

# Mechanisms and Approaches for Integrating Legal Education with Moral Education within the Framework of “The Five-Pronged Education” Approach

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**Abstract:** Against the background of the educational policy of ‘the five-pronged education’, integrating moral education into legal education holds significant practical relevance and theoretical feasibility. Moral education is not only the logical foundation of legal education—capable of addressing the limitations of purely technical training and providing an ethical safeguard for the legal profession—but is also an intrinsic requirement for mitigating the risk of moral deficiency among legal practitioners. The way that moral education gets integrated into legal studies—well, that mechanism actually comes from the traditional idea of running a country through virtue. There’s this thing called “moral momentum,” which spreads pretty naturally, and then you’ve also got people’s instinct to imitate what they see; put those two together, and teachers’ own moral conduct can rub off on students without any forced effort, so moral values end up getting internalized over time. When it comes to actually doing this in practice, one is that the legal curriculum should be systematically adjusted—meaning we add in specialized courses like “Legal Professional Ethics.” Another is that we can use typical case studies and hands-on teaching methods to help guide students as they internalize those ethical norms. A third point would be that law teachers themselves need to have their professional ethics strengthened, because they have to be seen as having a kind of exemplary moral influence. At the same time, good teacher-student interaction really helps here, since two-way communication can deepen everyone’s grasp of moral concepts. And then there’s one more thing: it’s a good idea to refine how we recruit and train teachers by bringing moral standards right into the process. That way you get what you might call a “unity of virtue and position,” which would go a long way toward making sure the whole integration of moral education into legal education actually works.

**Keywords:** The five-pronged education; Legal education; Moral education; Moral momentum; Virtue of teacher

## 0. Introduce

The primary question in education is what kind of people we should cultivate. On 10 September 2018, Xi Jinping stated at the National Education Conference: “We must strive to build an educational system that fosters the all-round development of students in terms of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labour education, and establish a higher-level talent cultivation system.” “The five-pronged education” is a vital safeguard for cultivating high-calibre talent in the new era and is the top priority in higher education today. Furthermore, on 3 May 2017, during an inspection visit to China University of Political Science and Law, Xi Jinping emphasised: “Legal education must adhere to the principle of fostering virtue and cultivating talent; it must not only enhance students’ legal knowledge but also cultivate their ideological and moral character, thereby inspiring the whole of society through concrete actions to uphold virtue, pursue goodness, respect the law and abide by it.” Legal education in higher education institutions should meet the requirements for the development of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labour education, and moral education not only compensates for the inherent limitations of legal education but is also its minimum requirement. At this point, there’s a need to get clear about how exactly you’d go about integrating moral education into legal education—what the operational mechanisms are and what the implementation pathways look like in practice.

For one thing, when we talk about “the five-pronged education,” it’s not just a simple mix of those five parts; instead, there’s an emphasis on how moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labour education are all internally connected to one another. In legal education, the intellectual side focuses on getting a handle on legal rules and logical reasoning, while physical and labour education can help build up resilience and a practical, down-to-earth spirit; aesthetic education, on the other hand, sharpens a person’s intuitive feel for fairness and justice.

But moral education plays a bit of a special role here—it kind of unifies and guides the whole setup, because it determines which direction legal knowledge gets applied in and where the ethical boundaries are for legal skills. If legal education doesn’t have that guidance from moral education, there’s a real risk of turning law into nothing more than a tool, so that when students go into practice later on, they end up feeling lost in some kind of moral vacuum. That’s why putting moral education at the heart of legal education isn’t just something that follows naturally from “the five-pronged” approach; it’s also a practical response to what a rule-of-law country really needs—namely legal professionals who’ve got both solid morals and real competence.

## 1. What moral education can do in legal education, and why it matters

So what is moral education, anyway? Well, it’s an educational activity aimed at building up students’ moral character and their general humanistic literacy<sup>[1]</sup>. There are a few different ways to explain the theoretical basis of moral education, depending on which angle you take. One is from the standpoint of moral philosophy—there, moral education draws on traditional ethical thinking about values and norms; with practical moral philosophy as its guide, it helps students gradually develop the kind of moral judgment and behavioral standards that today’s society expects. Another angle is from education itself: moral education should be integrated with general educational theory and methods, so that learners can keep developing self-awareness, build up self-discipline, and strengthen their sense of social responsibility as they go through the educational process—and that’s how you move forward toward achieving moral education’s goals.

It’s worth pointing out that moral education carries special weight in legal education; any legal education that ignores the cultivation of moral character can hardly be called a complete education.

### 1.1 Moral education is the logical starting point for legal education

Moral education is the logical starting point for legal If you look at legal thought in both Eastern and Western traditions, virtue is really the foundation that makes law legitimate. Law is basically the normative expression of human nature, and the basis of human nature lies in cultivating virtue. The modern educator Cai Yuanpei believed that a person’s moral nature is what sets humans apart from animals—this lines up pretty well with the Western idea of “moral character”<sup>[2]</sup>. Aristotle, for his part, saw justice as a core virtue related to living together in a community. He thought that justice shows itself when individuals meet their behavioral obligations within the social order, and its legitimacy comes from the value principles that the community recognizes. At the same time, justice also shows up in how society judges whether a person’s actions serve the common good, based on its own moral standards. So here’s the thing: legal knowledge and professional skills are definitely the foundation of legal education, but if you rely only on technical training, that’s not enough to support students’ future practice. Legal education should also help students develop a good moral character and a broad humanistic outlook, so that they can keep the necessary sense of responsibility and ethical awareness when they’re trying to balance the application of the law with value judgments.

### 1.2 Moral education gives legal education an ethical grounding

Virtue isn’t something that’s forced onto legal practitioners from the outside; instead, it’s an inner

force that lets them recognize values like justice, fairness, and integrity. Virtue covers not only the ethical conduct and moral character of legal professionals, but also the ethical order that makes up the legal community as a whole. Introducing moral education has an irreplaceable role to play in fostering a legal community that has a real ethical awareness. Within the legal education system, moral education does two things: one, it lays the groundwork for students to understand the value principles behind the law, and two, it encourages them to develop a firm moral compass and a conscious sense of professional ethics in their future practice. With that kind of guidance, law students can gradually become aware of the professional duties and ethical standards they need to uphold inside the legal community, and they can consciously stick to core professional values like integrity, fairness and responsibility when they go into practice.

### **1.3 The Hidden Risks of the Deterioration of Moral Education in Legal Education**

If the conduct of the legal profession lacks ethical underpinnings, the entire nation may be placed at risk. Indeed, the legal profession occupies a unique position in society and plays a vital role. In legal practice, lawyers are sometimes not respected by prosecutors and judges; indeed, there have even been instances of unethical behaviour, such as lawyers bribing judges, prosecutors and arbitrators. Such phenomena seriously undermine the formation and development of the legal community.

Furthermore, the risks associated with a lack of moral education are also evident in the “hidden curriculum” of legal education. If law schools focus solely on pass rates for the bar exam whilst neglecting professional ethics training, students may unconsciously develop the mistaken belief that ‘law is merely a technical discipline’ and that “winning is justice”. In recent years, some legal practitioners have become embroiled in illegal activities such as “predatory lending” schemes, fraudulent litigation and assisting clients in fabricating evidence; one of the root causes of this is that they failed to establish a solid moral foundation during their legal education. What is even more alarming is that this risk carries intergenerational implications: legal professionals lacking in moral integrity may, upon entering the legal practice, propagate utilitarian thinking to the next generation of legal practitioners through mentoring trainees and supervising junior lawyers. Therefore, addressing the shortcomings in moral education within legal education is a crucial measure to break the chain of ethical decline in the legal profession.

## **2. Exploring Mechanisms for Integrating Moral Education into Legal Education**

Whilst there are both similarities and differences between law and ethics, fundamentally they belong to different spheres and possess distinct characteristics. Consequently, in advocating the integration of moral education into legal education, the question that must inevitably be addressed is: what is the mechanism for combining the two? This is the issue to be discussed in this section.

### **2.1 The Foundations of Moral Education: Governing the Country through Virtue**

The normative aim of law is to foster an orderly social community; the same holds true of morality, and moral education itself serves to prepare the ground for a legal community imbued with moral character. There is actually a pretty clear consistency between the fundamental principles of moral education and the concept of moral governance that you see in traditional Chinese society – because when you look at those traditional governance philosophies that are centred on morality, the maintenance of political order will often rely on a kind of ethical practice that basically extends from self-cultivation all the way out to the family, then the state, and finally the wider world. So the exemplary influence that comes from the moral character of the people who are in governance is really regarded as the core force that drives the sustained operation of this whole mode of governance<sup>[3]</sup>, and moral education itself is aiming to achieve the goal of character development by using a model of exemplary moral behaviour as well.

## 2.2 The Mechanisms of Moral Education and Moral Momentum

So ancient thinkers actually believed that the moral character of those in positions of authority comes with a kind of momentum energy, and that energy would then influence other people from the top down – and what this concept really presupposes is the understanding that the character of people in power exerts an outward influence, and that this influence itself can serve as a vital force that helps underpin how social order functions. Then, from the perspective of moral education, we are able to utilise this unique mechanism of moral transmission to achieve the objectives of moral education more effectively, and we can do that specifically through teachers who occupy a position of authority.

## 2.3 Moral Momentum and the Instinct to Imitate

Apart from the imitation that gets prompted by moral momentum, there is also the fact that humans are social animals, so we actually possess an innate instinct for social imitation – and when you look at the development of human society, the mechanism of imitation has served as a key driving force in fostering shared patterns of behaviour, because it is precisely because individuals continually draw upon the behavioural patterns of others during social interaction that social action gradually acquires a degree of stability and predictability. This kind of unconscious imitation will naturally occur in classroom settings, which are basically like small social groups, so students will unconsciously end up emulating the teacher's moral conduct.

Now, from the perspective of educational psychology, the instinct to imitate aligns really closely with the theory of “observational learning” – so in law classrooms, for example, the way teachers handle moral dilemmas in complex cases, the way they treat vulnerable parties, and the way they assess the grey areas of the legal profession – all of that gets internalised by students through what you call “vicarious reinforcement”. Because of that, moral education isn't just something that gets conveyed through preaching; more importantly, it gets built through the teacher's daily words and deeds, and those words and deeds serve as moral examples that students can then emulate. So if you put this together with the idea of moral momentum, teachers need to be consciously aware of their “role model status” within the classroom setting, which means transforming every legal analysis and every instance of practical guidance into an opportunity for moral education – and at the same time, institutions can also invite distinguished judges, prosecutors, and solicitors into the classroom to share cases that involve professional ethics, because that will provide students with a more diverse range of positive role models and help expand the reach of moral momentum.

## 3. Practical Approaches to Integrating Legal Education with Moral Education

### 3.1 The Curriculum for Law Studies and Moral Education

One thing is, integrating moral education into the curriculum of law programmes and offering specialized courses (such as Legal Professional Ethics) can gradually cultivate students' ethical awareness and professional integrity through multi-level teaching activities in the practical delivery of legal education – so in classroom teaching, lecturers may use typical case studies to guide students in identifying and analyzing potential ethical conflicts that arise during the application of the law, and that will stimulate their capacity for reflection on professional ethical issues. Another thing is, by offering various practical legal courses, students get enabled to directly experience the fundamental ethical norms and codes of conduct required of the legal profession within real or simulated practice scenarios, and that helps them internalize the relevant values at a practical level. More specifically, we should make efforts to promote the deep integration of what is called “ideological and political education within the curriculum” with specialist law courses – for example, when teaching General Principles of Criminal Law, you can focus on legal institutions like “self-defense” and “emergency avoidance” to get students discussing the boundaries between human nature, legal principles, and morality; in Civil Law teaching, you can analyze moral constraints in civil activities by drawing on the principles of good faith and public order and good

morals; and in Criminal Procedure Law teaching, you can emphasize the ethical implications of procedural justice and the protection of human rights. A third point is, it is actually recommended that interdisciplinary general education modules on moral education be established, such as “Law and Ethics”, “The Virtue Tradition in Chinese and Foreign Legal Thought”, and “An Introduction to the Legal Professional Ethos” – because that would enable students to construct a multi-dimensional moral cognitive framework through comparison and reflection. At the same time, we have to adjust the assessment methods accordingly, which means incorporating case studies on professional ethics and debates on moral dilemmas into both continuous assessment and final examinations, because doing that will prevent moral education from just becoming a mere formality.

### 3.2 Professional Ethics Development for Law Lecturers

According to the concept of moral momentum, even though you wouldn't really say teachers occupy a position of authority relative to their students in a strict sense, they still play a leading role in maintaining classroom order – the whole teaching process remains teacher-led, so teachers really ought to possess a certain moral authority, and their conduct will unconsciously influence all of their students. That's why the cultivation of teachers' professional ethics has to be a primary concern. As for law teachers, they should have a fundamental understanding of the ethical standards that apply to legal practitioners, and then whether they are teaching or practicing, they need to be able to embody these principles in their conduct to a reasonable extent.

Strengthening the development of professional ethics among teaching staff requires a two-pronged approach combining institutional safeguards with cultural cultivation. On the one hand, law schools should make professional conduct a core criterion for staff promotion and awards, establish a “one-strike-and-you're-out” mechanism for breaches of professional ethics, and regularly organise training sessions on legal professional ethics and specialised seminars on professional conduct for teaching staff. On the other hand, staff should actually be encouraged to get involved in social service activities – things like legal aid and public interest litigation – because doing that will help set an example when it comes to fulfilling the social responsibilities of legal professionals. So when faculty members show fairness, integrity, and empathy in their professional practice, those qualities will end up serving as some of the most vivid educational materials there are for moral education. Then on top of that, there is also the idea of introducing a “moral education feedback” dimension into student evaluations – basically, allowing students to anonymously assess faculty members' ethical conduct – because that will not only encourage self-reflection among the faculty themselves but can also provide a useful basis for selecting role models within the academic community.

### 3.3 Effective teacher-student interaction in law courses

Morality is actually not just some one-way, top-down process that gets driven entirely by external forces – because within a certain scope, moral concepts are ultimately formed through interaction, and that interaction is two-way or even multi-directional, meaning that others shape us and we shape them, a minority can influence the majority, and the majority can also influence the minority. So when we are talking about law courses, fostering effective teacher-student interaction is really an essential measure for implementing moral education – it's not merely the teacher who plays a guiding role, because students can also influence the teacher through this process of interaction. As for specific methods, there are a few: one is using the Socratic method to get students to question and defend the moral foundations of legal norms; another is organising group debates to explore ethical dilemmas, like the question of “whether a lawyer should defend a client they know to be guilty”; and a third is running case study workshops where students take turns playing the roles of judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and clients, so that they can understand moral responsibilities from different perspectives through that kind of role-play. Through frequent and fairly in-depth interaction, moral concepts stop being abstract dogmas – instead, they get

repeatedly tested, refined, and affirmed through dialogue between teachers and students and among students themselves, and that process ultimately helps crystallise them into the students' moral intuition.

#### 4. Conclusion

So to sum it all up, integrating moral education into legal education is both necessary and feasible, and with the state's strong advocacy for "the five-pronged education" and the "integration of moral and legal governance", promoting the combination of legal education and moral education is currently a key focus of legal education reform. Of course, because teachers play a guiding and leading role in this process, there are clearly some requirements regarding their own professional standards – so this paper argues that the teacher recruitment and training mechanisms should be adjusted a bit to incorporate moral standards, because that would help achieve what you might call a "unity of virtue and position". In other words, it calls for establishing a system and mechanism for "selecting and appointing personnel" that is based on moral criteria, making sure that people with sound moral character are actually selected for teaching posts. Looking ahead, the integration of legal education and moral education should also explore some new avenues by using digital technology – for example, setting up an online repository of moral education case studies and a virtual simulation system for ethical decision-making would allow students to experience the consequences of moral choices in immersive scenarios, and using big data to analyse how students' professional ethical values evolve over time would provide a basis for more personalised moral education interventions. At the same time, higher education institutions should establish a "joint moral education mechanism" together with practical sectors like judicial bodies and bar associations – meaning that ethical conduct during internships gets incorporated into graduation assessments, and that way you form a closed-loop moral education system that spans the entire journey from the classroom all the way to the workplace. Only by integrating moral education throughout the whole process of legal education – from admissions and training all the way to employment – can we truly cultivate high-calibre legal professionals who are "well-versed in both ethics and law", and that will provide a solid talent base for the construction of a China governed by the rule of law.

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