

Original Paper

Research on the Connotation of Teacher Ethics in Chinese Higher Educational Institutions in the New Era

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Abstract

Currently, the discussion of public or private ethics, high or low standards, self-discipline or self-discipline, etc., has emerged in Chinese university teacher ethics, which marks a profound change in the connotation of teacher ethics in Chinese universities in the new era, with new features. Based on the vision of international teacher ethics, learning and understanding General Secretary Xi's important discussions on teacher ethics, and sorting out China's policies and systems for teacher ethics construction, this study argues that teacher ethics in Higher educational institutions is a combination of the "first-level index" of ethics, and three "second-level indexes" of "occupational ethics, personal ethics, and social ethics", and it is a unity of ethical concepts and ethical behaviors. It is not a specific quality or ability, but an important guideline for regulating the mutual relations between teachers and other communities of interest, and is the ethical foundation of teachers' quality.

Keywords

higher educational institutions, teacher ethics, education

In China, as a core issue in the construction of the teaching force, teacher ethics has become the focus of common concern in the theoretical and practical circles, but at present, the interpretation of the connotation of teacher ethics has appeared in the discussion of the issues of public or private ethics, high or low standards, some of which are open to question. Based on the perspective of normative comparison, the international orientation of teacher ethics care can be clarified. Based on the important discussion of the General Secretary, we can grasp the construction direction of the connotation of teacher ethics. Based on the perspective of policy evolution, it is possible to identify the practical concerns of teacher ethics in Chinese higher educational institutions. Through the norms of teacher ethics, policy evolution and the important discourse of General Secretary Xi, the theoretical and practical dimensions of teacher ethics can be considered comprehensively in order to accurately grasp the connotative characteristics of teacher

ethics in Chinese higher educational institutions and construct a discourse system of teacher ethics with Chinese characteristics, which is of great practical significance for the construction of teacher ethics in higher educational institutions at the present time.

1. International Code of Ethics for Teachers

The Declaration on Teaching Ethics issued by Education International (EI) was adopted at the Third World Conference of EI held in Thailand in July 2001, and states that educators should fulfil “a commitment to the profession”, “a commitment to students”, “a commitment to colleagues in education” and “a commitment to management”, “a commitment to parents,” and 26 ethical standards for teachers. The Moral Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) issued by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC). As early as 1929, the National Education Association (NEA) developed the Code of Ethics for the Educational Profession in the U.S. In 1996, the Code of Conduct for Good Teachers was developed, and out of the total of 26 elements, 21 elements were ethical requirements for how teachers should serve their students (Han & Tian, 2020). In 2015, the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification released the U.S. Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE). The Code establishes five principles based on the major relationships that can be involved in the teaching profession: responsibility for the educational profession, responsibility for professional competence, responsibility for students, responsibility for the school community, and ethical responsibility for the use of technology, and increases the number of articles to 86 measures that are applicable to all states in the United States.

The Ethics Programme issued by the Japan Staff Association. The Ethics Programme was formally adopted by the Japan Staff Association as early as 1952 and is still in use today to guide the ethical behavior of teachers. The Ethical Programme requires teachers to take up the mission of Japanese society and co-exist with young people; teachers to fight for equal opportunities in education; teachers to defend peace; teachers to act on the side of science and truth; teachers not to allow their freedom of education to be violated; teachers to pursue politically correct positions; teachers to work with parents to fight against the decadence of society and to create a new culture; teachers as workers; teachers have to defend their rights and interests in life; and teachers have to be united.

In addition, countries around the world, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, have proposed normative standards for professional ethics for teachers. For example, the UK Department for Education released the Early Career Framework in 2019 and sets out the skills, knowledge and experience that induction should secure for new teachers. In Australia, the Australian National Professional Standards for Teachers were issued in 2011. The standards not only set out clear standards of behavior for teachers’ professional knowledge, professional practice, professional engagement and professionalism in the field of teaching and learning, but also specific ethical standards in terms of the four stages of teacher development (Jiang & Wang, 2023). The Teachers’ Association of Ontario, Canada, formally introduced Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession in 2000, with entries relating to the

establishment of cooperative relationships between teachers and students, parents and colleagues, ethical thinking and ethical decision-making, and compliance with laws and regulations, and all of which ultimately land on the requirement to “responsibility for students and their learning process” (Dan, 2022). The above national codes of ethics for teachers break down teacher ethics into requirements for multiple arenas based on the different settings in which teachers are involved. Although the codes provide for more entries, the content requirements are detailed, specific and operational, which are more instructive for teachers to regulate their own ethical practices. The scope of teacher ethics is limited to the professional sphere, focusing more on teachers’ professional behavior and students and less on teachers’ ethical performance. Japan’s ethics program begins to talk about ideological requirements such as the need for teachers to have a correct political stance. Teacher ethics codes in other countries do not emphasize teachers’ obligations to the State and society.

2. General Secretary Xi’s Important Discourses on Teacher Ethics

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi has attached great importance to the construction of teacher ethics, and has published a series of discourses on the fundamental requirements, status and role, and construction path of teacher ethics. According to incomplete statistics, starting from General Secretary Xi’s letter of condolence to the majority of teachers nationwide in 2013 to his letter to the representatives of the nation’s outstanding teachers in 2023, he has comprehensively discussed the construction of teacher ethics more than 14 times, and by combing through these discourses on teacher ethics, we know that although there are different expressions of a good teacher in the mind of General Secretary Xi, there are also some common and essential traits, which together constitute a These qualities together constitute a complete quality system for contemporary teachers. The good teachers in General Secretary Xi’s mind mainly include:

First, the “three firmly established” benchmarks: firmly establish the ideals and beliefs of socialism with Chinese characteristics, firmly establish the concept of lifelong learning, and firmly establish the sense of reform and innovation.

Second, the “Four Good Teachers” standard: ideal beliefs, ethical character, solid knowledge, and love.

Third, the “four guides” requirement: to be a guide for students to refine their character, a guide for students to learn knowledge, a guide for students to think innovatively, and a guide for students to dedicate themselves to the motherland.

Fourth, the “four unity” requirements: adhere to the unity of teaching and educating people, adhere to the unity of words and teaching by example, adhere to the unity of study and concern for society, adhere to the unity of academic freedom and academic standards.

Fifth, the spirit of Huang Danian: the patriotic sentiment of serving the country with sincerity, the professionalism of teaching and educating people, and the dedication of being the first, and the noble sentiment of being indifferent to fame and fortune and being willing to dedicate oneself to the cause.

Sixth, the “six” qualities: strong politics, deep feelings, new thinking, broad vision, strict self-discipline, personality.

Seventh, the “Mr. Big” title: proficient in professional knowledge, do a good job “teacher”; cultivate virtue, become a “teacher”.

Eighth, the “educator’s spirit”: the ideal conviction of having a big heart and serving the country with sincerity; the moral sentiment of being a model of the world and acting as a model of the world; the wisdom of educating people by enlightening the mind and teaching them according to their aptitudes; the cultivating attitude of studying diligently and practicing diligently and seeking knowledge and innovating; the loving heart of teaching and loving the students and dedicating oneself to them; and the pursuit of promoting the Way of the World and educating the people with the mind of the world.

3. The Evolution of Teacher Ethics Policies in China

Because of the important value of teacher ethics in the construction of the teaching force, to improve the level of moral development of teachers, the Chinese government has issued many institutional documents to protect and support them. According to incomplete statistics, from the promulgation of the Teachers’ Law in 1993 to the present time, the national level has enacted at least 21 educational policies related to teacher ethics, and analyzing the policies in different periods can tell us the focus, characteristics and laws of the policies in each period, which is conducive to deepening the understanding of national teacher ethics.

Table1. Summary of Teacher Ethics System in Chinese Higher Education Institutions

No	Policy Name	Release Time
1	Teachers’ Law	1993
2	Opinions on Strengthening Academic Ethics	2002
3	Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Teacher Ethics Development	2005
4	Outline of the National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020).	2010
5	The Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers in Higher Educational Institutions	2011
6	Opinions on Strengthening the Teaching Force	2012
7	Opinions on Establishing and Improving the Long-term Mechanism for the Construction of Teacher Ethics in Higher Educational Institutions	2014
8	Overall Program for the Integrated Promotion of the Construction of World-Class Universities and First-Class Academic Departments	2015
9	Guiding Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Assessment and Evaluation System for Higher Educational Institutions Teachers	2016
10	Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teacher Construction in the New Era	2018
11	Ten Guidelines for the Professional Behavior of Teachers in Higher Educational	2018

	Institutions in the New Era	
12	Guidelines on the Handling of Teacher Misconduct by Teachers in Higher Educational Institutions	2018
13	Modernization of Education in China 2035	2019
14	Outline for the Implementation of Civic Ethics Building in the New Era	2019
15	Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Teacher Ethics in the New Era	2019
16	Overall Program for Deepening Education Evaluation Reform in the New Era	2020
17	Code of Conduct for the Guidance of Graduate Student Supervisors	2020
18	Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Reform of Teacher Building in Higher Educational Institutions in the New Era	2020
19	Guiding Opinions on Improving the Institutional Mechanisms for Ideological, Political and Ethical Construction of Teachers in Higher Educational Institutions	2021
20	Opinions on the Implementation of the System of Prohibited Practices	2022
21	Notice of Push for Faculty Access Queries	2023

Among the above institutional documents, the standards of teachers' ethics are clearly stated in the following: the Teachers' Law of 1993, which stipulates the six obligations that teachers should fulfil; the Outline of the National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020); the Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers in Higher Educational Institutions; In 2014, the Opinions on the Establishment of a Long-term Mechanism for the Construction of Teacher Ethics in higher educational institutions set out the "Red Seven" prohibited behaviors of teacher ethics, and the Ten Guidelines for Professional Behavior of Teachers in higher educational institutions in a New Era was issued in 2018, the Opinions on Further Promoting the Spirit of Scientists to Strengthen the Style of Teaching and Learning were put forward, and the Spirit of Scientists was proposed in 2019. Code of Conduct for Tutor Guidance were put forward in 2020. Analyzing these institutional documents on teacher ethics, although teacher ethics in different periods show the unique characteristics of each period, behind them all lies the pursuit of teachers' ethical values, and the connotation of teacher ethics has been deepened. The goal of teacher team construction ranges from "a high-quality and professional college teaching team with high ethical integrity, superb business, reasonable structure, and full of vitality" mentioned in the Opinions of the State Council on Strengthening the Construction of Teaching Teams in 2012, to "a high-quality and professional college teaching team with Ideal beliefs, ethical character, solid knowledge, and compassion" mentioned in the Modernization of China's Education 2035 in 2019.", gradually combining the requirements of the state and society for teachers' political awareness, knowledge and compassion.

4. Accurately Grasp the Connotation of Teacher Ethics in Higher Educational Institutions

Based on a comprehensive understanding of international teacher norms, policies and systems of teacher ethics, and the discussion of General Secretary Xi, this study believes that teacher ethics is a synthesis of ethical concepts, ethical qualities, and behavioral norms that teachers should follow in the course of their

professional labor and that it specifies, in the form of obligatory requirements, the cognitions, emotions, attitudes and behaviors with which teachers should do their job well. It is an important criterion to regulate the relationship between teachers and themselves, teachers and colleagues, teachers and students, teachers and profession, teachers and the country, teachers and society.

To accurately grasp the connotation of teacher ethics in higher educational institutions, we need to pay attention to the following four points:

First, accurately grasp the requirements of “unity of knowledge and action” of teacher ethics. Consequentialist ethicists believe that the ethical value of behavior is determined by its consequences. At the same time, the deontological school of ethics believes that the ethical value of an action is determined by its intention. Absorbing the views of deontological and consequentialist schools of ethics, this study argues that the ethical value of an act should be determined by both the intention and consequences of the act. In other words, to judge the standard of ethical or unethical, it is necessary to examine whether the individual’s ethical concept is correct or not, but also to see whether the ethical behavior follows the ethical concept, i.e., “we need to look at their words as well as their actions”, and ethics should be a synthesis of the unity of knowledge and action.

Second, accurately grasp the status of teacher ethics in the ethical system. In China, civic ethics includes professional ethics, personal ethics, family virtues and social virtues. Analyzing previous studies, except for family virtues, teacher ethics can find reasonable components in professional ethics, individual private virtues and social virtues. Therefore, we believe that teacher ethics is a kind of ethics between the “primary indicator” of ethics and the three “secondary dimensions” of “professional ethics, personal virtues and social virtues”. It is essentially a comprehensive ethics. This kind of cross-dimensional ethics is determined by the speciality and typicality of the teaching profession, and it is a high requirement for teacher ethics. However, it does not mean that we can infinitely expand the boundaries of teacher ethics and equate teacher ethics with teachers’ civic ethics, which is not in line with the theoretical logic of the Outline for the Implementation of Civic Moral Construction in the New Era, and tends to overload teacher ethics with too much pressure, which is also unfavorable to the practical construction of teacher ethics.

Thirdly, we should accurately grasp the status of teacher ethics in teacher quality. Teacher quality is a summary of the all-round qualities and abilities of teachers, and the most central and first in line is teacher ethics, which can be found in General Secretary Xi’s previous discourses. For example, in 2014, during a discussion with representatives of teachers and students at Beijing Normal University, General Secretary Xi mentioned that “the prosperity of the country, the revitalisation of the nation, and the development of education require us to vigorously cultivate and create a high-quality and professional teaching force with high ethical integrity, superb skills in business, and a reasonable and dynamic structure.” During a visit to the Bayi School in Beijing in 2016, it was mentioned that “the development of the Party and the country needs a large team of highly qualified and specialised teachers with noble ethical character, superb business skills, reasonable structure and full of vitality, and a large number of

good teachers”. Teacher ethics is not specifically expressed as a certain quality and ability, such as teaching ability, scientific research ability and business ability, etc., but appears as a guideline for regulating relations, and is the ethical foundation of teacher quality.

Fourthly, it is necessary to accurately grasp the relational scope of teacher ethics. Compared with primary and secondary school teachers, the teaching profession in higher educational institutions has its own distinctive features. For example, Tu (2010) believes that university teachers have the three characteristics of self-cultivation throughout their career, leading the ethical development of young students with humanistic spirit, and the ability to innovate and create and the ability to continue learning are more important. Zhang (2016) believes that the complexity and diversity of the work of university teachers is one of the more common and common characteristics; creative research is the most distinctive feature of the work of university teachers. University teachers at least have the unique characteristics of the workplace without limitations, the complexity of the work content, and the object of the work is conscious. These occupational characteristics determine the occurrence of university teachers’ ethics is broader, the teacher ethics from the adjustment of the relationship between the scope of more and more complex. Teacher ethics in higher educational institutions should not only regulate the relationship between teachers and themselves, teachers and teachers , students, teachers and leaders, teachers and professions, but also regulate the relationship between teachers and the state, teachers and the society, which is manifested in the teachers’ “main business” in education, teaching, scientific research, personnel training, etc., to meet the ethical requirements, as well as to meet the ethical requirements of the state and the society for the teaching profession.

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