

The Reform of the Course of Social Work Ethics under the Context of the New Setting of Society Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China

Ling Long¹, Shihai Chen²

¹School of Law and Public Administration, Yibin University, Yibin, Sichuan, China

²Publicity Department of the CPC Committee of Yibin University, Yibin, Sichuan, China

Abstract: *The establishment of the Society Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China marks a new historical stage in the development of social work in China, requiring social work professionals to improve the quality of the professional Social Work Ethics that is aligned with the needs of national governance. Based on the core functions of the Society Work Department, this study discusses the new requirements and adaptation issues of the Social Work Ethics course and proposes a curriculum reform from the path of value guidance - content reconstruction - practice enhancement - evaluation optimization to cultivate social workers with both professional ethical awareness and social governance responsibility.*

Keywords: Society work; Social Work Ethics; Curriculum reform.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China decided to establish the Society Work Department, which integrated the responsibilities of social assistance, grassroots governance, and volunteer services. The core mission is to comprehensively promote the deep integration of social work and grassroots governance under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, marking the beginning of Chinese social work transformation toward "Big Social Work". Chinese social work faces a comprehensive transformation in terms of service recipients, service platforms, service effectiveness, professional status, and service providers (Luo & Han, 2025). The social work ethics, as a core course in the social work profession, is a key vehicle for shaping social work students' professional values and regulating their professional behavior, which directly determined the quality of the professional ethics and social work service in future.

Currently, the course of social work ethics rooted in the Western professional ethics theory, focusing on micro-level ethical decision-making in individual cases. The course paid insufficient attention to ethical requirements within the macro-governance context, particularly lacking ethical guidance on topics such as Party-building leadership in social work, government-led service boundaries, and ethical conflicts in grassroots governance in China. In the new context of social work development led by the Society Work Department, the traditional social work ethics course is no longer sufficient to cultivate professionals adaptable to the demands of social governance. Therefore, based on the responsibilities of the Society Work Department, it is a key path to improve the quality of social work professional training through promoting the course reform of the social work ethics.

2. NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE SOCIAL WORK ETHICS FROM THE SOCIETY WORK DEPARTMENT

2.1 Strengthen the Value and Ethical Orientation Led by Party Building

The core responsibility of the Society Work Department is to uphold Party-building leadership in social work development and ensure that Party leadership permeates the entire social work service process, which requires social workers to follow the Party's purpose of "serving the people" in their social services. Building on traditional micro-values such as "client interests first," the social workers must also incorporate macro-values such as "upholding Party leadership," "maintaining overall social stability," and "promoting social harmony". Managing potential tensions between different ethical principles is a primary challenge in the curriculum reform. Therefore,

social work ethics education needs to break through the limitations of traditional technical ethics and organically combine the political ethics and value ethics to enable social work students to clearly understand the political attributes and value goals of social work under the leadership of party building and establish the ethical belief of serving the people.

2.2 Constructing Ethical Knowledge That is Compatible with the Core Functions of the Society Work Department

The Society Work Department coordinated social assistance, grassroots governance, and community services, encompassing multiple stakeholders, including government departments, grassroots Party organizations, community organizations, and service recipients. Beyond the traditional binary ethical conflicts between social workers and clients, social work services also involve multiple stakeholders, including the Party, the state, society, and individuals. There is an urgent need for social work students to learn how to translate the Communist Party's theories, lines, principles, and policies into concrete social work ethics guidelines (Wang & Cao, 2024). However, social work ethics curriculum rarely addressed the Party-community relations and social governance, thus the social work ethics course needs to expand its coverage of ethical issues in complex contexts, such as social governance

2.3 Improve Ethical Decision-making Capabilities at the Practical Level

The Society Work Department emphasizes the practical orientation and problem-solving capabilities of social work, requiring social workers to accurately identify ethical dilemmas in complex grassroots governance scenarios and make ethical decisions that align with the professional standards of social work and the requirements of grassroots governance. This means that social work ethics education must focus on real ethical challenges in social governance, such as ethical deviations in policy implementation, the division of responsibilities in multi-party collaboration, and the conflict between privacy protection and public interest. This aims to cultivate social work students' ethical analysis and decision-making skills within social service settings.

3. THE ADAPTABILITY OF THE SOCIAL WORK ETHICS COURSE

Facing the new requirement of the Society Work Department, the current social work ethics course in colleges and universities had exposed obvious lack of adaptability in teaching practice, which is mainly reflected in the following four aspects.

3.1 Teaching Objectives Deviate from Social Governance Needs

The curriculum objectives of social work ethics course focused on teaching social work professional ethics and training on identifying and resolving ethical dilemmas in micro-level social services. The course rooted in the Western social work ethic standards (such as those in the United States) but neglect to integrate social work into the political nature and social governance context of China. While social work students acquire basic social work ethics knowledge, who lacked an understanding of the broader ethical issues involved in social work services under the guidance of Party building, and could not adapt to the social governance practices led by the Society Work Department.

3.2 Disconnect Between Teaching Content and Governance Practice

The course of social work ethics focuses primarily on Western ethical theories (such as Kantian deontology and utilitarianism) and social work ethics principles such as confidentiality and client self-determination (Zhao, 2025). Content about local social work ethics only touches on scattered references to traditional culture or policy provisions. Furthermore, the core content of social work ethics is disconnected from the complex practical contexts of grassroots governance in China. It covers relatively few topics, such as "Party Building Leadership and Professional Ethics," "Ethical Conflicts in Grassroots Governance," and "Ethical Risks in Government Procurement of Services," which are key areas for the Society Work Department. The social work students are hard to apply their knowledge of social work ethics to practical social governance scenarios.

3.3 The Practical Teaching Link is Weak and the Scene is Single

The practical teaching of the social work ethics course primarily relies on classroom case discussions and

simulations, lacking integration with practical examples and service recipients in grassroots governance. Students' practical activities are primarily focused on community service and social organizations, with limited exposure to core areas coordinated by the Party Committee's Society Work Department, such as community governance, social assistance, new employment groups, and volunteer services. This makes it difficult for them to understand the ethical dilemmas or conflicts in real-world social governance scenarios. Furthermore, the course's practical training focuses on micro-technical methods in social work ethics, with insufficient guidance on identifying ethical dilemmas and making decisions in complex governance situations. The social work students' social work ethics skills are hard to adapt to the complexities of grassroots governance.

3.4 The Evaluation Method Lacks Process and Practicality

The evaluation of social work ethics course still relied primarily on final exams, supplemented by regular performance. The assessment focused on theoretical knowledge and case analysis, neglecting the evaluation of students' ethical behavior, value identification, and decision-making abilities. This single-minded evaluation approach failed to fully reflect social work students' ethical literacy, nor does it guide them to pay attention to ethical issues in social governance practices. It also struggles to achieve the evaluation goal of "value guidance + capacity building."

4. THE REFORM PATH OF THE SOCIAL WORK ETHICS COURSE UNDER THE CONTEXT OF THE SOCIETY WORK DEPARTMENT

In response to the above problems, combined with the core functions of the Society Work Department, this study proposes a "four-in-one" curriculum reform path in order to achieve the adaptation of the social work ethics course to the needs of grassroots governance.

4.1 Anchor the Teaching Objectives of "value-ability-knowledge"

The course of social work ethics should include the ethical content on the integration of Party building and social work, as well as grassroots governance. The teaching objectives should balance value guidance, capacity building, and knowledge transfer. The teaching process should strengthen the value foundation of Party building leadership, empower social work students' people-centered service ethics and awareness of social governance responsibilities, and cultivate social work students' ability to identify, analyze, make decisions, and reflect on social work ethics in complex situations such as grassroots governance (Liu & Liu, 2024).

4.2 Reconstruct the Teaching Content of Social Work Ethics

Based on the core functions of the Society Work Department, the social work ethics course adds the real-world ethical cases from the Society Work Department's coordinated areas (such as conflicts over resident demands in community governance and disputes over eligibility in social assistance). Focusing on core ethical issues in grassroots governance, the course offers special lectures on the ethical logic of Party-building leadership in social work, the value connotations of red social workers, the ethics of fairness and efficiency in social assistance, and the division of responsibilities among multiple stakeholders in community governance. The course integrates the code of professional ethics for social workers with local practice cases, emphasizing the procedures for handling practical issues such as social work ethics complaints and professional disciplinary actions.

4.3 Create Practice-oriented Teaching Models and Scenarios

Based on the case study and situational simulation model, social work students are guided through group discussions and role-playing to simulate the ethical decision-making process of basic governance. Collaborations have been established with Society Work Departments, subdistrict offices, and community service centers to extend practical instruction to the front lines of grassroots governance. Students are assigned to participate in social assistance verification, community deliberation, and coordination, experiencing real-world ethical dilemmas (Zhang, 2025). The program provides real-time guidance on ethical issues encountered in practice, cultivating social work students' ethical practical skills.

4.4 Establish the "process + diversity" Curriculum Evaluation System

Breaking away from the single evaluation model, a multi-faceted evaluation system takes into account both process

performance and practical ability. Using real tasks in social work practice as a vehicle, the system emphasizes process-based evaluation. Students are assessed on their accuracy in identifying ethical dilemmas, the rationality of their decision-making plans, and the ethical compliance of their service processes through case analysis reports, course practice logs and ethical reflection records, and group ethical scenario simulations, thereby comprehensively evaluating their social work ethics competence.

5. CONCLUSION

The Society Work Department has injected new impetus into the development of social work cause, and has also put forward urgent requirements for the reform of the social work ethics course. The reform achieves the adaptation of the social work ethics course to the needs of social work development by anchoring three-dimensional teaching objectives, reconstructing teaching content, creating a practical teaching model, and establishing a diversified evaluation system, which will help cultivate social work talents with value, knowledge and ability. In the future, the social work ethics course reform needs to continue to strengthen cooperation with the Society Work Department, promptly incorporate the governance cases into the teaching content, promote the coordinated linkage of social work ethics education with other professional core courses and social work professional internships, and build a "full-staff, full-process, and all-round" social work ethics training system to contribute to the efficient performance of the Society Work Department and the high-quality development of social work in China.

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