



Research on the Difficulties and Practical Paths of Building an Integrity Culture in Colleges and Universities

Jing Wen

Guangxi University, Nanning 530003, Guangxi, China

Abstract: The development of integrity culture constitutes a vital component in the spiritual and institutional development of higher education institutions, serving as both an essential requirement for fulfilling the fundamental mission of cultivating virtue and nurturing talent, and a strategic response to the state's anti-corruption initiatives. Through in-depth analysis of contemporary challenges and key issues in integrity culture construction within universities, this study explores effective pathways for advancing such initiatives. Such exploration plays a crucial role in enhancing the relevance and practical effectiveness of integrity culture development within higher education institutions.

Keywords: new era, university integrity culture, practical path

1. Introduction

President Xi emphasized: "We must strengthen anti-corruption education and build a culture of integrity, while improving the system for restraining and supervising power operations." [1] Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the CPC Central Committee with President Xi at its core has adhered to comprehensive strict governance of the Party, steadily advancing the construction of clean government and honest conduct. This has ensured smooth progress in socialist modernization in the new era. Under this new historical context, the construction of clean government and honest conduct is penetrating every corner of society with unprecedented scale and depth, laying the foundation for creating a clean, fair, harmonious, stable, healthy, and orderly social environment. Universities serve as the vanguard driving technological advancement, social progress, and national rejuvenation. They shoulder the mission of cultivating talents, fostering scientific innovation, and providing social services in the new era, while bearing the historical responsibility of inheriting and promoting China's outstanding cultural heritage. We must soberly recognize that although the anti-corruption campaign has achieved overwhelming success, the situation remains severe. Corruption still exists in universities, eroding this sacred academic sanctuary. Therefore, strengthening the construction of integrity culture in universities not only promotes the continuous development and improvement of theoretical frameworks for integrity culture, but also meets the urgent need to cultivate outstanding talents with integrity awareness in the new era.

2. The main contents of the construction of clean government culture in colleges and universities

2.1 The spirit and culture of integrity in colleges and universities

The integrity culture in modern universities is a campus mainstream culture shaped by integrating socialist core values with campus culture, characterized by educational equity, noble teacher ethics, exemplary teaching practices, and pure academic ethos. It embodies the university's spirit of fair competition, unity, and relentless pursuit of excellence. To build this integrity culture, higher education institutions must organically integrate ethical education with academic development, cultivating teachers' commitment to integrity in teaching and students' dedication to honesty in learning. Simultaneously, universities should educate faculty and staff to avoid crossing moral boundaries or legal red lines, establishing clear ethical boundaries for their thoughts and actions while building a robust firewall against corruption.

2.2 University integrity system culture

School regulations, disciplinary codes, and behavioral standards form the essential components of integrity culture in higher education. These institutional frameworks serve as vital tools ensuring smooth operations in teaching, research, and daily life, while regulating educators' professional conduct and students' academic ethos. To develop integrity culture, institutions must first identify commonalities and differences between their systems and mechanisms. While interconnected, these elements maintain distinct distinctions: systems determine mechanisms, yet mechanisms also shape systems. Systems

provide the foundation for mechanisms to function effectively, whereas specific systems require corresponding operational frameworks to materialize. Ultimately, a well-rounded institutional system achieves optimal results through the synergistic interaction of both systems and mechanisms.

2.3 Material culture of university integrity

The "hard environment" and "soft environment" of university campuses form an integral part of the material culture of integrity in higher education. The hard environment encompasses cultural facilities and educational spaces such as art corridors, morning reading corners, English corners, campus history museums, integrity-themed stone carvings, bulletin boards, famous quotes, and celebrity sculpture gardens. The soft environment includes a competitive learning atmosphere of mutual learning and improvement, a student-centered educational approach tailored to individual aptitudes, and a positive public opinion environment filled with uplifting energy. The construction of integrity material culture in universities involves endowing specific objects with educational value. Through the external forms presented by displayed artifacts, faculty and students can intuitively perceive the positive energy radiating from exemplary personalities and the cautionary lessons conveyed by negative cases. This enables them to consciously enhance their integrity awareness and improve their cultural literacy in integrity within the subtle influence of both the "hard environment" and "soft environment" of campus life.

3. The difficulties faced by the construction of clean government culture in colleges and universities

With the rapid economic development, society's growing demand for talent has driven expansion in university enrollment and educational resources, leading to remarkable progress in higher education. However, the lagging establishment of anti-corruption supervision mechanisms has resulted in recurring corruption cases, particularly in key sectors and critical positions. The root causes include not only weakened personal resistance to corruption among offenders but also insufficient constraints on power operations and delayed development of integrity culture.

3.1 There are cognitive deviations in the construction of clean government culture in colleges and universities

Universities serve as vital hubs for promoting integrity culture and disseminating anti-corruption knowledge. However, in recent years, corruption cases have emerged frequently due to systemic oversight and profit-driven motives, with a notable proportion of these cases being investigated. The root causes of corruption in higher education institutions are multifaceted. Firstly, some university leaders lack adequate understanding of integrity culture development. Certain administrators prioritize teaching, research, admissions, and employment as core priorities, viewing other tasks as non-essential. Others treat integrity culture initiatives merely as lip service, policy documents, or conference topics, resulting in insufficient attention, reflection, and investment in such efforts. Secondly, faculty members hold misconceptions about the scope of integrity education. Some educators mistakenly equate campus integrity initiatives with administrative functions, believing their role is limited to adhering to professional ethics and academic excellence. They perceive these efforts as unrelated to personal conduct. Thirdly, post-2000s students demonstrate passive attitudes toward integrity culture. These independent-minded individuals often show indifference toward matters perceived as irrelevant. Campus activities like integrity knowledge contests and cultural exhibitions attract minimal participation beyond student leaders, leading to poor engagement outcomes and failing to effectively promote integrity education. In addition, some colleges and universities believe that the main object of integrity education is university leaders, and the main body of integrity culture construction is limited to teachers, ignoring the integrity culture construction for students, and neglecting the integrity education for students. As a result, some college students lack of integrity knowledge and have a weak sense of integrity.

3.2 The effectiveness of university integrity culture education is not enough

First, the rigid formats of integrity culture education in universities fail to keep pace with the times and do not align with faculty and students' actual needs. The promotional methods remain stuck in outdated routines, failing to leverage new media platforms on campus for multi-dimensional and in-depth dissemination of integrity culture. The one-way "cramming" approach of imparting integrity knowledge persists. Second, the content of university integrity education feels dull and obsolete. Educational materials lack relevance to institutional realities, professional characteristics, or student demographics. There's no targeted education using common corruption cases as cautionary examples. The "Monday morning quarterback" style of education—relying solely on post-facto corruption cases for deterrence—only serves to make people "dare not be corrupt," without analyzing root causes or applying lessons broadly to achieve the goal of "not wanting to be corrupt." Third, the scope of integrity education lacks breadth. The content lacks specificity, failing to comprehensively address the roles

and responsibilities of university leaders, faculty, and students. Without tiered, categorized, and phased educational content tailored to different groups, the effectiveness falls short of expectations, contradicting the original purpose of integrity education.

3.3 The system and mechanism of building a clean government culture in colleges and universities are not perfect

When power is left unchecked, corruption inevitably follows. Absolute authority breeds absolute corruption. Institutional loopholes create opportunities for malpractice, while the lack of integrity culture mechanisms in universities allows corrupt individuals to exploit these vulnerabilities, leading to recurring corruption cases. First, awareness of establishing integrity culture systems has weakened. Some university leaders believe that with limited human and financial resources, integrity culture development doesn't require dedicated planning—simply conveying directives from higher authorities during faculty meetings each semester and promoting integrity values suffices. Consequently, such institutional frameworks rarely appear in university development plans. Second, responsibilities remain unclear in integrity culture construction. Although universities designate the Party Committee Secretary as the primary responsible person for integrity building, with the Discipline Inspection Commission assisting in implementation and departments like the Discipline Inspection Office and Student Affairs handling specific tasks, ambiguous accountability leads to disjointed coordination. This results in the Discipline Inspection Office and Supervision Department acting as "solo performers" while other departments become mere spectators, often dismissing their role as irrelevant. Third, there's a lack of effective supervision mechanisms to ensure the thorough implementation of university integrity culture systems. Due to the small campus communities and strong sense of personal connections, enforcement of institutional regulations faces challenges. Some officials violate party discipline and administrative ethics, while faculty members breach school ethics standards. Supervision and disciplinary departments often adopt a "nice guy mentality," occasionally downplaying major violations or trivializing minor infractions, leading to unresolved issues. This renders the Party conduct and integrity system virtually ineffective. Moreover, the supervision and disciplinary departments themselves are crucial components in advancing institutional integrity within universities.

4. Diversified paths of building a culture of integrity in colleges and universities

"University integrity culture constitutes a vital component of the broader integrity culture framework. It represents the cultural evolution developed through theoretical and practical integrity-building initiatives in higher education institutions, embodying their commitment to establishing a value system that prioritizes integrity over corruption. This includes institutional norms, campus ethos, and spiritual aspirations." [2] To meet the evolving demands of modern higher education, universities must identify strategic focal points and support mechanisms for integrity culture development based on their specific circumstances. By implementing targeted measures and precise efforts, institutions can effectively advance integrity culture construction, thereby contributing to the healthy development of higher education in the new era.

4.1 Establish a strong sense of integrity and build a strong ideological defense line against corruption

President Xi emphasized: "We must educate and guide Party members and officials to strengthen their ideals and convictions, uphold the spiritual homeland of Communists, continuously consolidate the ideological and moral foundation for clean governance among Party cadres, and build a robust ideological defense against corruption." [3] Cultivating integrity awareness among teachers and students is a crucial component of university integrity culture development. First, we should persistently arm faculty and students with socialist core values. By comprehensively advancing anti-corruption education in universities, we can continuously enhance their theoretical understanding of integrity, strengthen their awareness of clean governance, fortify ideological defenses, and improve their immunity against corruption. Second, we must safeguard the main battlefield of ideological and political courses, giving full play to the irreplaceable role of these teachers in integrity education. President Xi stressed: "Ideological and political course teachers should possess strong political commitment, profound dedication, innovative thinking, broad vision, strict self-discipline, and upright character." [4] Ideological and political course teachers must resolutely defend this core domain. By integrating integrity culture education into daily course design, we should explore practical and effective integrity education programs that help students enhance their theoretical understanding of integrity and self-discipline awareness through classroom instruction. Third, we should leverage the unique advantages of "curriculum-based ideological education." Incorporating integrity education into the curriculum plan allows students to receive comprehensive and continuous integrity training throughout their academic journey. Educators should uphold professional ethics in accordance with the "Ten Professional Conduct Standards for College Teachers in the New Era", the Ministry of Education's Guidelines on Handling Moral Misconduct by University Faculty, and institutional regulations.

They must adhere to the principle that "scholarly excellence defines teaching standards, and integrity sets exemplary conduct", strictly observing legal awareness, refraining from crossing legal boundaries, and upholding ethical principles. [5] Furthermore, the culture of integrity must be integrated into all aspects of university management to strengthen faculty and student awareness of ethical conduct. By analyzing corruption cases as cautionary examples, educators can educate peers through relatable scenarios, encouraging staff to enhance integrity education, reinforce teaching discipline, and cultivate self-discipline. This approach helps faculty members consciously pursue practical work ethics and personal integrity as fundamental life values.

4.2 Strengthen the construction of institutions and mechanisms to build a protective net for the construction of integrity in universities

President Xi emphasized: "Institutional issues are fundamentally systemic, overarching, stable, and long-term. The key lies in improving the system of checks and supervision over power operations, enabling people to oversee authority, ensuring transparency in governance, and confining power within institutional constraints"[6]. Institutional development constitutes a crucial step in building integrity culture within universities. Power without oversight breeds corruption, just as integrity culture requires robust institutional safeguards. First, establish comprehensive power operation systems. Implement institutional controls to regulate personnel conduct, thereby minimizing corruption risks. Tailor these systems to institutional realities, focusing on "key figures" while overseeing the "majority," ensuring transparent governance where public authority serves public interests and corrupt practices have no hiding place. Second, refine supervisory mechanisms. Optimize oversight priorities and advance monitoring checkpoints to plug corruption loopholes and nip issues in the bud. Universities must rigorously implement the president's responsibility system under Party committee leadership, strictly enforce decision-making rules for major matters, and standardize deliberations across leadership levels. Third, strengthen accountability mechanisms. Intensify supervision in critical areas and key processes; maintain strict disciplinary enforcement to uphold integrity standards, consolidate reform achievements, and build an enduring mechanism against corruption—creating an unbreakable protective net for integrity culture.

4.3 Take the popular campus cultural activities as a platform to expand the communication channels of the construction of clean government culture

President Xi emphasized, "We must vigorously strengthen anti-corruption education and the development of a culture of integrity, adhering to the principle of combining rule of law with moral governance." [7] University campus culture serves as a tangible manifestation of institutional ethos. The shared essence between university culture and integrity culture forms an inseparable unity. First, integrating integrity culture development with the inheritance of traditional cultural excellence. China's rich traditional culture contains abundant integrity education resources. [8] Universities can showcase the charm of outstanding traditional integrity culture through diverse, engaging campus cultural activities, enhancing student participation and allowing them to be subtly influenced by integrity culture through various artistic forms. This strengthens the influence, appeal, and effectiveness of university integrity culture. For example, campus cultural festivals, integrity knowledge competitions, "Ink and Brush Integrity" art exhibitions, "Red Rhythm Integrity" concerts, integrity-themed short film contests, and plays can enrich the dissemination of integrity culture, create a campus atmosphere of integrity, boost students' enthusiasm for participating in integrity culture construction, and improve their integrity literacy. Second, fully leveraging universities' unique approaches and abundant cultural resources to build clean campuses. By harnessing the cultural advantages of high-quality groups, we can deeply embed the concept of "integrity, incorruptibility, and public service" into people's minds, achieving the goal of fostering integrity culture recognition among faculty and students and enabling them to embrace integrity values and principles. Simultaneously, we should strengthen teachers' sense of responsibility and mission in campus integrity culture development, fostering an environment that integrates teaching, cultural education, and integrity cultivation to establish a new paradigm for campus integrity culture. Thirdly, leveraging new media platforms enhances the effectiveness of integrity promotion. With mobile devices becoming mainstream among college students, their internet-powered information dissemination capabilities make them more inclined to access timely and impactful content through digital channels. Universities should fully utilize these platforms' real-time advantages: official WeChat accounts, Weibo, BBS forums, and Xiaohongshu (a popular social media platform) can effectively communicate updated integrity policies and showcase exemplary cases. Platforms like Kuaishou, TikTok, and Huoshan Video transform abstract policy documents into accessible theoretical explanations and engaging animated stories, significantly improving the effectiveness of integrity culture dissemination on campus.

5. Conclusion

The development of integrity culture in higher education institutions constitutes a vital component of campus cultural development and serves as an effective safeguard for maintaining academic integrity. Universities should strengthen education on ideals and convictions, actively advance the construction of integrity culture, build robust institutional frameworks, and establish sound mechanisms. By fulfilling their educational mission to "rectify the root causes," institutions can promote truth, goodness, and beauty while using critical thinking to address misconduct. This approach purifies the academic environment, leaving no room for corruption to hide, and ensures that faculty and students practice what they preach. Ultimately, this fosters a mindset where individuals are deterred from, unable to, and unwilling to engage in corruption—a powerful defense against unethical conduct.

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