

## *Original Paper*

# The Practice and Exploration of the Strategy of "Moving forward the Quality Control Threshold and Combining Deregulation with Regulation" in the Quality Assurance of Postgraduate Dissertations

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### ***Abstract***

*The quality of a postgraduate dissertation is an important way to measure the quality of postgraduate education. It is also an important way to measure the level of postgraduate education at universities. The quality of dissertation not only affects the academic prospects of individual postgraduate but also impacts the academic reputation and social influence of universities. Based on an analysis of the quality assurance system for postgraduate training, this paper proposes a strategy of moving forward the quality control threshold and combining deregulation with regulation. This strategy has been put into practice and explored in the quality assurance of postgraduate dissertations at our university, achieving remarkable results.*

### ***Keywords***

*Postgraduate, dissertation, quality assurance, quality control, combining deregulation with regulation*

## **1. Introduction**

dissertations are a core component of postgraduate education, serving as a concentrated reflection of postgraduates' academic abilities, innovative spirit, and overall quality. The quality of dissertations directly reflects the effectiveness of postgraduate training and serves as an important indicator of universities' academic level and educational quality. In order to effectively ensure the quality of postgraduate dissertations, a series of important documents have been issued by China's Education Administration Department, which have set forth clear requirements for dissertations quality

management and particularly strengthened the dissertations random inspection system. In 2014, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Quality Assurance and Supervision System for Degrees and Postgraduate Education" (Degree [2014] No. 3) and the "Measures for the Random Inspection of Doctoral and Master's dissertations" (Degree [2014] No. 5). For the first time, a quality assurance system covering the entire process of postgraduate training has been established, emphasizing the importance of strengthening management of key stages such as dissertation proposal, mid-term review, pre-defense, and defense. It also proposes the establishment of a dissertation spot-check system to monitor the quality of dissertations that have already been awarded degrees. In 2019, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the "Notice Regarding Further Standardizing and Strengthening the Management of Postgraduate Training" (Jiaoyan [2019] No. 1), which once again clearly stated that "strictly enforce the management of dissertations and degree conferral." It required all educational institutions to improve their dissertations quality assurance mechanisms, increase the intensity of random inspections, and strictly hold those responsible for problematic dissertations accountable. In 2020, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China jointly issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Reform and Development of Postgraduate Education in the New Era" (Jiaoyan [2020] No. 9), further proposing to strictly control the quality of degree conferral, improve the dissertations review system, and establish a dissertations quality early warning mechanism. These policy documents collectively form the institutional framework for ensuring the quality of postgraduate dissertations in China, providing policy guidance and operational guidelines for improving their quality. Against this backdrop, universities should strictly implement the requirements of national documents and comprehensively improve the quality of postgraduate dissertations through measures such as improving process management, strengthening quality control, and optimizing the academic environment, thereby providing a strong guarantee for the cultivation of high-quality innovative talent.

## **2. Postgraduate Training Quality Assurance System**

The quality assurance system for Postgraduate education refers to a set of systems, measures, and methods designed to ensure the quality of postgraduate education. It covers the entire process of postgraduate education, including admission, training, dissertations writing, and career guidance. Dissertations quality assurance is an important part of the quality assurance system for postgraduate education.

### *2.1 Components of the Quality Assurance System for Postgraduate Education*

**Admission Quality Assurance:** By establishing scientific admission plans and standards, we select outstanding postgraduate to ensure the foundation for high-quality postgraduate education.

Educational Process Quality Assurance: By developing reasonable postgraduate education plans, strengthening course development and faculty team building, and improving quality monitoring mechanisms, we ensure the quality of the educational process.

Dissertations Quality Assurance: By establishing strict dissertations management systems and quality control standards, and strengthening management of key dissertations stages such as topic selection, proposal defense, mid-term review, defense, and evaluation, the quality of dissertations is ensured.

Employment Guidance Quality Assurance: By enhancing employment guidance services, improving postgraduate employment competitiveness and entrepreneurial capabilities, the ultimate manifestation of postgraduate education quality is ensured.

### *2.2 The Status and Role of Dissertations Quality Assurance in the Postgraduate Education Quality Assurance System*

Dissertations quality assurance is an important component of the postgraduate education quality assurance system.

Dissertations quality is a key indicator of postgraduate education quality. Dissertations are significant outcomes of the postgraduate education process and reflect the academic level and comprehensive qualities of postgraduate. The quality of dissertations directly impacts the quality of postgraduate education and the academic reputation of universities.

Dissertations quality assurance is a critical component of the postgraduate education quality assurance system. Dissertations quality assurance encompasses key stages such as dissertation selection, proposal defense, mid-term review, defense, and evaluation, making it a vital component of the postgraduate education process. Strengthening dissertation quality assurance ensures comprehensive control over the entire postgraduate education process.

Dissertations quality assurance can promote the reform and development of postgraduate education. By strengthening dissertations quality assurance, issues and shortcomings in postgraduate education can be identified, driving reforms and development in postgraduate education to improve the quality and level of postgraduate education.

## **3. Strategy Of Moving Forward The Dissertation Quality Control Threshold**

Strategy of moving forward the dissertation quality control threshold aims to shift the focus of dissertation quality assurance from the final stage of defense to critical milestones throughout the entire dissertation process. Strategy of moving forward the dissertation quality control threshold aims to shift the focus of dissertation quality assurance from the final stage of defense to critical milestones throughout the entire dissertation process. By integrating top-level planning from graduate schools with concrete implementation by training unit, we establish a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder, and institutionalized quality assurance system. Adhering to the principles of "prevention first, process control, and continuous improvement," we embed quality awareness into every phase—from proposal formulation and mid-term reviews to preliminary and final defenses. This approach addresses the

shortcomings of traditional "end-of-the-road" and "reactive" quality control methods, fundamentally elevating the standard of graduate dissertation. By transforming post-facto remediation into proactive prevention and real-time supervision, we achieve a systematic overhaul in dissertation quality management. In ensuring the quality of postgraduate dissertation, moving quality control forward is an effective strategy. By moving quality control forward to the dissertation proposal stage and strengthening the management of the entire dissertation process, the quality of dissertation can be ensured.

### *3.1 Our Practices And Explorations Of Moving Forward The Quality Control Threshold In Ensuring The Dissertation Quality*

Our university has actively implemented a strategy of moving forward the quality control threshold in the process of ensuring the quality of postgraduate dissertation.

As the first-level management department of the university, the graduate school should focus on system construction, standard formulation, resource coordination and supervision and evaluation. strengthens top-level design and macro management. Moving forward institutional standards: Revise and improve the postgraduate training plan, clarify that the dissertation proposal report, annual progress report, qualification examination (if any), pre defense and other stages are necessary prerequisites for degree application, and establish a rigid elimination or diversion mechanism for each stage. Introduce the "Guidelines and Standards for Writing Dissertations" to unify academic standards in advance. Moving forward in the construction of the mentor team: strict selection and annual assessment of mentors, implementation of mentor on-the-job training and certification system, strengthening the responsibilities and abilities of mentors in academic ethics, research methods, and dissertation guidance. Establish a mentor guidance quality warning and interview mechanism. moving forward resource guarantee: Establish a "Graduate Research Innovation Fund" to support advanced research on excellent topics. Build an "Information Management Platform for Thesis Quality" to achieve online management of the entire process from proposal opening to defense, providing technical support for process monitoring. Moving forward supervision and evaluation: Establish a sampling system for the entire process of dissertation writing, and conduct periodic sampling of opening reports, mid-term assessment reports, etc. to evaluate the rigor of the training process. Incorporate the dissertation process management effectiveness of each training unit into their annual performance evaluation system.

The training unit is the key body of policy implementation, responsible for transforming the macro requirements of the university into specific measures. Focus on implementation and specific execution. Moving forward of curriculum teaching and training: Set up compulsory courses such as "Academic Writing and Norms" and "Research Methodology", and embed academic norms and writing training into curriculum teaching and assessment. Moving forward and strengthening the opening and argumentation process: form dissertation proposal and argumentation group, implement "dissertation proposal and defense", and invite experts from both inside and outside the university to conduct strict evaluations. Thoroughly demonstrate the value, innovation, and feasibility of the topic selection. Those

who fail of pass must Resubmit the dissertation proposal within a specified time limit, and those who fail twice in a row will activate the diversion mechanism.moving forward guidance and monitoring of the research process: Strictly implement the annual report meeting system for research progress, require postgraduate to publicly report their progress in academic forums or research groups, and have the mentor group evaluate and guide them. Implement mid-term assessment diversion, and for students whose research progress is seriously lagging behind and who do not have the potential for further training, decisions such as postponement, warning, or diversion will be made based on the assessment results.Substantiation of Pre-defense Process: Position the pre-defense as the "final checkpoint" before formal submission, with organizational structure and solemnity matching those of official defense. The Pre-defense Committee should propose specific and rigorous revision suggestions. The dissertation must be approved by the committee before entering the blind review process, ensuring Pre-defense "not just a formality".

Through Graduate School leadership and resource support, as well as training units refined management and strict implementation, a synergy is formed between the upper and lower levels. The core of the strategy of "Moving Forward The Quality Control Threshold" is to build an interlocking quality assurance chain, internalize the quality consciousness into the conscious actions of every supervisor and postgraduate, so as to produce high-level dissertations and improve comprehensively postgraduates training quality.

### *3.2 The Concept And Significance Of Moving Forward The Quality Control Threshold*

Moving Forward the Quality Control Threshold refers to moving the quality control threshold for dissertation to the proposal stage, strengthening the management and review of dissertation topics, proposal reports, and dissertation reviews, and ensuring that dissertation topics are innovative, scientific, and feasible. At the same time, through strengthening the construction of the dissertation management system, the whole process from dissertation writing, mid-term review, defense to final assessment is supervised, forming a closed-loop quality assurance system.

This measure improve the quality of dissertation effectively. By moving the quality control process for dissertations to the proposal stage, we can strengthen the review and management of dissertation topics and proposal reports, ensuring that dissertations topics are innovative, scientific, and feasible. Additionally, by strengthening the management of the entire dissertation process, we can monitor and control all stages of dissertation writing, mid-term reviews, defenses, and evaluations, ensuring the quality of dissertations.

It helps improve the quality of postgraduate training. Dissertations are a crucial part of postgraduate training and reflect their academic level and overall abilities. By strengthening dissertation quality assurance, we can promote postgraduate academic research and innovation abilities, improving the quality of postgraduate training.

It helps drive reforms and development in postgraduate education. By strengthening dissertation quality assurance, we can identify issues and shortcomings in postgraduate education, driving reforms and development to improve the quality and standards of postgraduate education.

#### **4 “Combining Deregulation With Regulation” Strategy To Ensure The Quality Of Dissertation**

In ensuring the quality of postgraduate dissertation, we have adopted a “Combining Deregulation With Regulation” strategy (Li, 2024; Liu, 2017; Jiaozhengfa (2017) NO.7). By clarifying rights and responsibilities, stimulating vitality and strengthening supervision, we have constructed a dissertation quality assurance system with clear rights and responsibilities, efficient operation and supreme quality. Adhering to the principle of "quality as the core, delegation of authority as the means, and supervision as the safeguard", the Graduate School (Department) has transitioned from being the primary actor in process management to becoming a rule-maker, platform builder, and quality supervisor. By shifting the focus of management downward, it fully stimulates the sense of primary responsibility and innovative vitality in quality improvement among training units (colleges, departments, and institutes). These training units serve as the first responsible entities for dissertation quality assurance, tasked with implementing comprehensive and meticulous management throughout the entire process of dissertation.

##### *4.1 The Strategy Of "Deregulation" Is To Empower Autonomy And Stimulate Endogenous Motivation*

The essence of "deregulation" is trust and empowerment, aiming to mobilize the enthusiasm and creativity of training units. Graduate School decentralization of process management, Instead of organizing the whole university dissertation proposal, mid-term assessment, pre-defending and other links, we have formulated macro guidance opinions and quality standards, and completely devolve the authority of specific implementation plans, time arrangements, expert selection and result identification to each training unit. The Graduate School devolves the right to select experts: The training unit is allowed to independently build and expand the expert database of dissertation evaluation (meet the basic qualification requirements) according to field characteristics and development needs, and independently assign evaluation experts and members of the defense committee to ensure the professionalism and pertinence of the evaluation. Decentralize the authority of standard formulation: Encourage all disciplines to formulate dissertation quality evaluation rules and academic norms that are higher than the university standards and more characteristic of the discipline, based on the international frontier and their own characteristics, while complying with the basic requirements of the university.

The training unit undertakes the main responsibility and establishes the degree evaluation sub committee that is dissertation quality working group led by and responsible for the dean in charge, to formulate detailed and operable implementation rules for the management of the paper process in the unit.

The training unit must implement effective process management, carefully organize the opening, mid-term, and pre defense stages, invite external peer experts to participate, implement a high standard

and strict screening and diversion mechanism, and give warnings, extensions, or even elimination to unqualified candidates.

Strengthening the first responsibility of supervisors: Clarify and consolidate the primary responsibility of graduate supervisors in selecting thesis topics, research processes, academic ethics, and writing papers, and regard the quality of guiding papers as the core indicator of supervisor recruitment qualifications, professional title evaluation, and performance rewards.

#### *4.2 The Strategy Of "Regulation": Strengthening Supervision And Evaluation, Guarding The Bottom Line Of Quality*

The core of 'Regulation' is supervision and accountability, ensuring that the delegated power is not abused and the bottom line of quality is unbreakable.

Graduate School Institutional Standards (Legislation): Responsible for formulating and updating university-wide guidelines, formatting requirements, and anti-plagiarism protocols to establish clear policy frameworks for academic programs. Quality Monitoring (Audit): Established an annual thesis quality report system that integrates internal blind reviews, post-graduation spot checks, and third-party evaluations to conduct regular monitoring of academic standards across all programs. Spot check ratios and results are publicly disclosed both internally and externally. Targeted Accountability (Enforcement): Institutions found with problematic theses during inspections face penalties including disciplinary interviews, enrollment quota reductions, temporary suspension of degree-granting privileges, or even revocation of accreditation. Thesis inspection outcomes are directly linked to institutional annual performance evaluations and resource allocation decisions.

Cultivation units establish internal quality assurance system: actively cooperate with the sampling work of graduate school, and establish a more strict internal audit mechanism (such as 100% double-blind review, pre-defense of all papers), so as to change passive acceptance of inspection into active self-diagnosis and self-improvement.

Strict implementation of information disclosure: regularly disclose the key information of thesis process management to teachers, students and graduate schools of the university, such as diversion rate, blind review pass rate, defense objection handling, etc., to accept internal supervision.

Implementation of rewards and punishments and improvement: For mentors and teams with quality problems, the training unit shall first deal with them according to internal regulations. Meanwhile, based on feedback from quality assessment, the training unit shall continuously revise and improve its quality management rules to form a closed-loop management.

"combining deregulation with regulation" constitutes a systematic initiative. The deregulation phase must be thorough and risk-free, while the regulatory phase requires scientific rigor and effective implementation. Its success hinges on clear division of responsibilities between graduate schools and academic institutions, fostering collaborative efforts to establish a thesis quality culture rooted in self-regulated academic communities and supported by institutional supervision. This approach

ultimately achieves the fundamental goal of cultivating high-quality graduate talent through connotative development.

## 5. Achievements

By implementing a strategy of "moving forward the quality control threshold and combining deregulation with regulation", our university has achieved significant results in ensuring the quality of postgraduate dissertation.

### 5.1 Significant Improvement in Dissertation Quality

Through measures such as strengthening the review and management of dissertation topics and proposal reports, enhancing the comprehensive management of dissertation, and reinforcing the construction of the faculty team and guidance efforts, the quality of postgraduate dissertation at our university has significantly improved. In the provincial degree office's dissertation spot checks, our university has had no problematic theses for nine consecutive years and has received 15 Excellent dissertations. These achievements fully demonstrate the effectiveness of our university's postgraduate dissertation quality assurance measures.

### 5.2 Increased Enthusiasm among Training Units

By delegating authority to training units, our university has stimulated their enthusiasm and creativity. Training units can formulate postgraduate training plans and dissertation management systems suitable for their own circumstances and needs, ensuring the quality of postgraduate training and dissertation. Additionally, training units have placed greater emphasis on investing in and managing the development of their faculty teams and the intensity of their guidance, thereby enhancing the academic standards and guidance capabilities of their faculty members. The implementation of these measures has fostered healthy competition and the formation of incentive mechanisms among various training units.

### 5.3 Improved Quality of Postgraduate Education

Through the strengthened implementation of dissertation quality assurance measures, postgraduate are subject to comprehensive monitoring and oversight throughout all stages of the dissertation process, including topic selection, proposal defense, mid-term review, defense, and evaluation. the quality of postgraduate education has significant enhanced in our university. More than 90 percent of postgraduates are awarded degrees on time, The annual employment rate of graduate students is over 90 percent.

## 6. Summarize

In summary, our university has implemented measures such as dissertation proposal reports and mid-term assessment diversion in dissertation quality assurance. These initiatives have shifted the quality control checkpoint forward while granting training unit greater authority, strengthening process guidance and adopting a combination of deregulation and regulation approach. Practice has shown that



the frontier and standardization of dissertation topics have significantly improved, the elimination mechanism during the process has effectively enhanced postgraduate sense of urgency, and whole quality has been optimized. In the future, we will deepen evaluation system reforms, build an intelligent management platform, and strengthen supervisor training and incentives to establish a long-term dissertation quality assurance mechanism.

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