

## Perceptions of Cadres in Chinese Universities on the Construction of An Integrity Culture: A Thematic Analysis

QI WANG, RUI LIAO\*

**Abstract** This study explores the perceptions of cadres in Chinese universities regarding the construction of an integrity culture. While the existing English and Chinese literature discussed the achievements, problems, and future directions of the construction of an integrity culture in Chinese universities as well as the comparison between Chinese universities and universities in other countries in the construction of an integrity culture, empirical research in this issue is relatively limited. This paper is the first article on the perceptions of cadres in Chinese universities on integrity education. Four focus group interviews with 35 participants were conducted in June 2023. Through thematic analysis of focus group interviews on this topic, this paper argues that the Chinese universities are targeting a 'Comprehensive Integrity Ecosystem,' which has a strong holistic character. This holistic character shaped the construction of integrity culture and the ideas and perceptions of cadres in integrity education.

**Keywords:** • integrity culture; cadres • perceptions • Chinese universities

ADDRESS: Qi Wang, Ph.D. Candidate, School of Political Science and Public Administration, Neijiang Normal University, Neijiang, 641000, Sichuan, China, email: m13833659292@163.com. Rui Liao, Ph.D. Candidate (corresponding author), School of Accounting, Tianfu College of Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, Deyang, 618000, Sichuan, China, email: rui\_lorry@163.com.

ISSN 1581-5374 Print/1855-363X Online © 2025 Lex localis  
Available online at <http://journal.lex-localis.press>

## 1 Introduction

Regarding the literature on the construction of integrity culture in universities, relevant English and Chinese literature has different topics and research focuses. Relevant English literature mainly focuses on policy support, research ethics, and integrity in various disciplines. The study on policy support regarding the development of academic staff's ethics shows that the policy objectives and content of moral construction for Chinese university teachers are becoming clearer, and both management supervision and policy direction are constantly being optimised (Li and Xue, 2022). Recent research also shows that the strategy of combining theory and practice in ecological civilisation moral education aims to enhance students' environmental awareness and behaviour and unify theory and practice to improve the ecological environment (Liu, 2021). The guiding role of the Red Boat Spirit in social entrepreneurship education has reshaped the social entrepreneurship values and business ethics motivations of Chinese university students and has played a driving role in improving rural transformation, new agricultural technologies, and other fields (Yuan et al., 2023). By applying a convolutional neural network model to analyse the current situation of university students' acceptance of traditional moral culture, Liu (2022) reveals the predictive ability of network activities on college students' acceptance of traditional morality.

Another type of literature is the comparison research between China and other countries in terms of the integrity education. This type of research normally reveals the differences and common ground in the field of integrity education. In the understanding of moral education among Chinese and Pakistani university teachers, Pakistan emphasizes divine sovereignty, constitutional loyalty, and social service, while China places more emphasis on collectivism and socialist values, emphasizing family and social values, but lacks theoretical research support in teaching (Asif et al., 2020). In the study comparing the impact of engineering ethics education and cultural background on research misconduct between China and the United States, scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on the differences in engineering ethics education, student ethical concepts, and research behaviour between the two countries. According to Cao's (2014) research, China and the United States exhibit different characteristics of engineering ethics education in their respective technological and philosophical backgrounds. The United States tends to provide systematic education through training in applied ethics, while China leans towards practical moral education. The United States holds a leading position in the field of engineering education, especially in terms of funding and engineering achievements, where it has more advantages; However, in recent years, China has accelerated its pace and placed greater emphasis on the input and output of engineering labour. Cao (2014) proposed that through international cooperation, professional engineering ethics education can play an important role in strengthening engineering social responsibility and engineering sustainability. At the same time, when analysing the specific situation of engineering education in China, Clancy (2020) pointed out that the acceptance level of ethics education among Chinese engineering students

is lower than that of American students, and their education focuses more on cultivating virtues, ethics, or the development of moral character. In addition, Chinese students tend to distinguish ethical cognition from law, believing that ethics mainly deals with issues of right and wrong that are not covered by law. In the study of cultural differences related to research misconduct, Li and Cornelis (2020) used a qualitative research method to compare the views of researchers in China and Belgium (Flanders region) on research misconduct. The study found that there are similarities in research culture between the two groups of individuals, but significant differences still exist. Chinese participants mentioned plagiarism and improper attribution as research misconduct more frequently, while participants from Flanders are more concerned about data fabrication and tampering. In terms of explaining the reasons behind it, Chinese researchers tend to lean towards the "bad apple" theory, which attributes misconduct to internal moral issues within individuals; However, researchers in Flanders tend to attribute it more to external situational factors, such as the pressure of "publication or elimination".

In addition, both groups recommend addressing research misconduct through education and training (Li and Cornelis, 2020). Overall, these studies indicate that the perception of ethical education and research behaviour in China, the United States, and other cultural backgrounds is greatly influenced by culture. Comparative studies from a cross-cultural perspective can help improve ethical education and strengthen behavioural norms in the global scientific research and engineering fields.

Another type of literature focuses specifically on the integrity education on a single subject or discipline. Ren et al. (2020) researched the impact of personal moral philosophies on the safe practice of students in chemistry and related majors in Chinese universities. They found that in chemistry laboratory education, idealism has a significant impact on chemical safety practice, with higher scores for idealism among senior students and students from eastern regions (Ren et al., 2020). Hence, it is recommended that the integration of idealism content into chemistry education be strengthened. The moral sensitivity of nursing students is usually related to two aspects personality and context. They have different impacts on their moral decision-making mechanisms. This research finding indicates that situational moral sensitivity and moral judgment play a crucial role in moral decision-making (Chen et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). Therefore, it is recommended that diversified strategies be adopted to cultivate the moral sensitivity of nursing students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese nursing master's students demonstrated strong moral courage, and their practical actions and decisions were driven by various factors and outcomes. They proposed a multidisciplinary approach to enhance the cultivation of moral courage in nursing education (Huang et al., 2023).

Regarding relevant Chinese literature on the integrity culture education of Chinese universities, there has been literature on the theoretical foundations and content of

integrity culture development in universities, relevant measures taken to promote the integrity culture, integrity culture education in different disciplines, and relevant policy to support the promotion of integrity culture.

Concerning the theoretical foundations and content of integrity culture development in Chinese universities, there have been studies pointing out that the Marxist ideology as well as the Chinese traditional concept of integrity were its theoretical basis, which needs to be developed and innovated with the development of social and economic context (Zhang, 2010). The construction of the integrity culture in China includes the promotion of integrity ideology, education on laws and regulations, professional ethics, and character cultivation, which are normally considered important ways to improve the ideological quality of university students (Chen and Rong, 2013). As a vital part of university education, the construction of integrity culture in Chinese universities aims to foster the moral consciousness of integrity through cultural promotion, conceptual innovation, and behavioural guidance (Xiong et al., 2008).

Some studies focus on the achievements regarding the construction of integrity culture in Chinese universities. These achievements mainly include four arenas namely material culture, institutional culture, behavioural culture, and spiritual culture. For example, many Chinese universities constructed exhibition halls for integrity culture, cultural squares, natural landscapes with integrity themes, and propaganda fronts to improve campus infrastructure and promote integrity culture. Besides, university media like campus networks and school newspapers was applied to spread cases and slogans of the integrity culture and make the integrity culture more visible and easily accepted by university students (Gao, 2010). Meanwhile, mechanisms and regulations that are compatible with clean governance were established to strengthen the integrity education and improve the transparency and openness in university affairs (Liu and Wang, 2016). Moreover, university staff was educated to work ethically, and managers were required to work with integrity, aiming to set a proper example of decent work ethics for university students (Jin, 2016). Lastly, to improve the effect of integrity culture education and foster integrity character and ideological consciousness, a variety of activities were carried out, such as the "July 1st" selection and appraisal, public benefit activities, and the Chinese Communist Party class practices (Gao, 2010).

In addition to the measures taken by the Chinese universities, there has also been literature addressing the problems or weaknesses when trying to build an integrity culture. For instance, Liu and Wang (2016) mentioned that the promotion of the integrity culture solely relies on the discipline inspection departments and the role of the Chinese Communist Party committee which is supposed to overall plan is not fully developed. Meanwhile, some Chinese universities failed to integrate various resources within and outside of the universities and were unable to cooperate well enough with other organisations like governmental departments as well as non-governmental organisations (Liu

and Wang, 2016). Additionally, policies regarding integrity were difficult to implement and their effects were hard to evaluate, leading to a very limited impact on the thoughts and behaviours of university staff and students (Chen and Rong, 2013).

To better promote the integrity culture in Chinese universities, some suggestions were made by scholars. Zhang (2010) argues to strengthen the theoretical research on the integrity culture, especially the reconciliation of the Marxist ideology as well as the Chinese traditional integrity culture. Also, Chinese universities ought to strengthen the cooperation mechanism between and within different departments and communicate better with organisations outside universities to expand the influence of the integrity culture (Liu and Wang, 2016). The education forms should also be updated. Fully utilising the new media as well as creative activities (like filming relevant short videos and organising social media events) would assist in the dissemination of the integrity culture (Xiong et al., 2008). Additionally, Chen and Rong (2013) argue to strengthen the relevant policy and institutional support and make long-term plans to cooperation the integrity culture into various disciplines, cadre training, and student social activities.

The existing literature discussed the construction and education of the integrity culture, covering the discussion on the integrity culture education on specific disciplines and comparison between China and other countries. The literature also pointed out the current problems faced by Chinese universities in integrity culture education, including difficulties in policy implementation, insufficient resource integration, and inadequate external cooperation. Also, the literature mentioned the importance of developing an integrity culture and the measures that ought to be taken in doing so. However, the empirical research on this topic is still underdeveloped, especially in Chinese-language literature. Additionally, most research focused on students and teachers, while the research on the role of cadre is still vacant at present. This piece of research adds to the existing literature by discussing the role of cadres and the measures taken by them in developing the integrity culture in Chinese universities. By applying focus group interviews on cadres about their specific roles and practical experiences, this paper analyses the practices and challenges when making and implementing the integrity culture policy. Via analysing the interview data, this paper interrogates the current problems of the integrity education system and makes recommendations on the future directions when making policy changes on integrity culture education.

## **Research Method**

Focus groups, as a specific technique for data collection, can help researchers return to the core research question. The rich and valuable information obtained during this data collection process can assist researchers in re-evaluating the research questions and hypotheses, as well as discovering or testing theories.

The discussions among multiple participants in focus groups and their responses to questions cannot only help researchers explain a certain phenomenon and its causes but also develop new information, enabling further exploration of the research question. To interrogate the perceptions of cadres on the construction of the integrity culture in Chinese universities, four focus group interviews were conducted. The researcher travelled to three cities in Sichuan province and invited officials and cadres in five universities whose work was related to the construction of the integrity culture.

Regarding ethical considerations, the researcher contacted the working staff of the discipline inspection commissions in these universities, telling them the information on this research project, and requested them to invite relevant officials and cadres who are in charge of relevant work and willing to voluntarily participate in the focus group interviews. All the research respondents came to the focus group interviews voluntarily. Also, in a very professional field, the identities of research participants are easy to be revealed if too much personal information is noted and published. Therefore, to ensure anonymity, and also the identities of the informants are not exposed, each participant is given a pseudonym. Additionally, only university departments the participants were working for are provided here, which are directly related to the understanding of relevant findings. Names and personal information of research participants are not displayed in this article.

The participants in this study come from the following departments: Discipline Inspection Commission (DIC), Propaganda Department, Teaching Department, Student Affairs Office, Academic Affairs Office, School of Marxism, School of Economics and Management, School of Special Education, school of civil engineering, school of music, school of media studies, school of law, school of mathematics and physics, and school of civil and architectural engineering. These departments and their working staff are all more or less related to the construction of the integrity culture. Each participant was given the opportunity to express the relation between her/his department's work and the construction of the integrity culture. Besides, they were also asked to talk about the outcomes that have been achieved in their work as well as the problems they met in terms of the integrity culture.

Here is the information on focus groups and interviewees:

**Table 1:** Focus Groups and Interviewees

University (Focus Group)	Department	Department Interviewees	University Interviewees
	Discipline Inspection	2	

University (Focus Group 1)	1	Commission (DIC)		5
		Student Affairs Office	1	
		School of Marxism	1	
		Propaganda Department	1	
		Discipline Inspection	3	
		Commission (DIC)		
		School of Economics and Management	1	
		Propaganda Department	1	
		Student Affairs Office	1	
		Teaching Department	1	
University (Focus Group 1)	2	School of Special Education	1	8
		Discipline Inspection	3	
		Commission (DIC)		
		Propaganda Department	1	
		School of Civil Engineering	1	
University (Focus Group 2)	3	Academic Affairs Office	1	8
		Student Affairs Office	2	
		Discipline Inspection	1	
		Commission (DIC)		
		School of Music	1	
University (Focus Group 3)	4	Propaganda Department	1	6
		School of Media Studies	1	
		Academic Affairs Office	1	
		Student Affairs Office	1	
		Discipline Inspection	2	
		Commission (DIC)		
		School of Law	1	
		School of Mathematics and Physics	1	
		Propaganda Department	1	

School of Civil and Architectural Engineering	1
School of Marxism	1

Before taking part in the focus group interviews, participants were given information on this research project and agreed that their dialogues would be recorded, analysed, and appeared in the article with their real names anonymised. The processes of conducting focus groups were recorded. The audio records are stored in the password-protected laptop of the researcher only and will be deleted when the paper is published. The transcription of the research data will be stored for another two years since the publication of relevant research findings.

The research data was transcribed by an online application named iFlytek Heard which was developed by iFlytek. Afterwards, the transcription was carefully checked by the researcher to ensure accuracy. The original data including records and transcriptions are in Chinese language. It was analysed with the support of NVivo. When selectively displaying the dialogues, Baidu Translation was used to translate the Chinese dialogues into English. The researcher manually checked the translated dialogue and made sure the English translation matched the original Chinese data. The data analysis procedure followed the procedures of open coding, axial coding, and theory coding. Open coding (first-level coding) involves coding and labelling the raw interview data line by line, to generate initial concepts and identify conceptual categories from the raw data. To minimize the influence of researchers' personal biases, preconceptions, or effects, we strive to use the respondents' original words as labels to derive initial concepts. Since the number of initial concepts is very large and exhibits a certain degree of overlap, categories are created by reclassifying and reorganizing the concepts. The task of axial coding (second-level coding) is to identify the underlying logical relationships between categories, thereby developing core categories and their subcategories. In this study, categories have been classified based on the interrelations and logical sequence at the conceptual level, and several core categories have been summarized. The core categories, along with the corresponding open coding categories, are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:**Categories and definitions

Main Category	Subcategory	Definition
	First-Year University Students	Refers to students who have just been admitted to a university and are in their first year of undergraduate or associate degree studies.



<b>Target Audience for Integrity Education</b>	Ordinary-Level Students	Refers to students in universities who are neither first-year students nor graduates, typically including second-year and third-year university students.
	Leaders and Administrators	Refers to personnel in the university's management team, whose primary responsibility is to facilitate the smooth operation of various tasks within the institution.
	Teachers	Refers to individuals in universities responsible for teaching-related tasks, including frontline teachers and counsellors.
	Graduates	Refers to students in their final year of study at the university, who are about to graduate.
<b>Implementers of Integrity Education Measures</b>	University	The primary entity responsible for formulating and implementing integrity education measures in universities, mainly including various colleges, Party organizations at all levels, and disciplinary inspection committees.
	Class	The secondary group responsible for carrying out integrity education measures in universities, including counsellors, class committees, etc.
	Student Group	A supplementary group involved in implementing integrity education measures in universities.
	Party Conduct, Academic Style, and Campus Culture Development	Integrate integrity education into the construction of party conduct, academic style, and campus culture to create a clean, rigorous, and pragmatic academic campus environment.
	Diversified Promotion Methods	Promote integrity culture through various forms of measures, utilizing diversified platforms and tools for dissemination.
<b>The Measures for Integrity Education</b>	Strengthening the Training of Key and Exemplary Personnel	Cultivate comprehensive and capable implementers to further promote the dissemination of integrity.

Building a Multi-Group Integrity Education System	Construct a connected integrity education community composed of multiple groups, strengthening the ties among family, school, and society.
Continuing to Normalize Legal Publicity Initiatives	Integrate integrity with legal education and promote the widespread dissemination of legal knowledge.
Improving Related Work Systems and Mechanisms	Perfect the mechanisms related to integrity education, including mechanisms for discipline, incentives, and evaluation.

Incorporating Integrity Education into the Curriculum	Establish integrity education as a formal course with set evaluation objectives.
Teaching Supervision and Incident Handling	Supervise and evaluate teachers' teaching processes, quality, and content, and appropriately handle and penalize teaching-related incidents.
Organizing Meetings, Thematic Education, and Research Activities	Hold activities centred around the cultural theme of integrity.
Conducting Social Practice Activities	Carry out social practice activities such as the "Three to Countryside" program and the "Red Dream Journey to Qingyun."
Conducting Theoretical Study Activities	Carry out theoretical studies centred on integrity culture, including honesty education, legal education, and similar topics.
Student Honesty Education	Focus on end-of-semester evaluations, important qualification exams, and ensure fairness in teachers' grading processes to instil a sense of honesty in students.

	Connecting Integrity with Regional Culture	Unearth elements of integrity in regional culture and use examples to enhance educational content.
	Fair and Transparent Campus Evaluations	Ensure fairness in various types of campus awards, honours, and selection processes.
	Integrity in Scientific Research and Cultural Education	Further promote integrity development in the fields of scientific research and cultural education.
<b>Support Conditions for Integrity Education</b>	Technical Support	The technical conditions required for universities to research, promote, and popularize integrity education.
	Financial Support	The funding necessary for universities to research, promote, and popularize a culture of integrity.
<b>Relationship Between Integrity Education and Comprehensive Education</b>	Graduation Education	Organizing integrity-oriented lectures and training activities for students before their graduation.
	Curriculum Integration	Incorporating integrity education into academic courses, integrating the concept of integrity with specific subjects to create unique courses focused on integrity education.
	Research Education	Treating integrity education as a research topic for academic exploration and study.
	Professional Education	Integrating integrity education with specific disciplines, emphasizing the cultivation of integrity awareness in specialized talent development.
	Wide Coverage	Ensuring integrity education spans all educational stages in universities and reaches all participants comprehensively.
<b>The</b>	Importance for	The importance and significance of integrity education for

<b>Significance of</b>	College Students	university students.
------------------------	------------------	----------------------

<b>Integrity Education</b>	Role in Chinese Historical and Cultural Traditions	The pivotal role of integrity culture within the broader context of Chinese history and culture.
	Importance for Faculty and Leaders	The significance of integrity education for university faculty and administrative personnel.
<b>Domain of Campus Integrity</b>	Teachers	Teachers are part of campus integrity education.
	First-Year Students	First-year students are a distinctive feature of campus integrity education.
	Leaders and Cadres	Leaders and cadres are the main force of campus integrity education.
<b>Existing Issues in Integrity Education</b>	Incomplete Top-Level Design	While scientific, the top-level design of university integrity education is not systematic.
	Normalized Corruption	Occurrences of corruption are increasing and gradually spreading to other areas.
	Weak Departmental Collaboration	Collaboration and coordination between departments in campus integrity education are weak.
	Low Participation Rate of Key Stakeholders	Important stakeholders, such as frontline teachers, have relatively low participation rates.
	Unmet Educational Goals	Some of the pre-set goals for integrity education have not been achieved.
	Tight Budgets	Budgets for the integrity education initiatives in some universities are insufficient.
	Poor Integration with Curriculum	The integration of integrity with subject courses is unsatisfactory.
	Low Alignment of Knowledge and Action	There is a noticeable gap between planned initiatives and actual results.
	Overly Simplistic Educational Methods	Integrity education lacks diversity in its forms and approaches, making it too monotonous.
	Weak Cultural Combateness	Integrity culture lacks impact; related facilities are outdated and inadequate.
	Unclear Understanding of Integrity Education	University participants lack a clear and comprehensive understanding of integrity education.

<b>Outcomes of Integrity Education</b>	Numerous Award-Winning Integrity-Themed Works	A rich number of award-winning works are themed around integrity.
	Iron Man Spirit of the School	The school has promoted an integrity culture using the Iron Man spirit, creating new cultural results.
	Reduction in Non-Integrity	Non-integrity behaviours have gradually decreased on campus, achieving significant results.

	Behaviours on Campus	
	Heightened Awareness of Party Rules and Discipline	Awareness of Party rules and discipline has increased among university personnel.
	Creation of a Scientific Top-Level Design	Universities have developed a scientific top-level design for integrity education, achieving major progress.

Theoretical coding was the final stage of coding, with the main task being to select a core category based on the first two levels of coding and develop a more generalized theory around it.

Researchers systematically analyse all the identified concepts and categories to select a core category that is inclusive and generalized. Then, around this core category, other related concepts and categories are organically linked to form a clear theoretical framework. This study used another quarter of the interview transcripts to test for theoretical saturation. The results show that the categories in the model have been developed to a very rich extent. Regarding the core category of integrity culture development, no new significant categories or relationships were identified, and no new constituent factors were found within the core categories. Therefore, it can be concluded that the theory constructed in this study is theoretically saturated.

## Findings

When talking about the construction of the integrity culture, many participants mentioned the importance of 'top-level design'. For instance, as a cadre of the DIC, Gangyong stressed the significance of punishment 'with high pressure' in the process of anti-corruption, which is a vital part of integrity. Corruption is normally understood as a phenomenon that is directly against the rule of integrity.

There are different understandings of corruption. The concept of separation of powers and checks and balances is the mainstream and dominant thought in Western theories of power restraint. It originated as early as ancient Greece and Rome and developed into a relatively systematic and comprehensive ideological framework after achieving triumph in modern times. In Western political practice, the idea of checks and balances has withstood the test of time. However, relying solely on the mutual restriction of powers within the system cannot effectively prevent the emergence of authoritarian politics and the abuse of power. According to Zhou (2011), it is precisely because the limitations of intra-system checks and balances in fully regulating and constraining power have been recognized that thinkers like Tocqueville and Dahl broke away from the habitual mindset of "restricting power with power." Instead, they sought a new paradigm of "restricting power through society"—that is, relying more on social forces such as the media, interest groups, and individual citizens to supervise and constrain public power (Zhou, 2011). The dialogue of Gangyong reflects the role of DIC in anti-corruption, the power of which is separated from other departments. However, different from the Western theories on the separation of powers, Gangyong stressed the leadership of the Party Committee. According to him, the main problem is that each department works alone in the construction of an integrity culture, and DIC is considered to be in charge of this task, which fails to reflect the leadership of the Party committee in this process:

Integrity cannot be separated from anti-corruption and punishment. Punishment must be done with high pressure, or integrity education would be empty talk. Our university doesn't punish much, which [punishment] is a deterrent. The problems of teachers have a great impact on students. Students learn from teachers. Some teachers instruct students to engage in false invoices and false business trips, which has a great impact on students. I think it's hard to evaluate the effectiveness [of the construction of integrity culture]. Just like the assessment of the provincial DIC [to us], we can see from another perspective that more cases show that the political ecology is not good, and fewer cases show that the wind is clean and upright [风清气正 feng qing qi zheng]. If you want to evaluate this, you can see that there is not much corruption and malfeasance in this unit, which can reflect the cultural achievements of integrity. If it is good, these things will be very few. Don't always think that the DIC will supervise us. We should think about this issue differently. This department has not found any big problems in so many ways for many years. I always want to find out how to deal with some cases. If there is a large-scale problem found, it means that the problem of corruption is serious. In schools and universities, there is still no overall connection, departments fight alone, and they do not work together. Some people think that the integrity culture is a matter of the DIC. It should be the main responsibility of the Party committee. [the Party committee] didn't realise the importance of the construction of an integrity culture to university education. Gangyong, DIC General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities that

"we must adhere to taking moral education and character building (立德树人) as the central task, integrate ideological and political work throughout the entire process of education and teaching, achieve three all-round education for all students and in all aspects, and strive to open up a new chapter in the development of higher education in our country" (People's Daily, 2016). Pan and Du (2025) view campus culture as a key element of educational practice in colleges and universities, playing a vital role in shaping values and nurturing students' character through subtle, implicit education. It occupies an important position in the reform and development of higher education. Campus culture should embody the principle of "harmony in diversity," guided by the cultivation and practice of socialist core values, which should adhere to a unified orientation while accommodating diverse approaches, uphold tradition while fostering innovation, respect differences, and continuously enhance the openness and inclusiveness of university culture (Pan and Du, 2025). Interestingly, as the head of the Student Affairs Office of a university, Hongli specially mentioned the 'three all-round educations' when talking about the construction of the integrity culture. The dialogue below indicates that the development of a culture of integrity should draw on the concept of 'three all-round educations', integrating integrity education into the entire workforce, the entire process, and all aspects of talent cultivation in higher education:

The three all-round education means the whole staff, the whole process and all aspects. It should be the same with integrity culture education, not just ideological and political courses and counsellors, but to further expand our team. Professional teachers should also integrity the ideological and political elements [into their teaching]. It is like those who work in the canteen also have some public power, right? There is a kind of peer education in the interaction between student backbones and other students. To implement the whole process, we should tell the students including freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors; and those who are about to be employed should be reminded of honesty. Now there are many post-90s corruption cases, which happen around us, not far away. The comprehensive integrity education mode includes classroom linkage, the first classroom and the second classroom (student practice, organizational life, micro-community). Students have a set of discourse systems. Online and offline education still needs to adopt a targeted way, adhere to the integration of theory and practice, and take students to experience after the class is over. The city where the university is located [anonymized] has many carriers [places] of integrity education. The linkage of family, school and society is also very important. It would be quite difficult for an integrity education without the support of family. Hongli, Student Affairs Office

As the head of the School of Music, Bo deems inadequate cooperation between departments and schools within the university as a significant problem. From the affiliated departments of interviewees and the data analysis results, it can be concluded that the construction of an integrity culture is related to many

relevant departments. Therefore, when too many departments and staff are required to get involved in this issue, the specific responsibility becomes quite unclear. It is hard to affirm the role each department should take in specific issues. Such a dilemma hindered the intention and effectiveness of the integrity culture construction in Chinese universities. The problems mentioned below can also be attributed to the unclear responsibility and inadequate cooperation between departments and schools. For instance, university major course teachers may consider the construction of integrity culture the responsibility of other administrative staff instead of themselves and are inclined to add integrity education into their teaching. Also, the construction of integrity culture largely relies on the extent of attention of those who are in charge of the university. Without the attention of those in charge, it would be harder for the interactions and cooperation of departments and schools in this issue:

First, the integrity culture construction and the ideological and political integration of the curriculum are not enough. How to say, they are not fully included in the education and teaching plan. For example, the theme class meeting and the personnel department of the organization department contain ethics education for teachers, which is not a special system. It's all based on the Department's work requirements. For students, the special targeted courses are not perfect, and the first and last courses for students have not been normalized. Yesterday was the day when students graduated from the university. I think that in these aspects, the immersive [沁润 qinrun] type of infiltration guidance needs to be strengthened. Second is that cultural facilities and educational places are laggard in building positions. Is there a position for our integrity culture, and is there a slogan or a sign? Third is that the construction of an integrity culture to be really integrated into the management and the moral education of the university is not enough. If the leaders see the importance of it, they will work more attentively. The interaction between schools is not enough. A complete matrix has not yet been formed, in terms of the integrity culture.

Bo, School of Music

As the head of the DIC of a university, Quan talked about his work in recent years. From the dialogue below, we can see that the work of DIC mainly includes the punishment of those who are in violation of regulations as well as supervision and inspection of those who are in key positions. For instance, Quan mentioned the case of acting against the Eight Regulations which primarily emphasize improving investigative research, streamlining meetings and documents, regulating overseas visits and security measures, controlling news coverage and document publication, practising frugality, and strictly following guidelines for clean governance. Their main objective is to combat formalism, bureaucracy, and extravagance, thereby strengthening the bond between the Party and the people (Wang and Ni, 2024). This punishment is an important aspect of the construction of an integrity culture, which helps deter the intention and actions against regulations, especially for leaders and managers of departments who hold



power. Meanwhile, the dialogue below also reflects the importance of prevention. According to the dialogue below, the major accident of the first Party Committee of the university becomes a warning for those working at the university afterwards. Also, inspection plays an important role in the prevention of crime. Yet, due to the separation of departments, such as the incorporation of the auditors, many crimes and violations cannot be found. Therefore, better cooperation between departments and the combination of punishment and prevention would be needed in the further construction of an integrity culture.

It's common for leading cadres [in our university] to abuse their power for personal gain, mainly in violation of Eight Regulations and the misuse of small coffers. One comrade voluntarily gave himself up to us. What the Incorruptible Outlook magazine reported was an example of our assigned group. There are few cases transferred from the province, and there are few reports. We mainly rely on inspections to find clues [of crime]. The number of cases we handle is relatively small, three cases in a year, perhaps four cases, and there are many key supervision objects, especially cadres at the department level. Two people were expelled from the Party, one with a double expulsion [be dismissed from public office and expelled from the Party], and the third form was the cancellation of party positions. For those who take the initiative, we need to reflect the party's policy, mainly focusing on the top leaders and cadres at the department level ... The first session of our [Communist] Party committee had a major accident, which still has a certain warning effect. The final result was that one person was sentenced to 14 years [in prison], and our [former] president was sentenced to 6 and a half years. The second session of the [Communist] Party committee became stable. During the inspection and rectification, several cases were handled, and there were no cases in the following years. The third [Communist] Party committee works hard, so the whole university, as an organization for commendation, is in such a situation now. I sent out cadres of the DIC and found problems and came to deal with them. The [staff] really can't do it. No matter how I tell them, it's not necessarily effective. The cooperation between inspectors and discipline inspection and supervision is OK, but not with those who are in charge of audit. They [the auditors] don't find problems. We can't participate in the inspection and find problems ourselves [without the auditors]. Some comrades don't have the spirit of hard work, so we are afraid that they won't work hard. There are not necessarily major cases. Oh, there was one major case in the year before last, and one major case in the last year. Now, we have to do it [deal with major cases] again. Without funds and incentives, they [workers] would be sloppy ... The work of handling a case was divided into three parts. After a long time, the case couldn't be filed. At last, the case couldn't be filed ... I think one case needs to be filed before the end of June, and three to four key supervision objects should be filed this year.

**Quan, DIC**

Although the DIC is considered to be the core agency in the construction of the integrity culture, secondary schools also play a vital role in this as they are in charge of the daily management of teachers and students. As the head of the School of Media, Yu mentioned the measures taken by his school and the effect of conducting the integrity culture education. Different from the DIC which mainly focuses on cadres which hold power, the work of secondary schools has more impact on teachers and students. In order to facilitate the construction of an integrity culture, the establishment of rules and regulations would not be enough. Further, the change of mindsets and behaviours of individuals would be needed. The dialogue below mentioned the various measures taken to infuse integrity education into daily teaching and administrative management. Especially, the secondary school not only faces cadres and teachers but also popularises the awareness of integrity among students. Another interesting transformation is the ‘democratisation’ of secondary school management. Yu below linked this phenomenon with the effect of integrity culture construction. The situation in which “one person has the final power to make decisions” has shifted, showing a trend toward listening more to public opinions, marking the gradual strengthening of democratic management and a culture of integrity within the school. This transformation also illustrates a separation of power, which marks the decrease in managers’ power when trying to achieve integrity:

There is a difference between honesty and integrity. Teachers and students, especially the administrative cadres of secondary schools, should know that being a clean man [is important], and let others know the procedures and effects of handling affairs. It shouldn’t be that you don’t care about the effect when you do something. Combined with the university’s work arrangements, there will often be clean culture education with a special topic or theme. We should also pass the integrity culture to students through the teaching and research section. Many people pay attention to the administrative staff of secondary schools, but students should also have this awareness, and the scope ought to be popular. The construction of ‘theoretical armed forces’ is relatively solid, and we will arrange some activities independently in combination with the secondary school. The practice of our secondary school is almost the same. There are clear regulations, which are to closely integrate integrity education, and the procedures must be legal. In the past, many procedures did not meet the requirements. Now we must act according to the rules and establish a sense of rules for people ... Every year, some activities and competitions are held [on the integrity culture], and some people are awarded, but it appears to be not very systematic. The development of our secondary school [on the integrity culture education] is relatively solid based on its situation. Now the atmosphere is much better. The public trust of teachers in secondary school is much higher than that of previous years. I used to hear "it's ok if your leaders decide." this situation has changed a lot. You should listen to the teachers now. Although you know one way is the best, you still need to hold a forum to listen to opinions. I think it's better

than previous years. It's easy to deal with administrative cadres now. Before, officers were afraid of criticism from the top and opposition from the bottom. Now they are relieved, and the vast majority of teachers agree to do so. The construction of a clean and honest culture has been basically normalized, and there are rules to follow and act according to, and the situation of arbitrariness and head-beating decisions has been significantly reduced. Yu, School of Media

## **Conclusion**

From the findings above, it can be observed that Chinese universities are trying to construct a 'Comprehensive Integrity Ecosystem,' which emphasises holistic collaboration among leadership, faculty, staff, students, and external partners. This theory centres around five interrelated principles, namely 'top-level design, integration of education and curriculum, three all-round educations, cultural and community alignment, and sustained feedback and deterrence'. The 'top-level design' principle stressed the importance of an overall plan from the top as well as the role of leaders in the construction of integrity culture, illustrating the 'top-down' character in the management of Chinese universities. Meanwhile, 'integration of education and curriculum' highlights the combination of integrity education and professional education. The scope of curriculum in Chinese universities has extended beyond its profession. The 'three all-round educations' reveals the holistic tendency of Chinese education, which aims to run through the whole process of university students' learning and growth, in which integrity is considered an important part. Another aspect of this holistic character is the 'cultural and community alignment'. From the dialogues, it can be known that the cadres in Chinese universities attach importance to the collaboration between universities and social institutions like families and local communities, trying to ally matters like integrity education. 'Sustained feedback and deterrence' refers to the effort of university departments, especially the DIC to sustain the integrity of university staff through daily management, by combining supervision, inspection, and deterrence.

This piece of research adds to the existing literature by introducing the perspectives of university cadres who are directly in charge of the construction of an integrity culture. Through thematic analysis of focus group interviews on this topic, this paper argues that the Chinese universities are targeting a 'Comprehensive Integrity Ecosystem,' which has a strong holistic character. Although the existing literature has pointed out the achievements and shortcomings of the integrity culture education in Chinese universities, there has not been any empirical study that systematically reviews the integrity education system. This research echoes some findings in the existing literature. Liu and Wang (2016) stated that the promotion of the integrity culture is too dependent on the DIC, and the role of the Chinese Communist Party

committee, which is supposed to overall plan, is not strengthened. On the other hand, a few Chinese universities did not develop a well-rounded usage of in-University and external across-university resources and failed to forge collaboration paths with organizations within the University, such as governmental departments and non-governmental organizations (Liu and Wang, 2016). The findings of this research also support these arguments.

The findings of this research also provide details on the situations in which poor coordination often leads to efforts and limited results, reinforcing the urgency of the conclusion, that there needs to be unified leadership and organized procedures. In addition to the descriptions and arguments of previous studies, this research found the problem of inefficient cooperation between departments within Chinese universities in integrity education and the construction of integrity culture. Therefore, the importance of consistent policy implementation, institutional support, and integrating integrity education into teaching and student activities is further addressed.

Previous studies have illustrated the link between a country's integrity education and its social and political context (Asif et al., 2020; Li and Cornelis, 2020; Cao, 2024). Different from the rest of the world, China's integrity education has more political characteristics and overall planning and integrates integrity cultivation with socialist core values. The top-down and holistic character forms the core features of the construction of integrity in Chinese universities. As a limitation of the study, this research focuses on the views and perspectives of cadres. Therefore, more data from diverse sources would be needed in the future, including the perspectives of students and other staff. Such data would help form a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of integrity in Chinese universities.

## References:

- Asif, T., Guangming, O., Haider, M. A., Colomer, J., Kayani, S., & Amin, N. ul. (2020). Moral Education for Sustainable Development: Comparison of University Teachers' Perceptions in China and Pakistan. *Sustainability*, 12(7), 3014. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12073014>
- Cao, G. H. (2014). Comparison of China-US engineering ethics educations in Sino-Western philosophies of Technology. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 21(6), 1609–1635. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-014-9611-3>
- Chen, J. and Rong, X. (2013) '新形势下高校廉洁文化建设的困境与对策' (The dilemmas and countermeasures of clean culture construction in universities under the new situation), *Research on Integrity Culture*, 4(4), pp. 66-74.
- Chen, Q., Su, X., Liu, S., Miao, K., & Fang, H. (2021). The relationship between moral sensitivity and professional values and ethical decision-making in nursing students. *Nurse Education Today*, 105, 105056. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2021.105056>
- Clancy, R. F. (2019). The Ethical Education and Perspectives of Chinese Engineering Students: A Preliminary Investigation and Recommendations. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 26(4), 1935–1965. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-019-00108-0>
- Gao, J. (2010) '高校廉洁文化建设与管理效能的提升' (The construction of clean culture in universities and the improvement of management effectiveness), *Research on Integrity Culture*, 1(4), pp. 64-67.
- Huang, M., Dong, W., Zhao, Q., & Mo, N. (2023). Moral courage of master's students of nursing during COVID-19. *Nursing Ethics*, 30(4), 585–597. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09697330221146250>
- Li, D., & Cornelis, G. (2020). Differing perceptions concerning research misconduct between China and Flanders: A qualitative study. *Accountability in Research*, 28(2), 63–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2020.1802586>
- Li, J., & Xue, E. (2022). Applying latent allocation topic model to explore the policy changes of teachers' morality development for teacher educational sustainability in China. *Sustainability*, 14(23), 16125. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142316125>
- Liu, B. (2022). The acceptance status of traditional moral culture in colleges and universities using Convolutional Neural Network. *Scientific Programming*, 2022, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/7868591>
- Liu, G. and Wang, X. (2016) '论高校廉洁文化机制的构建' (Discussion on the construction of clean culture mechanisms in universities), *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 3, pp. 48-50.
- Liu, H.Q., Du, K.L. (2025) “高校‘三全育人’协同机制探究” (Research on the Collaborative Mechanism of "All-round Education" in Universities), *学校党建与思想教育 (School Party Building and Ideological Education)*, 2, pp. 80-82. doi:10.19865/j.cnki.xxdj.2025.02.021 .
- Liu, J. (2021). Research On the Construction Strategy of Green Civilization Moral Education in Colleges and Universities from The Perspective of Ecological Civilization. *Fresenius Environmental Bulletin*, 30(5), 5220–5229.

Jin, F. (2016) '新形势下高校廉洁文化建设研究' (Research on the construction of clean culture in universities under the new situation), *School Party Building and Ideological Education*, 24, pp. 79-80.

Ren, X., Wang, X., Jin, X., & Li, M. (2020). The impact of personal moral philosophies on the safe practice of students in chemistry and related majors. *Science & Education*, 30(1), 67–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-020-00165-z>

Wang, R., Ni, X. (2024) “作风建设、政党纪律与党的自我革命——基于中央八项规定精神执行情况理论思考” (Work Style Construction, Party Discipline, and the Party's Self-Revolution: Theoretical Reflections Based on the Implementation of the Spirit of the Eight-Point Regulation), *政治学研究* (Chinese Journal of Political Science), 3, pp. 64-75, 242-243.

Xi, J.P. (2016) “在全国高校思想政治工作会议上强调：把思想政治工作贯穿教育教学全过程 开创我国高等教育事业发展新局面 ” (Emphasizing at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities: Integrating Ideological and Political Work throughout the Entire Teaching Process to Open a New Chapter in the Development of China's Higher Education), *人民日报* (People's Daily), 9 December, p. 1.

Xiong, W., Zhu, X. and Huang, X. (2008) '高校廉洁文化建设实效性工作思路探析' (Exploration of practical work ideas for clean culture construction in universities), *Journal of Jiangxi Education Institute*, 29(6), pp. 101-103.

Yuan, C.-H., Wang, D., & Su, H.-H. (2023). Red Boat spirit and social entrepreneurship education in China. *Sustainability*, 15(6), 5030. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15065030>

Zhang, H. (2010) '高校廉洁文化建设新探' (A new exploration of the construction of clean culture in universities), *Journal of Central South University of Forestry and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 5, pp. 103-105+118. doi: 10.14067/j.cnki.1673-9272.2010.05.020.

Zhang, N., Ren, X., Xu, Z., & Jin, C. (2024). Effects of dispositional and contextual moral sensitivity in moral decision-making: A cross-sectional study among nursing students. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.16677>

Zhou, Y.C. (2011) “从分权制衡到社会制约：西方权力制约思想的范式转换” (From Division and Balance of Powers to Social Restriction: Paradigm Shifts in Western Thought on Power Restraint), *社会主义研究* (Socialism Studies), 4, pp. 82-87.