCS is justified for two reasons. First, the selected items provide precise representations of the theoretical constructs, whereas other items in the module exhibit limited conceptual relevance. Second, aggregating multiple items into composite indices may obscure the interpretability of the empirical results.

Explanatory Variable (IPE)

As a distinctive form of education in China, IPE functions as a cultural site for ideological transmission and is inevitably characterized by ideological attributes (Huang, 2025). The constitutes an educational practice guided by political purposes and characterized by ideological, political, and value-oriented dimensions (Dong, 2019). The primary aim of IPE is to guide students toward appropriate value orientations while transmitting and internalizing the dominant ideology (Li et al., 2004). In the CFPS database, information on educational attainment is derived from both the current stage of study of enrolled students and the highest degree obtained by graduates. Given that IPE in Chinese higher education is primarily concentrated in the first two years of undergraduate study, and that the data were collected during the summer vacation, this study treats enrolled students who have not yet obtained the corresponding degree as having already completed IPE. Consequently, this study constructs an education variable by combining graduates' highest degree attainment with the current stage of study of enrolled students, assigning a value of 1 to individuals who are pursuing or have attained a junior college degree or higher. To address potential endogeneity, this study employs

individual intellectual level as an instrumental variable, defining respondents with an intellectual level exceeding 3 as having relatively high cognitive ability and assigning them a value of 1.

Control Variables

Since perceptions of SCS are shaped by a range of social factors and individual experiences, this study incorporates control variables at both the individual and family levels to enhance the accuracy and robustness of the baseline regression analysis. This approach helps mitigate potential endogeneity arising from omitted variables. The specific control variables are defined as follows. At the individual level, three variables are included: health status, work experience, and military service experience. Health status is coded as a binary variable following Cheng et al. (2014), with respondents reporting "healthy" or "very healthy" coded as 1. Work experience is measured as a binary variable based on respondents' self-reported employment history. Military service experience is coded as 1 if the respondent has served in the military or is a veteran. At the family level, control variables include family size, household registration type, and ethnicity. Ethnic minority status is coded as 1 in the ethnicity variable. Family size is measured as the total number of individuals residing in the respondent's household. Urban household registration is coded as 1. Furthermore, regional fixed effects are incorporated account for unobserved regional-level control variables in the study.

Extended Research Variables

This study further examines the impact of IPE in higher education institutions on SCS from both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions.

In terms of educational factors, two key aspects are examined: higher education reform and differences in moral education systems across universities. Following Wu et al. (2022), year of birth is used to construct a binary variable indicating whether an individual reached college-entry age after the 1999 higher education reform, thereby enabling a comparative analysis of university reforms. In addition, a binary variable is constructed based on variations in ideological and political curriculum structures across higher education institutions to capture differences in curriculum systems.

To examine heterogeneous effects, four moderating variables are selected from two dimensions. First, at the intra-individual level, relatively stable personal characteristics are considered. Married or remarried respondents are classified as being in a marital union and coded as 1. Family size is defined following Wu et al. (2022), with households comprising more than four members classified as large families and assigned a value of 1. Second, from the external dimension of the individual, this study examines how SCS is influenced by broader social factors. Party membership is defined as affiliation with the Communist Party of China and coded as 1, indicating exposure to party-related education. Respondents who habitually watch short videos are classified as having high levels of Internet participation and assigned a value of 1. Detailed coding criteria for all variables are reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Variable Definitions

Variable Category	***Symbol***	***Variable Name***	***Definition***
Dependent Variables	Y1	Extrinsic Success	Identification with the idea that wealth reflects personal value (1-0)
	Y2	Intrinsic Success	Identification with the notion that social relationships are more important than personal abilities (1-0)
Independent Variable	IPE	Experience in Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education	whether the individual has received post-secondary education or higher (1-0)

Table 1. Variable Definitions (continued)

Variable Category	*Symbol*	*Variable Name*	*Definition*
Control Variables	urban	household Type	Type of household registration (urban = 1, rural = 0)
	counts	Family Size	The number of people in the household (continuous variable)
	ethnicity	Ethnicity	Whether the individual belongs to an ethnic minority (1-0)
	income	Household Income	Whether the household income is above average in the region (1-0)
	employ	Employment	Whether the individual has full-time employment (1-0)
	health	Health Status	Whether the individual is in good physical health (1-0)
	military	Military Experience	Whether the individual has military service experience (1-0)
Extended Analysis Variables	fam	Family Size	Large family (1 = Yes, 0 = No)
	cpc	Party Membership	Member of the Communist Party of China (1 = Yes, 0 = No)
	net	Internet Participation	Use of short video platforms (1 = Yes, 0 = No)
	marriage	Marital Status	Currently in a legally recognized marriage (1 = Yes, 0 = No)
	bachelor	Undergraduate Moral Education System	Received undergraduate education and above (1-0)
	reform	Higher Education Reform	Higher education after college expansion (1-0)
Mediating Variable	IQ	Intellectual Level	Intellectual assessment above the average level (1 = Yes, 0 = No)

Descriptive Analysis

The results of the variable data description in Table 2 show that the descriptive statistics for each variable align with the current state of Chinese society, with dispersion levels within a reasonable range. This effectively prevents extreme values from interfering with the regression analysis. Accordingly, this study employs a binary discrete model to analyze the effect of IPE experiences in higher education on individuals' SCS. This provides a more rigorous analysis of how IPE shapes perceptions of both intrinsic and extrinsic success.

Table 2. Variable Description

Variable Name	*Sample Size*	*Mean*	*Minimum Value*	*Maximum Value*
Y1	22746	0.764	0	1
Y2	22746	0.7	0	1
urban	22746	0.514	0	1
counts	22746	4.259	1	15

Table 2. Variable Description (continued)

Variable Name	*Sample Size*	*Mean*	*Minimum Value*	*Maximum Value*
employ	22746	0.659	0	1
health	22746	0.783	0	1
military	22746	0.029	0	1
ethnicity	22746	0.087	0	1
income	22746	0.193	0	1

Empirical Regression Results

Baseline Regression and Marginal Effect Analysis

This study employs a binary logit model to examine the effect of IPE experience on individuals' SCS. To improve the accuracy and internal validity of the benchmark regression results and to mitigate potential endogeneity arising from omitted variables, regional fixed effects are incorporated alongside individual- and family-level control variables. In terms of result interpretation, since the regression coefficients of the binary logit model primarily indicate the direction of influence rather than directly representing the marginal effect of explanatory variables on the dependent variable, the probability of an event occurring must be calculated using e^{β}. Additionally, to better analyze causality, this paper calculates the arithmetic mean of the model's marginal effects, using the average marginal effect to represent the marginal effect. The relevant results presented in Appendix A indicate that:

The effect of IPE on perceptions of extrinsic success in higher education is presented as follows. As shown in Regression Result (1), the coefficient for IPE is -0.170 and remains statistically significant at the 1% level, indicating that individuals with IPE experience are less likely to equate wealth with personal value. This finding suggests that IPE contributes to a more accurate understanding of extrinsic success. Further analysis shows that the proportion of higher-educated individuals holding a positive perception differs by more than 18% compared with those without IPE experience. Additionally, Marginal Result (3) indicates a coefficient of -0.030 for the effect of IPE experience, which indicating that IPE effectively reduces cognitive bias and yields a positive marginal effect of 0.03 units on extrinsic success.

The impact of IPE on perceptions of intrinsic success is presented as follows. Regression Result (2) reports a coefficient of -0.287 for IPE, which is statistically significant, indicating that individuals with IPE experience are less likely to believe that social relationships are more important than personal ability. This finding suggests that IPE contributes to a clearer understanding of intrinsic success. Further results show that the proportion of individuals with higher education who hold a positive perception of intrinsic success is more than 33% higher than that of individuals without IPE experience. Additionally, Marginal Effect Result (4) highlights a coefficient of -0.059, which indicates that IPE effectively reduces cognitive bias and yields a positive marginal effect of 0.059 units on intrinsic success.

The correlation coefficients indicate that IPE in higher education exerts a significant positive influence on individuals' perceptions of SCS, with a stronger effect on intrinsic success than on extrinsic success.

Robustness Test

To assess the robustness of the baseline regression results (see Appendix B), this study conducts a series of robustness checks using three commonly employed approaches: replacing the primary explanatory variable, the empirical model, and adjusting the sample.

The primary explanatory variable is replacement. This paper transforms the dependent variable from a binary to a ternary ordinal variable. In the context of analyzing ordinal variables, the ordered logit regression model is more scientifically sound than the traditional logit regression. Because the model variables cannot be paralleled through data trends, this study references Gao and Du (2019) and constructs a generalized ordered logit model for analysis. As shown in Regression Results (5)-(8), the estimated effects of IPE on both intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions of career success remain robust in terms of statistical significance, direction, and magnitude. These findings are consistent with the baseline regression results.

Empirical model replacement. The Probit and logit models are frequently employed for binary discrete empirical analysis. This study performs a robustness check on the benchmark regression model using the Probit model. According to the regression results (9) and (10), the impact of college IPE on perceptions of extrinsic and intrinsic success remains consistent with the benchmark model in terms of significance, direction, and relative coefficient magnitude. Therefore, the regression results align with those of the benchmark model, providing empirical support through the robustness test by substituting the main explanatory variable.

Sample replacement analysis. This study analyzes data from 2018, retaining 28,256 samples through consistent variable processing methods. According to regression results (11) and (12) , the effects of IPE on both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of SCS remain stable compared to the baseline model, in terms of statistical significance, direction, and coefficient values. These findings confirm the robustness of the benchmark regression through sample substitution.

Taken together, robustness checks conducted through alternative variable specifications, model substitution, and sample replacement consistently support the baseline findings. This provides robust evidence supporting the reliability and validity of the empirical findings from the benchmark regression in this study.

Endogeneity Test

This study addresses potential endogeneity concerns arising from omitted variables and reverse causality by employing an instrumental variable approach. Specifically, an IV-Probit model is applied following Luo et al. (2020). Although previous studies have frequently used parental educational attainment as an instrumental variable for individual education, this approach may violate the exogeneity assumption in the present context, as SCS is itself significantly shaped by parental education (Min et al., 2012). Accordingly, individual intelligence is adopted as an instrumental variable, given its strong correlation with educational attainment and its absence of direct association with perceptions of SCS. The validity of the instrumental variable is evaluated using the Wald test for exogeneity and the AR test for weak instrument concerns (Yin et al., 2019). The regression results (see Appendix C) indicate that the instrumental variables passed the validity test. Therefore, the estimated coefficient of IPE remains consistent with the baseline model in both direction and statistical significance, further reinforcing the robustness of the conclusion that higher education IPE exerts a positive influence on individuals' SCS.

Further Analysis

Building on the baseline regression model, this section will conduct a deeper analysis of how IPE in higher education cultivates individuals' SCS, which will primarily expand in three directions: higher education reform, the IPE systems of different higher education institutions, and heterogeneity analysis.

Analysis of Differences within China's IPE System

Higher Education Reform

In the early 21st century, China launched the Action Plan for the Revitalization of Education in the 21st Century, which triggered a large-scale expansion of higher education. Beginning in 1999, the enrollment expansion rate exceeded 47%, and the number of students in regular higher education institutions increased from 1.084 million in 1998 to 5.659 million in 2007, representing a growth of 422% (Ministry of Education, 2019). This expansion marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of Chinese higher education. Against this backdrop, this study conducts a comparative analysis of SCS across different cohorts exposed to IPE before and after the enrollment expansion. Separate regression models are estimated for the pre- and post-expansion periods to examine how the effects of IPE on SCS vary across stages of higher education development. The results reported in Appendix D indicate that:

Regression results (15) and (17) show that the coefficients for university-level IPE are negative in both the pre- and post-reform periods. The effect is stronger and more statistically significant before the higher education reform, with a coefficient of -0.56, compared to -0.096 after the reform. These results indicate that individuals exposed to IPE in both periods are less likely to equate material wealth with personal value, although this tendency is more pronounced among pre-reform cohorts. Consistent with this pattern, the marginal effect estimates reveal larger magnitudes and higher significance prior to the reform, underscoring the stronger role of IPE in shaping perceptions of extrinsic career success in the pre-reform period.

Regression results (16) and (18) indicate that the coefficients for IPE are negative in both the pre- and post-reform periods, with stronger statistical significance observed after the reform. The effect of IPE is stronger and more statistically significant after the higher education reform, with a coefficient of -0.331, compared to -0.183 before the reform. These results indicate that individuals who received IPE, regardless of the reform period, consistently reject the view that social relationships outweigh individual ability, although this tendency is more pronounced in the post-reform cohort. Marginal effect analysis further confirms this pattern, showing greater magnitude and significance for the post-reform group, which highlights the enhanced role of contemporary IPE in fostering intrinsic success values.

Different Systems of IPE Curriculum

China's IPE system in higher education designs corresponding curricula for junior college, bachelor's, and higher-degree levels. The notable difference is that bachelor's and above levels include more theory-oriented courses, such as philosophy and modern Chinese history. Accordingly, this study defines a new higher education variable based on a bachelor's degree or higher to compare the effects of different IPE systems on SCS. Postgraduate education is not analyzed separately due to its relatively limited IPE content and the small number of postgraduate respondents in the database.

Compared with the baseline regression, the results indicate that the direction and significance of the impact remain consistent across curriculum levels, although the significance for extrinsic success is slightly lower. This suggests that IPE at the bachelor's degree level or higher positively influences both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of SCS.

The regression result (19) in Appendix D shows that the coefficient for IPE above the undergraduate level is -0.118, which is lower than in the baseline regression. The proportion of individuals with positive extrinsic success perceptions is also reduced compared to the baseline group. According to the marginal effect analysis, the significance levels and coefficients are slightly lower than those in the baseline model. These findings suggest that the undergraduate-level and higher IPE system does not substantially enhance extrinsic success cognition.

The regression result (20) in indicates that the coefficient for IPE at the bachelor's degree level or higher is -0.462, larger than in the baseline model. The proportion of individuals with positive intrinsic success perceptions is also higher. Marginal effect analysis confirms consistent significance levels, with a greater marginal effect than in the baseline regression. These findings suggest that IPE exerts a stronger influence on intrinsic success when combined with courses such as philosophy and modern Chinese history.

Heterogeneity Analysis

Building on the robustness tests of the benchmark regression, this study further explores the heterogeneity of IPE's effect. By constructing interaction terms with the primary explanatory variable, the study assesses whether university IPE differentially influences individuals' SCS across four dimensions: Party membership, Internet participation, marital status, and family size. This analysis seeks to reveal more nuanced policy implications.

Party Membership

The Communist Party of China cultivates members' ideological awareness through regular theoretical study and guidance on Party values, providing a prime example of value-based learning outside formal educational settings. Regression results (21) and (25) in Appendix E indicate that Party membership significantly strengthens the effect of higher education IPE on SCS. This heightened effect arises because Party members undergo systematic ideological training, progressing from development activists to probationary members and then to full members. According to Party regulations, members engage in systematically organized learning activities, including ideological reports, dialogue sessions, and democratic life meetings. These activities embed values, ideological beliefs, and behavioral norms into each member's ideological framework, distinguishing Party members from non-members (Marquis & Qiao, 2020). Consequently, Party member education effectively shapes individuals' perceptions of career success through extracurricular engagement, illustrating that expanding channels for value education enhances the overall effectiveness of moral education.

Level of Internet Participation

With the rise of new media platforms, such as short-video applications and online communities, individuals' online engagement and dependency have been increasing steadily. Consequently, the online environment has emerged as a key contextual factor shaping value perceptions. Regression results (22) and (26) (Appendix E) indicate that online engagement significantly and negatively moderates the impact of IPE on both extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions of career success in higher education. This finding suggests that a fragmented and high-velocity online environment may significantly undermine the capacity of IPE to shape perceptions of extrinsic success (Zhao, 2018). Accordingly, recognizing the role of online participation is crucial for emphasizing IPE's guidance of individuals' perceptions of SCS.

Family Size

The family constitutes a critical context for value formation, with family size serving as a proxy for variations in parental attention, sibling competition, and family culture. Regression results from Equations (23) and (27) indicate that family size strengthens the positive role of IPE in cultivating extrinsic success, while exerting no significant impact on intrinsic success. This pattern is likely driven by constraints in family resource allocation and intensified intra-family competition, which foster stronger materialistic needs among individuals from larger families (Li et al., 2020). Accordingly, recognizing the heterogeneous role of family size is essential for IPE to effectively shape SCS.

Marital Status

Individual perceptions of social roles influence value cognition, with marital status serving as a key indicator of such roles. As shown by regression results (24) and (28), marital status strengthens the positive role of IPE in cultivating extrinsic success, while exerting no significant impact on intrinsic success. This finding is consistent with prior studies suggesting that marriage reshapes social roles and life pressures, enhances responsibility and social experience, and thereby promotes individuals' recognition of extrinsic success (Carr et al., 2014). Accordingly, enhancing individuals' accurate understanding of different social roles can enhance the effectiveness of IPE in guiding SCS.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Analysis of individual microdata reveals that IPE in higher education functions as an important mechanism for shaping individuals' competencies and perceptions of SCS. This finding fully corroborates prior theoretical research: higher education, through functions such as knowledge transmission and value embedding, effectively promotes individuals' perception of career success. These results provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1. Meanwhile, from the summary of empirical results (see Appendix F), this study also uncovers the following findings:

IPE in higher education has consistently promoted SCS across both pre-reform and post-reform periods, though its effects vary across periods. Regarding intrinsic success, educational modernization and internationalization have prompted IPE to focus more on cultivating students' innovation and perseverance. This shift encourages a transition from relationship-based to competence-oriented values, thereby enhancing human capital for a market-oriented economy (Xie & Ma, 2025). As a result, the influence of IPE on intrinsic success perception is stronger in the post-reform era. In contrast, for extrinsic success, the market-oriented nature of higher education reform has reduced the role of ideological and moral guidance (Zhu & Lou, 2011). Consequently, IPE's effect on extrinsic success perception has weakened, reflecting the tendency of current evaluations to emphasize economic outcomes over broader value formation.

Different IPE systems exhibit distinct patterns in shaping SCS. First, IPE in undergraduate and higher education institutions appears to have limited effectiveness in guiding individuals' perceptions of extrinsic success. Although the IPE system at the undergraduate level and above is relatively well-established, there is a lack of integrated curricular design centered on individuals' understanding of extrinsic success, with a greater emphasis placed on formal alignment rather than systematic and logical coordination across courses (Zhang & Gao, 2026). Moreover, value guidance within these courses continues to focus primarily on theoretical exposition and the cultivation of political identification (Liu et al., 2023), while paying insufficient attention to how individuals negotiate material success, wealth, and related concerns. As a result, the curriculum struggles to provide robust normative support for shaping perceptions of extrinsic success. Second, the inclusion of theoretically oriented disciplines such as philosophy and modern history contributes to the development of students' critical thinking capacities. By strengthening value judgment and reflective reasoning, these disciplines enhance students' understanding of the intrinsic meaning of career development. Therefore, educational systems that place greater emphasis on theoretical subjects are more conducive to fostering perceptions of intrinsic success.

The comparative analysis of individual characteristics provides substantial support for Hypothesis 2. Heterogeneity analyses based on Party membership, Internet engagement, marital status, and family size reveal two key findings. First, extrinsic success is most prominently influenced by individual-level characteristics, particularly family-related factors, which help explain the relatively limited capacity of IPE in Chinese higher education to shape perceptions of extrinsic success. Second, intrinsic success is more susceptible to influences from the educational environment, suggesting that the incorporation of enhanced online guidance and second-classroom activities in contemporary IPE may more effectively foster students' perceptions of intrinsic success.

Based on the conclusions, this study proposes the following policy recommendations: This study finds that the limited impact of IPE on extrinsic success is largely due to the strong influence of individual and family factors, revealing the limitations of traditional education in shaping such perceptions. Hence, Chinese higher education should optimize curricula by integrating theoretical learning, field research, and lectures to enhance students' resilience and practical competence.

The findings also show that the guiding effect of IPE on extrinsic success has weakened after higher education reforms, highlighting a critical challenge of the current era. Chinese higher education should gradually strengthen students' understanding of extrinsic success through independent IPE curricula and the integration of IPE with professional courses. Furthermore, the findings indicate that highly theoretical curricula significantly weaken perceptions of extrinsic success, suggesting that an excessive emphasis on theory may impede students' recognition of career-related values. Therefore, it is necessary for Chinese higher education to adjust curricular structures and incorporate more practice-oriented teaching approaches to foster appropriate value orientations.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the measurement of SCS is constrained by the structure of the available survey items. Second, due to confidentiality restrictions of the CFPS database, research on socioeconomic factors influencing individuals' SCS remains insufficient. Future research could build on these findings to conduct more in-depth studies aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the impact of IPE in China on young students.

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Appendix A. Baseline Regression Results

	Regression Coefficients		*Marginal Effects*	
	Extrinsic Success	**Intrinsic Success**	**Extrinsic Success**	**Intrinsic Success**
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**
IPE	-0.170***	-0.287***	-0.030***	-0.059***
	(-3.94)	(-7.23)	(-3.95)	(-7.25)
urban	-0.107***	0.031	-0.019***	0.007
	(-3.21)	(1.02)	(-3.21)	(1.02)
counts	0.008	0.003	0.001	0.001
	(1.08)	(0.40)	(1.08)	(0.40)
employ	0.422***	0.411***	0.075***	0.085***
	(12.97)	(13.50)	(13.09)	(13.69)
health	0.175***	-0.175***	0.031***	-0.036***
	(4.62)	(-4.77)	(4.62)	(-4.78)
military	0.093	0.083	0.016	0.017
	(0.96)	(0.93)	(0.96)	(0.93)
ethnicity	-0.036	-0.142***	-0.006	-0.029***
	(-0.63)	(-2.69)	(-0.63)	(-2.69)
income	0.291***	0.151***	0.052***	0.031***
	(6.77)	(3.94)	(6.78)	(3.94)
cons	0.712***	0.703***	NA	NA
	(12.61)	(13.16)		
N	22746	22746	22746	22746
Pseudo R^2	0.013	0.011	0.013	0.011

Note: t statistics in parentheses * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Appendix B. Robustness Test Results

	Ordered Logit (alternative dependent variable)				*Probit*		*2018 Sample*	
	Extrinsic Success		**Intrinsic Success**		**Extrinsic Success**	**Intrinsic Success**	**Extrinsic Success**	**Intrinsic Success**
	β_1	β_2	β_1	β_2				
	(5)	**(6)**	**(7)**	**(8)**	**(9)**	**(10)**	**(11)**	**(12)**
IPE	-0.214***	-0.176***	-0.288***	-0.288***	-0.102***	-0.175***	-0.311***	-0.271***
	(-4.82)	(-4.10)	(-7.34)	(-7.34)	(-4.04)	(-7.25)	(-7.78)	(-7.11)
Individual Control Variables	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Household Control Variables	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Regional Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	22746		22746		22746	22746	28256	28256
Pseudo R^2	0.016		0.013		0.013	0.011	0.012	0.007

Appendix C. IV-Probit Regression Results

	Extrinsic Succes	Intrinsic Success
IPE	-0.476***	-0.569***
	(-2.88)	(-3.59)
Individual Control Variables	YES	YES
Household Control Variables	YES	YES
Regional Fixed Effects	YES	YES
N	22746	22746
Wald test	12.21***	8.36***
AR	15.44***	15.44***

Appendix D. Comparative Analysis of China's IPE System

	Expansion of Higher Education Enrollment				***Different Systems of IPE Curriculum***	
	After the reform (after 1999)		***Before the reform (before 1999)***		**Extrinsic Success**	**Intrinsic Success**
	Extrinsic Success	**Intrinsic Success**	**Extrinsic Success**	**Intrinsic Success**		
	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)
IPE	-0.096*	-0.331***	-0.560***	-0.183*	-0.118**	-0.462***
	(-1.86)	(-6.96)	(-5.98)	(-1.95)	(-2.06)	(-8.99)
margin-IPE	-0.017*	-0.070***	-0.096***	-0.037*	-0.021**	-0.095***
	(-1.86)	(-7.00)	(-6.01)	(-1.95)	(-2.06)	(-9.04)
Individual Control Variables	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Household Control Variables	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Regional Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	11557	11557	11189	11189	22746	22746
Pseudo R^2	0.014	0.022	0.016	0.004	0.012	0.012

Appendix E. Heterogeneity and Marginal Effect Analysis

	Extrinsic Success				*Intrinsic Success*			
	cpc	**net**	**fam**	**marriage**	**cpc**	**net**	**fam**	**marriage**
	(21)	**(22)**	**(23)**	**(24)**	**(25)**	**(26)**	**(27)**	**(28)**
IPE	-0.104**	-0.227***	-0.442***	0.119*	-0.210***	-0.371***	-0.361***	-0.193***
	(-2.16)	(-4.43)	(-5.62)	(1.79)	(-4.73)	(-7.83)	(-4.81)	(-3.17)
Interaction	-0.275**	0.186**	0.377***	-0.417***	-0.215**	0.266***	0.099	-0.084
	(-2.46)	(2.07)	(4.09)	(-4.94)	(-2.10)	(3.22)	(1.14)	(-1.08)
margin-Interaction	-0.069***	-0.007	-0.012	-0.051***	-0.094***	-0.021	-0.054***	-0.056***
	(-3.89)	(-0.54)	(-1.27)	(-5.41)	(-4.73)	(-1.52)	(-5.70)	(-5.41)
N	22746	22746	22746	22746	22746	22746	22746	22746
Pseudo R^2	0.013	0.013	0.013	0.015	0.012	0.012	0.011	0.013

Appendix F. Summary of Empirical Results

	Extrinsic Success	*Intrinsic Success*
IPE	+++	+++
reform	+++/+	+/+++
bachelor	++	+++
cpc	++	+++▲
net	++	---▲
fam	---▲	NA
marriage	+++▲	NA

Note: +(-) means positive (negative) association,+++,++,+ mean significant at 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively, -signs are similar;▲ means maximum impact; NA means no association.)