

Civil rights, press freedom... Seven subjects off limits for teaching, Chinese universities told

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Civil rights, press freedom and party's mistakes among subjects banned from teaching in order described by an academic as back-peddling.

Mainland universities have been ordered to steer clear of seven topics in their teaching, including universal values, press freedom and civil rights, two university staff said, offering an insight into ideological control under the new Communist Party leaders.

A law professor with a Shanghai-based university who requested anonymity because he feared persecution said yesterday that teaching staff at his university had been briefed about the seven taboo subjects, which also include judicial independence and the past mistakes of the Communist Party.

Are we still a university if we are not allowed to talk about even civil rights and press freedom? A SHANGHAI-BASED LAW PROFESSOR

"Are we still a university if we are not allowed to talk about even civil rights and press freedom?" he asked.

He said he had no idea which party department had given the order, saying they were simply told that it came from the party's Central Committee.

A Beijing-based industrial relations professor said yesterday the order, in the form of a classified document, had come from the General Office of the party's Central Committee, and only a select group of teaching and administrative staff at his university had been briefed about it.

The Beijing professor, who also declined to be named, said he had not personally seen the document but had been briefed on it because he had been outspoken.

"It's apparent back-peddling if we cannot talk about what the Communist Party did wrong in the past," he said.

The tightening of ideological control via a gag order for teachers comes amid renewed controversy over remarks about Mao Zedong reportedly made by party general secretary Xi Jinping in a party meeting, which were mentioned in a commentary published this week in the official *Guangming Daily*.

The commentary cites Xi as saying that if Mao had been totally discredited in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the party and the country's socialist system would have been toppled and that would have plunged the country into turmoil.

Qiao Mu , an associate communications professor and director of the Centre for International Communication Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University, said he had not been told about the order. If it existed it would be difficult to track down because such orders were often circulated via administrative departments overseeing ideology and student affairs, he said.

Qiao said he had noticed Xi's tendency to subscribe to what he called a "Cultural Revolution mindset and the mindset of the former Soviet Union" since he came to power. "He is very left-leaning, which is revealed in his comments about Mao," Qiao said. "So don't be surprised if there is such an order, although it might not take the form of a formal document and could be limited to select groups of people.

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P.S.

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