

# Research on the Construction of Teacher Ethics and Conduct in Higher Education from an Evaluation Perspective: A Case Study of Province S

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**Abstract:** *Teachers are the primary resource for educational development, and teacher ethics is the first standard for evaluating the quality of the teaching workforce. The state have always placed great importance on the work of teacher ethics and conduct. This paper, taking Province S as a case study, explores the evaluation mechanisms for teacher ethics in higher education. On the premise of clarifying the importance and urgency of teachers' ideological and political work, the paper delves into the significance of the evaluation system for teacher ethics and conduct in universities, summarizes key areas and challenges of teacher ethics assessments, and provides countermeasures for improving these mechanisms. Additionally, it discusses the current state of the teacher ethics evaluation system in higher education, analyzes its root issues, and explores improvements in content, methods, mechanisms, and the utilization of results, with the aim of strengthening the effectiveness of ideological and political work for university teachers and constructing a comprehensive framework for "large-scale ideological and political work."*

**Keywords:** Assessment, Evaluation, Teacher's Ethics and Conduct.

## 1. Introduction

Teachers are the backbone of educational work. Without a high-level teaching workforce, it is challenging to cultivate top-tier innovative talents and produce high-level innovative outcomes. Teachers serve as role models for students, and their behavior and conduct have a profound impact on student growth. A good teacher must uphold high moral standards and serve as an example in both learning and behavior. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) emphasized the importance of strengthening the construction of teacher ethics and conduct, advocating for the cultivation of a high-quality teaching workforce and promoting the societal ethos of respecting teachers and valuing education. The 20th National Congress reiterated the need to "enhance the construction of teacher ethics, cultivate a high-quality teaching team, and promote a social atmosphere that respects teachers and education," providing clear guidance for teacher ethics and conduct development in universities in the new era. The Party and the state have consistently emphasized the importance of the teaching workforce, issuing a series of institutional documents, such as: "Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Teacher Workforce in the New Era" by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council "Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Teacher Ethics and Conduct Construction in the New Era" by the Ministry of Education and other departments, "Guidelines on Establishing a Long-Term Mechanism for Teacher Ethics Construction in Universities" and "Opinions on Further Strengthening Teacher Ethics Construction" by the Provincial Education Department. These documents all reflect the principle that teacher ethics and conduct are the first standard for evaluating the quality of the teaching workforce.

## 2. Basic Concepts of Teacher Ethics and Conduct

Teacher ethics refers to professional ethics. often referred to as "teacher ethics." Specifically, teacher ethics encompasses

the moral norms and behavioral standards that teachers and all educators must adhere to during educational activities, as well as the corresponding moral outlook, sentiments, and qualities. Teacher ethics includes the fundamental ethical qualities that teachers should possess, such as dedication to work, nurturing students, being role models, and fostering a spirit of excellence and goodness. Teacher conduct refers to the behavioral practices and atmosphere in the teaching profession, such as loving and respecting students, caring for their development, and promoting an environment of respect.

Teachers must uphold both the baseline and the high standards of ethics and conduct. On September 9, 2014, during a meeting with representatives of teachers and students at Beijing Normal University, General Secretary Xi Jinping outlined four essential qualities of a good teacher: having firm ideals and convictions, moral integrity, solid knowledge, and a compassionate heart. On April 19, 2021, during a visit to Tsinghua University, Xi Jinping emphasized that teachers should become exemplary figures, guiding students in learning, life, and personal development, helping them grow into well-rounded individuals. Teachers must research real problems, stay focused on global academic frontiers and national needs, and be dedicated to solving practical problems while continually learning new knowledge, technologies, and theories. They must remain firm in their beliefs and align with the Party and the people, making them staunch believers and loyal practitioners of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This represents the highest standard of teacher ethics and conduct in the new era. The "Ten Guidelines for Professional Behavior of College Teachers in the New Era" (Teacher [2018] No. 16) establishes the basic standards for teacher behavior, while the "Guiding Opinions on Handling Teacher Misconduct in Colleges and Universities" (Teacher [2018] No. 17) and the "Trial Measures for Handling Teacher Misconduct in Colleges and Universities in Jiangsu Province" (S Education Reg. [2019] No. 1) outline the negative lists of teacher misconduct, forming the baseline and red line that teachers should not cross.

### **3. The Practical Significance of the Evaluation Mechanism for Teacher Ethics and Conduct in Higher Education Institutions**

Since 2017, to uphold and strengthen the Communist Party's comprehensive leadership over higher education institutions, and to enhance the political and ideological work of teachers as well as the construction of teacher ethics, universities across China have established the Office of the Party Committee for Teacher Affairs. General Secretary Xi Jinping, during a discussion with faculty and students at Peking University, explicitly stated: "The first criterion for evaluating the quality of the teaching workforce should be teacher ethics and conduct. The construction of teacher ethics should be a continuous effort for every school, requiring both strict institutional regulations and ongoing educational supervision." This important discourse provides clear guidance for the development of the teaching workforce in the new era.

#### **3.1 Expanding Research on the Evaluation Mechanism for Teacher Ethics in Higher Education**

To improve the scientific rigor and effectiveness of current evaluation mechanisms for teacher ethics, it is essential to revisit the philosophical foundations of education, reaffirming the intrinsic value and significance of individuals. It is problematic to approach the evaluation of teacher ethics with an assumption of "original sin" as this perspective may not only undermine the enthusiasm of teachers but also generate internal resistance to the evaluation process. A scientifically sound and rational evaluation mechanism for teacher ethics in higher education can shift the current focus from merely emphasizing academic performance to also valuing teacher ethics, thereby correcting the disorganized state of teacher ethics construction in universities, where clear leadership has been lacking. This represents a profound transformation of the long-term mechanisms for building and maintaining teacher ethics.

#### **3.2 Enhancing the Effectiveness of Ideological and Political Education for Students**

Optimizing the content and structure of ideological and political education and promoting its scientific development enriches the comprehensive evaluation system of higher education institutions. Strengthening the evaluation of teacher ethics is a key component of deepening the reform of the teaching workforce in the new era. It is also an important part of the ideological and political work system for teachers and serves as a crucial element in advancing comprehensive evaluations of teacher ethics in universities.

Strengthening the political and ideological work of teachers is a prerequisite for effective ideological and political education for students. The principle of "educating the educators first" is vital to improving ideological and political education in universities. By enhancing the ideological and political quality of teachers through evaluations of their ethics, educators can serve as role models, gradually shaping the souls of students and guiding them to develop a correct worldview, life outlook, and value system.

#### **3.3 Implementing Policy Requirements**

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized the need to "strengthen the construction of teacher ethics and conduct, cultivate a high-quality teaching workforce, and promote a social atmosphere of respect for teachers and education." This reflects the implementation of the Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Teaching Workforce in the New Era, which underscores the importance of "enhancing the supervision of teachers' ideological and political qualities and ethics, strengthening teacher ethics evaluations, and implementing a negative list system for teacher ethics violations." Furthermore, it is a reflection of the Opinions on Strengthening and Improving the Ideological and Political Work of Young Teachers in Higher Education, which calls for the "improvement of the evaluation mechanism for young teachers' ethics."

#### **3.4 Facilitating the Rise of Localized Experiences**

Through research and analysis of innovative approaches to ideological and political work for university teachers, new platforms for ideological and political education will be developed. This will provide feasible strategies and recommendations for constructing a teacher ethics assessment and evaluation system for undergraduate institutions in Province S.

### **4. Issues in the Evaluation Mechanism of Teacher Ethics and Conduct in Higher Education Institutions**

According to statistics, in 2022, 12 undergraduate institutions in Province S implemented teacher ethics and conduct evaluation policies. By 2023, this number had risen to 24 institutions. Within just one year, 12 additional universities had introduced these evaluation policies. This increase reflects the growing emphasis on teacher ethics and conduct in higher education and the gradual improvement of relevant institutional mechanisms. However, in reality, only a small number of schools conduct dedicated evaluations of teacher ethics, and challenges persist, such as difficulties in quantifying teacher behavior, vague evaluation criteria, an overemphasis on prohibitive regulations, monotonous evaluation procedures, and a lack of incentives and rewards. Particularly in the age of big data, online speech is difficult to monitor, and lists of ethical violations are often ineffective. Thus, the evaluation mechanism for teacher ethics in higher education requires urgent improvement.

Currently, undergraduate institutions place significant emphasis on societal recognition and educational ethics in their evaluations, with features such as clear evaluation subjects, defined assessment orientations, and the transparency of evaluation results. Nonetheless, there are notable issues such as ambiguous grading boundaries, difficulties in quantifying evaluation standards, and a tendency for assessment methods to become superficial. There is a pressing need for the innovation of teacher ethics evaluation mechanisms, aiming to establish a balance between operational feasibility and scientific rigor, between reform and stability, and between targeted key areas and broad coverage. This will drive reform in the institutional

management of teacher ethics in higher education.

#### 4.1 Ambiguous Standards for "Outstanding" Ratings

Typically, teacher ethics evaluation results are divided into three categories: "outstanding" "qualified" and "unqualified." While the criteria for an "unqualified" rating may be relatively clear—based on a negative list of ethical violations—determining whether a teacher qualifies as "outstanding" is far more ambiguous. For example, teachers who have no records of ethical misconduct are generally rated as "qualified." However, distinguishing between "qualified" and "outstanding" is challenging due to the lack of precise qualitative and quantitative criteria. This ambiguity can lead to a significant degree of subjectivity, with the standard for "outstanding" varying based on the assessor.

#### 4.2 Difficulties in Quantifying Evaluation Content

The standards for evaluating teacher ethics and conduct in undergraduate institutions usually assess several aspects, such as loyalty to education, rigorous scholarship, dedication to teaching, moral conduct, and collaboration and innovation. These evaluations often reference the "Ten Guidelines for Professional Conduct of Teachers." They are used to assess both full-time faculty and adjunct staff in terms of political and moral qualities. However, one major issue is that many of these standards are difficult to quantify. The lack of objective and measurable criteria hinders the ability to conduct a clear, data-driven evaluation of teacher ethics.

#### 4.3 Limited Evaluation Methods and Participants

The methods for evaluating teacher ethics in most higher education institutions follow a standard procedure: self-evaluation by teachers, departmental review by the academic unit, and approval by the relevant school department. This procedural framework often leads to a formalistic approach. Furthermore, the range of participants in these evaluations is limited, typically involving only the individual teacher, the department head, and officials from the department responsible for teacher ethics. Those who interact closely with the teacher, such as students, colleagues within the department or research team, as well as staff from academic affairs, research, and organizational departments, are often excluded from the evaluation process. As a result, the assessment lacks a diverse set of perspectives and may fail to capture a comprehensive view of the teacher's ethical conduct.

#### 4.4 Simplistic Use of Evaluation Results

The evaluation of teacher ethics is the most direct reflection of a teacher's professional conduct and is an essential criterion for qualification, performance appraisal, promotion, and awards. Teacher ethics assessments serve as a guiding framework for professional behavior, setting the standard for what is expected of educators in higher education. For example, in Tianjin and Shanxi, institutions have established teacher ethics evaluation systems where the results are categorized simply as "qualified" or "unqualified." However, this binary classification fails to distinguish between teachers who are merely qualified and those who excel in ethical

conduct. It also does not adequately address the behavior of teachers who may be on the verge of ethical misconduct. This lack of nuance prevents institutions from gaining an in-depth understanding of the state of teacher ethics, making it difficult to take proactive measures or implement targeted improvements. Moreover, the use of such a uniform "qualified" standard provides little insight into the differences in ethical performance between teachers, limiting its effectiveness in personnel selection, promotion, and reward processes.

### 5. Pathways for Building a Teacher Ethics and Conduct Evaluation Mechanism in Higher Education Institutions

The evaluation of teacher ethics and conduct is not intended as a punitive measure, nor is it a mere formality to fulfill administrative requirements. Its fundamental purpose is to use assessment as a tool to motivate and regulate the professional behavior of teachers, thereby safeguarding and enhancing the overall image of the teaching workforce in higher education. Through the process of evaluation, educators are encouraged to deepen their understanding of ethical responsibilities and improve their professional conduct.

A scientifically sound and reasonable evaluation system serves as the "steering wheel" for the work surrounding teacher ethics. The evaluation of teacher ethics and conduct should be closely aligned with the broader goal of nurturing moral integrity in education. Relying solely on institutions to serve as the main evaluators is insufficient; instead, it is crucial to construct an evaluation system that incorporates multiple stakeholders, including schools, students, families, and society, with appropriate weight assigned to each. To enhance the objectivity of the evaluations, the involvement of professional third-party evaluation agencies should also be considered. Moreover, it is important to avoid an overemphasis on research output while neglecting teaching quality. Teachers and departments that excel in ethical evaluations should receive sufficient performance-based rewards to enhance their enthusiasm for participation, thus fostering a more outcome-oriented evaluation system.

#### 5.1 Using the "Ten Guidelines for Professional Conduct of Teachers in Higher Education in the New Era" as a Guiding Principle

The "Ten Guidelines for Professional Conduct of Teachers in Higher Education in the New Era," issued by the Ministry of Education in 2018, should serve as the compass for the evaluation of teacher ethics and conduct. Vocational colleges and universities should use these guidelines to comprehensively assess their teachers' conduct in various aspects such as education, care for students, research, teacher-student relationships, and social activities. Simultaneously, the unique characteristics of each institution should be considered when establishing an ethical evaluation mechanism. In the implementation process, it is essential to uphold principles of objectivity, fairness, and transparency. The evaluation should avoid superficial formalities and arbitrary practices. A strict supervision system should be in place to monitor teacher ethics, and a multi-dimensional supervisory framework should be established. This

framework should involve management personnel, teachers, parents, and students in constructing a fair, objective, scientific, and rational evaluation mechanism for teacher ethics and conduct.

### **5.2 Promoting the Holistic Development of Teachers as the Ultimate Goal**

The purpose of evaluations is not merely to assess but to promote the comprehensive development of teachers. The cultivation of well-rounded talent is contingent upon the holistic development of educators—not only in teaching and research but also in their ethical conduct, political literacy, and value leadership. It is essential to foster a high-quality, professionalized teaching force with outstanding ethical standards, deep expertise, a balanced structure, and a dynamic spirit. This will provide strong support for accelerating the modernization of education, building a powerful nation in education, and delivering education that meets public expectations.

### **5.3 Combining Ongoing Monitoring with Periodic Evaluations**

The evaluation of teacher ethics and conduct should emphasize ongoing observation, focusing on details and everyday conduct. Educational evaluation is a dynamic, scientific, and unified process that encompasses formative, summative, value-added, and comprehensive evaluations. These four types of evaluation must be fully integrated and implemented. First and foremost, a combination of continuous monitoring and periodic evaluations should be adopted. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of a teacher's ethical conduct at different stages, enabling a multidimensional, objective, and developmental analysis of their professional behavior. Constructive feedback for improvement should be given based on the results, and ethical evaluations should be incorporated into the daily management of teachers in vocational institutions. This will help cultivate a teaching force that embodies ethical excellence and fosters a positive professional atmosphere.

### **5.4 Establishing a Teacher Ethics and Conduct Assessment System at the Secondary Unit Level**

At present, only a small number of higher education institutions have established evaluation systems at the departmental or secondary level. In these cases, the responsibility for evaluating teacher ethics does not lie solely with the individual teachers or the relevant administrative departments; instead, the ethical conduct of both individual teachers and the collective ethical standards of departmental units are subject to evaluation. Teacher ethics and political literacy are not solely the responsibility of individual educators or specific departments; instead, departmental party organizations must play a pivotal role as intermediaries. The construction of ethical standards in higher education institutions relies not only on the individual efforts of teaching staff but also closely linked to the work of secondary units.

### **5.5 Linking Evaluation Results with Performance-Based Compensation**

To further emphasize the importance of teacher ethics in

performance distribution, it is not enough to merely penalize individual teachers who violate ethical norms by withholding part of their performance-related pay. The overall management level of ethical conduct within each department should also be factored into the evaluation of departmental performance. Departments or colleges that have significant ethical lapses resulting in negative social impacts should see a reduction in the performance evaluations and corresponding compensation of their administrative leaders.

## **6. Conclusion**

In summary, the construction of teacher ethics and conduct in higher education is a crucial element of the broader effort to improve the quality of the teaching workforce. By developing a robust evaluation mechanism for teacher ethics, universities can promote a culture of ethical conduct, enhance the effectiveness of ideological and political education, and ensure that teachers serve as role models for students. To achieve this, it is essential to address the current challenges in teacher ethics assessments, such as vague standards, difficulty in quantifying evaluation content, and lack of fairness in the evaluation process. By implementing the proposed countermeasures, universities can strengthen the effectiveness of teacher ethics evaluations and contribute to the overall development of the teaching workforce.

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