



WHEN EMOTIONS SPIRAL: POLARIZATION AND RATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION IN ONLINE TEACHER DISCUSSIONS

Fahui Feiⁱ

Ningxia Shizuishan No.1 Middle School,
China

Abstract:

The teaching profession in China is culturally paradoxical: revered as spiritual patriarchs yet burdened by unlimited responsibility and public outrage. This study investigates how online discussions of teacher misconduct can escalate into emotional outbursts. Using grounded theory, we analyzed 4,000 user comments from eight incidents on Chinese social media between 2023 and 2025. The proposed Emotional Polarization Spiral model comprises six self-reinforcing stages: fragmented triggering, emotional arousal, algorithmic amplification, echo chamber reinforcement, group polarization, and labeling simplification. The spiral revolves around cumulative erosion of public trust in teachers; each incident depletes trust capital and intensifies the next cycle. The model extends affective polarization research to a non-Western, morally freighted occupation, specifies recursive emotion-algorithm-identity mechanisms, and adapts Habermas's refeudalization thesis to China's administered publicness. Practical implications for platform governance, cultural cultivation, professional empowerment, and shielded mini-publics are discussed.

Keywords: emotional polarization; teacher image; online public discussion; habermas public sphere; grounded theory

1. Introduction

The teaching profession in China is culturally paradoxical. Confucian tradition elevates teachers to spiritual patriarchs through the saying “*yi ri wei shi, zhong shen wei fu*” (a teacher for a day is a father for a lifetime), and modern discourse adds metaphors like “*the engineer of the human soul*” (Yang, 2010). Yet this moral pedestal imposes an implicit contract of unlimited responsibility. Philosophers describe this ideal as the “moral saint,” requiring extraordinary patience, kindness, and moral judgment, an ideal that maps directly onto teaching, where society demands flawless moral exemplars. Teachers are expected to exercise infinite patience, unconditional care, and irreproachable judgment, but these affective demands constitute “emotional labor,” compelling teachers to manage

ⁱ Correspondence: email 1576522794@qq.com

feelings according to rigid rules rather than expressing genuine emotion (Wolf, 1982; Osguthorpe, 2008; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011, 2013; Hochschild, 2012; Fenstermacher et al., 2009). The gap between idealized expectations and daily classroom realities, administrative overload, and parental pressure creates a structural vulnerability, a latent crisis of professional credibility.

This vulnerability is not merely symbolic. It is embedded in a population under extraordinary psychological strain. Jin and Yu (2024) found that the overall detection rate of mental health problems among Chinese teachers is significantly elevated, especially obsessive-compulsive tendencies, depression, and anxiety, exceeding rates among doctors, civil servants, and corporate employees. When preschool teachers are excluded, the rate is even higher. Yu (2025) reported that among primary and secondary school teachers, detection rates for depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive tendencies are substantially higher than national adult averages (Huang et al., 2019). These figures point to an emotionally depleted teacher population, vulnerable to public scrutiny and moral condemnation.

The institutional response has intensified. The Ministry of Education launched a “Standardized Management Year” initiative in 2024, issuing a 12-item negative conduct list for basic education, expanded to 16 items in 2025 and 20 in 2026, targeting paid tutoring, unfair enrollment, and student abuse (Ministry of Education, 2024/2025/2026). While these measures acknowledge a crisis, they remain reactive, punitive, and symptom-focused, addressing individual transgressions rather than the communicative mechanisms that transform incidents into waves of public distrust.

Public discourse on teacher-related incidents has become a primary arena where professional trust is contested. This study investigates how and why online discussions of teacher misconduct in China degenerate into cycles of emotional escalation and a deficit of rational deliberation. Using grounded theory, we analyzed 4,000 user comments from eight incidents on Chinese social media (2023 to 2025) and constructed an Emotional Polarization Spiral model with six self-reinforcing stages: fragmented triggering, emotional arousal, algorithmic amplification, echo chamber reinforcement, group polarization, and labeling simplification. Each incident accelerates the depletion of institutional trust in teachers.

This research makes three contributions. First, it provides an empirically grounded model of emotion-driven polarization in teacher-related public discourse. Second, it critically engages Habermas’s refeudalization thesis (Habermas, 1991) and its digital age extension (Habermas, 2023), incorporating insights from the affective turn (Yuan, 2016) and adapting these frameworks to China’s “*administered publicness*” (Shao & Zhan, 2013). Third, the model offers actionable insights for policymakers, platform operators, and educational administrators to temper polarization and restore rational deliberation. The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews theoretical foundations; Section 3 details methodology; Section 4 presents the model; Section 5 discusses theoretical implications; Section 6 concludes with recommendations and limitations.

2. Literature Review

This study draws on two complementary theoretical traditions to investigate emotion-driven polarization in teacher-related online discussions: Habermas's public sphere theory and affective polarization. Habermas provides a normative framework for diagnosing the erosion of rational critical deliberation in digital spaces, while affective polarization offers tools for understanding emotional dynamics that drive group antagonism. Their integration, critically adapted to the Chinese context, generates a more complete explanatory framework for the "*emotional polarization spiral*" in teacher image discourse.

Habermas's concept of the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) defines it as a domain between the private realm and public authority where private persons engage in free discussion and exercise public oversight (Habermas, 1991). Its core mechanism requires participants to suspend private interests and use reason (Song, 2015). Habermas introduced "*refeudalization*" to describe the crisis of the mass media public sphere: pre bourgeois forms of power re-penetrate, state and society blur, media is absorbed by commercial conglomerates, critical function atrophies, and publicity becomes ornamental display (Wang, 2011). The rational, critical public gives way to consumerism and emotion. In the internet age, digital media lower participation thresholds but also generate fragmented communication, algorithmic echo chambers, and filter bubbles, making rational consensus harder to achieve. Habermas acknowledges that digital platforms may undermine convergent judgments (Du, 2023).

Direct transplantation of Habermas's framework to China requires circumspection. We selectively appropriate his analytical tools while suspending idealist presuppositions. First, China's online space is characterized by "administered publicness." Platforms are constrained by commercial logic and state regulation; the boundaries of rational critique are defined by laws and platform rules, not an autonomous civil society (Shao & Zhan, 2013). The Chinese online public sphere is a quasi-public sphere or regulated discursive space, requiring attention to the triadic game of state, capital, and users. Second, Habermas's rationalist paradigm has been critiqued by the affective turn. Emotion is not the antithesis of reason but a constitutive element of public judgment. In China, emotional mobilization can be a means for disadvantaged groups to articulate grievances (Yuan, 2016). Papacharissi (2015) theorizes "affective publics" as networked formations mobilized through sentiment, demonstrating public sympathy as a distinct mode of political participation. Thus, this study does not advocate wholesale de-emotionalization. It criticizes emotions that are algorithmically manipulated, distorted by fragmented contexts, and intensified by group polarization, while acknowledging legitimate roles for moral outrage and empathy.

The concept of affective polarization provides the second pillar. Unlike ideological polarization over policy, affective polarization is the tendency to dislike and distrust opposing groups even in the absence of issue disagreement (Iyengar et al., 2019; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979),

individuals derive self-concept from group memberships and show ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation. In teacher discourse, participants identify as parents, defenders of teachers, or system critics, and their behavior is shaped by identity defense rather than by factual incidents. Recent research distinguishes valence and arousal as two dimensions of affective polarization, showing emotional intensity is as important as valence (Kasper et al., 2025). Based on Russell's (1980) circumplex model, feeling thermometers capture valence, while arousal measures partisan intensity; mean arousal is often more strongly associated with ideological extremity. In China, a "*trench warfare effect*" exists: exposure to opposing views in emotionally charged environments may intensify polarization (Zhang & Liu, 2025). Social media discourse is dominated by anger, resentment, and anxiety; negative content tends to generate higher engagement (Liu & Zhang, 2024). Emotional polarization manifests as binary debates, heated disputes, viral inflammatory speech, and disinformation, deepening rejection of neutral information and escalating into cyber violence (Xuan & Wang, 2025). Emotion operates as a cross-layer mechanism in filter bubbles and echo chambers: anger guides information seeking, reinforces group affiliation, and shapes algorithmic recommendations, intensifying filtering dynamics and attitude extremization (He & Fan, 2025).

Three significant gaps remain.

First, affective polarization research has focused on Western partisan politics, not semi-professional, morally freighted groups like teachers in China.

Second, the literature on teacher image treats incidents discretely, without theorizing how an ordinary incident can escalate into a polarized crisis.

Third, no study has integrated Habermas's refeudalization thesis and the affective turn to specify recursive mechanisms, including fragmentation, emotional arousal, algorithmic amplification, echo chamber reinforcement, group polarization, and labeling simplification.

The present study fills these gaps by constructing an Emotional Polarization Spiral model based on eight teacher-related incidents, explaining how teacher discourse degenerates into emotional escalation and identifying pathways to restore rational deliberation.

3. Material and Methods

This study aims to investigate emotional polarization in online public discussions of teacher image in China, examining how and why teacher-related public opinion incidents systematically escalate into emotional polarization and a deficit of rational deliberation. Given the processual, context-dependent, and theory-exploratory nature of this question, this study adopts an exploratory multiple-case study design and employs grounded theory as its analytical strategy.

Existing theories, including Habermas's public sphere and affective polarization, have yet to provide a systematic mechanism-based explanation. Therefore, this study constructs a middle-range theory from empirical data. Grounded theory is suited for

emerging phenomena with limited prior theory; it enables systematic coding and inductive extraction of concepts, categories, and models (Strauss & Corbin, 1990/1998). The multiple case design with eight incidents enhances replicability and external validity, enabling cross-case comparison.

A combined purposive and maximum variation sampling strategy was adopted. We selected teacher-related incidents that trended on Weibo and Douyin between 2023 and 2025. To ensure diversity, seven incident types were deliberately chosen (see Table 1). This tests whether the Emotional Polarization Spiral replicates across incident types, enhancing theoretical robustness.

Table 1: Details of Teacher-Related Public Opinion Incidents

Case No.	Incident Name	Incident Type	Time
Case 1	“Orphan” commentary incident in Xiangyang, Hubei ^[ii]	Improper speech	2023.1
Case 2	Class group venting incident: “If you don’t like it, don’t bother me” ^[iii]	Emotional outburst	2024.1
Case 3	Teacher beat and verbally abused students in Xiangtan, Hunan ^[iv]	Frequent physical violence	2024.02
Case 4	Teacher Tang in Baise, Guangxi sexually assaulted a student, leading to suicide ^[v]	Severe sexual assault	2025.02
Case 5	Parents’ “expanded reporting” of teacher misconduct ^[vi]	Imbalanced home-school relations	2023.1
Case 6	Female teacher in Qinyuan, Shanxi had an inappropriate relationship with a middle school student ^[vii]	Improper teacher-student relationship	2024.11
Case 7	Teacher at Southern Medical University punished for arriving late after saving a patient ^[viii]	Teacher rights infringement	2024.05

[ii] The “Orphan” commentary incident in Xiangyang, Hubei. Sources include Jimu News, “*The worst in the class, are you an orphan? Teacher’s comment sparks controversy*,” October 25, 2023; Xiangyang Municipal Education Bureau, “*Notice on the handling of a teacher’s inappropriate commentary*,” Xiangjiao Han No. 89, October 27, 2023.

[iii] The class group venting incident. Sources include The Paper, “*Middle school teacher loses control in class group chat and makes extreme remarks; education bureau intervenes*,” October 16, 2024; Local Education Bureau, “*Statement of facts*,” October 17, 2024.

[iv] The corporal punishment incident in Xiangtan, Hunan. Sources include CCTV, “*Surveillance footage exposes teacher beating student in a Xiangtan elementary school*,” February 28, 2024; Xiangxiang Municipal Education Bureau, “*Notice on the corporal punishment incident at Jinquan School*,” February 28, 2024.

[v] The sexual assault case in Baise, Guangxi. Sources include South Wind Window, “*Investigation into Teacher Tang’s sexual assault of a student at Baise Qifu High School*,” February 11, 2025; Baise Joint Working Group, “*Notice on Teacher Tang’s serious violation of teacher professional ethics*,” Bailian Tongbao No. 3, February 11, 2025.

[vi] The phenomenon of parents’ expanded reporting. Source includes The Beijing News, “*Behind ‘a female teacher reported more than ten times a semester’: expanded reporting plagues grassroots teachers*,” October 30, 2023.

[vii] The improper teacher-student relationship in Qinyuan, Shanxi. Sources include CCTV News Client, “*Female vocational school teacher in Qinyuan, Shanxi, involved in improper relationship with student, removed from teaching post*,” November 22, 2024; Qinyuan County Vocational High School, “*Statement of facts*,” November 21, 2024.

[viii] The late arrival incident at Southern Medical University. Sources include China National Radio, “*Teacher at Southern Medical University disciplined for arriving late after saving a patient; university responds*,” May 15, 2024; Southern Medical University, “*Explanation of the teaching error of Teacher Yu Li*,” May 17, 2024.

Case 8	Teacher in Tongchuan, Shaanxi cursed “may the whole class get H1N1” ^[ix]	Emotional outburst	2024.12
--------	---	--------------------	---------

Data were sourced from Sina Weibo and Douyin, primary arenas for teacher-related opinion incidents and trending topics. For each incident, the peak opinion moment (T0) was defined as the time when the topic entered the trending list and the hourly new comment volume peaked. Using systematic sampling, 500 user comments were extracted from T0 minus 24 hours to T0 for each incident. Comments were sorted chronologically and selected at a fixed interval (total comment count divided by 500). A total of 4,000 comments were extracted across eight incidents. Official notices and media reports were also collected for triangulation.

Following Charmaz (2014), we used NVivo 14.0 to perform three-level coding (open, axial, selective) analogous to Strauss and Corbin (1990/1998). Emotion word recognition used the Chinese Emotion Vocabulary Ontology Library (DUTIR, 2022; Xu et al., 2008). The coding process followed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) model: open, axial, and selective coding. These steps are iteratively interwoven (Flick, 2022). The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2017) was applied: data were compared with data, and concepts and categories were developed until saturation.

Open coding began with line-by-line coding of raw materials (comments, reports, notices). We assigned initial codes capturing core meanings, remaining open to emergent concepts (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990/1998). Codes were simple and direct. Similar codes were grouped into categories; constant comparison detected overlaps. Memos recorded inferences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2017). Emotion words were identified using DUTIR, which annotates polarity and intensity (levels 1, 3, 5, 7, 9) and seven emotion categories (Xu et al., 2008). For each comment, we identified dominant emotion and intensity.

We coded eight cases sentence by sentence, distilling 48 initial concepts using action-oriented phrases (e.g., “verbally insulting students”). These were clustered into 23 categories. For example, “verbally insulting students,” “physical violence,” and “malicious curse plus sense of entitlement” became “teacher speech misconduct,” “severe corporal punishment,” and “extreme professional indifference.” DUTIR showed that anger-related words were most frequent in Cases 2 and 8, with intensities between 7 and 9, indicating the strongest emotional arousal (Table 2).

Axial coding deepens open coding using a paradigm model to relate categories to subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The paradigm model includes causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action strategies, and consequences. Following constant comparison, we examined the 23 categories within this framework.

[ix] The student cursing incident in Tongchuan, Shaanxi. Sources include Guangming Net, “Tongchuan teacher’s remark ‘may the whole class get H1N1’ sparks public outrage, teacher suspended,” December 11, 2024; Tongchuan Municipal Education Bureau, “Notice on the handling of improper remarks by a teacher at Gao Xin Experimental School,” Tongjiao Fa No. 42, December 2024.

Categories sharing attributes or the same model position were integrated into higher-order principal categories and verified against raw data.

We mapped 23 categories onto six paradigm elements. Causal conditions: teacher speech misconduct, severe corporal punishment, serious legal violations, and abuse of the reporting system. Phenomenon: public demands (severe punishment, institutional accountability, student protection, teacher rights). Context: waves of doubt about teacher ethics, opinion polarization, and risk of context stripping. Intervening conditions: delayed information release, blurred reporting boundaries, incomplete laws, improper school handling. Action strategies: absence of structural discussion, institutional accountability, opinion polarization, and labeling. Consequences: chilling effect on the teaching profession, home-school trust crisis, and deep reflection on education management. We extracted 10 principal categories: opinion triggers, characteristics, public demands, emotional behaviors, teacher misconduct, improper school handling, social education, social psychology, and legal issues. Table 3 presents axial coding; Table 4 displays the paradigm model.

Table 2: Example of Open Coding

Phenomenon Defined (Excerpts from Raw Materials)	Conceptualization (a)	Categorization (b)
The worst in the class, are you an orphan? — homework comment hurting student	a1 Verbal insult of student	b1 Teacher's improper speech
Netizens overwhelmingly condemn teacher's morality, demand severe punishment	a2 Public moral condemnation	b2 Wave of doubt about teacher ethics
Teacher loses control after repeated communication about meal card issue, makes extreme remarks	a3 Teacher emotional outburst	b3 Spillover of professional burnout
Some netizens call for attention to teacher mental health	a4 Call for attention to teacher mental health	b4 Appeal for reducing teacher group pressure
Surveillance video: multiple slaps, hair pulling, verbal abuse	a5 Physical punishment behavior	b5 Severe corporal punishment
Public opinion skips discussion of institutional improvement, directly takes extreme sides	a6 Bypassing institutional construction	b6 Absence of structural discussion
Tang Moumou sexually assaulted student for years, leading to student's suicide	a7 Sexual assault of minor	b7 Severe legal violation
Public opinion directly accuses school and education bureau of "passive handling"	a8 Questioning administrative negligence	b8 Institutional accountability
Parents report teacher for absurd reasons such as "wearing a skirt" or "slow response to messages"	a9 False and expanded reporting	b9 Abuse of reporting system
Teachers are forced to "lie flat" and adopt a Buddhist attitude to avoid risks	a10 Teacher self-protective behavior	b10 Chilling effect on the profession

Fahui Fei
WHEN EMOTIONS SPIRAL: POLARIZATION AND RATIONAL
RECONSTRUCTION IN ONLINE TEACHER DISCUSSIONS

Female teacher's inappropriate relationship with middle school student; chat records spread	a11 Improper teacher-student relationship	b11 Ethical transgression
Netizens show highly fractured alignment	a12 Polarization of public opinion	b12 Identity-claiming antagonism
Teacher disciplined (bonus deduction, public notice) for arriving late after saving a patient	a13 Prosocial behavior punished	b13 Institutional coldness
Public discussion calls for "rules should have ethical temperature"	a14 Rational institutional discussion	b14 Value-rational dialogue
Teacher curses students, "may the whole class get H1N1" and boasts "I have a permanent position"	a15 Malicious curse + sense of entitlement	b15 Extreme professional indifference / b16 Sense of institutional privilege
Screenshot spread strips context; emotions quickly aroused	a16 Fragmented communication	b17 Risk of context stripping
School fails to respond promptly; issues simple statement only after opinion escalates	a17 Delayed information release	b18 Lag in information disclosure
School disciplines teacher directly without investigation to quell public opinion	a18 Hasty disciplinary action	b19 Placating-style punishment
Parents lack basic educational knowledge, tend to complain readily	a19 Parents' lack of proper educational methods	b20 Deficit in family education
Teachers bear enormous psychological pressure with no support	a20 Absence of psychological support	b21 Lack of mental health guidance
Reporting system lacks detailed rules; teachers often troubled by malicious reports	a21 Institutional ambiguity	b22 Blurry boundaries of reporting system
No clear regulations against online defamation of teachers	a22 Legal vacuum	b23 Incomplete laws and regulations

Table 3: Axial Coding (Main Categories and Sub-Categories)

Dimension	Principal Category (c)	Subcategory (b)	Corresponding Concept (a)
Public Opinion	c1 Opinion Trigger	b1 Teacher's improper speech; b2 Wave of doubt about teacher ethics	a1, a2, a3, a15
Public Opinion	c2 Opinion Characteristics	b5 Severe corporal punishment; b7 Serious legal violation; b11 Ethical transgression; b17 Risk of context stripping	a5, a7, a11, a16
Netizen	c3 Public Demands	b4 Appeal for reducing teacher group pressure; b8 Institutional accountability; b14 Value-rational dialogue	a4, a8, a14
Netizen	c4 Emotional Behaviors	b6 Absence of structural discussion; b12 Identity-claiming antagonism	a6, a12
Teacher	c5 Teacher Misconduct	b3 Spillover of professional burnout; b11 Ethical transgression;	a3, a11, a15

Fahui Fei
WHEN EMOTIONS SPIRAL: POLARIZATION AND RATIONAL
RECONSTRUCTION IN ONLINE TEACHER DISCUSSIONS

		b15 Extreme professional indifference; b16 Sense of institutional privilege	
School	c6 Improper School Handling	b18 Lag in information disclosure; b19 Placating-style punishment	a17, a18
Society	c7 Social Education	b9 Abuse of reporting system; b20 Deficit in family education	a9, a19
Social Psychology	c8 Social Psychology	b10 Chilling effect on the profession; b21 Lack of mental health guidance	a10, a20
Legal	c9 Legal Issues	b22 Blurry boundaries of reporting system; b23 Incomplete laws and regulations	a21, a22

Table 4: Model of Public Opinion Demands

Element	Content
Causal Conditions	b5 Severe corporal punishment; b7 Serious legal violation; b1 Improper speech; b9 Abuse of reporting system
Phenomenon	Emergence of public demands (severe punishment of teachers, institutional accountability, student protection, safeguarding teacher rights)
Context	b2 Wave of doubt about teacher ethics; b12 Polarization of public opinion; b17 Risk of context stripping
Intervening Conditions	Delayed information release; Blurry boundaries of reporting system; Incomplete laws and regulations; Improper school handling
Action/Interaction Strategies	b6 Absence of structural discussion; b8 Institutional accountability; Opinion polarization and labeling
Consequences	Chilling effect on the teaching profession; Crisis of home-school trust; Deep reflection on education management

Selective coding establishes a core category integrating all others (Strauss & Corbin, 1990/1998). A core category must appear frequently, relate to most categories, account for variation, be abstract, and gain explanatory power. Applying these criteria, we identified the Emotional Polarization Spiral as the core category.

The core category selection was accompanied by a storyline (Strauss & Corbin, 1990/1998). An incident of teacher misconduct triggers public opinion and is stripped of context through fragmented communication. Decontextualized fragments activate symbolic expectations; emotional contagion suppresses rational analysis, shifting the discussion from fact-seeking to moral condemnation. Algorithms amplify high-emotion content, marginalizing rational analysis. Echo chambers and confirmation bias filter dissent, driving positions from suspicion to extreme aversion. Group polarization splits participants into antagonistic camps, turning polarization into identity declaration. Finally, the event is compressed into binary moral labels, discourse ethics erodes, and instrumental dispute replaces rational dialogue.

Using the core category and storyline, we integrated all 23 open coding categories and 10 principal categories into the Emotional Polarization Spiral framework, forming a six-stage chain: fragmented triggering, emotional arousal, algorithmic amplification,

echo chamber reinforcement, group polarization, and labeling simplification. This chain reflects temporal evolution and reveals self-reinforcing, accelerating spiral dynamics. A full exposition is in Section 4, Findings.

A second coder (Master of Education) independently coded a random 20% sample (about 160 records) from the main cases. Both coders received prior training on unified coding rules (DUTIR emotion annotation, category merging). Kappa coefficient was 0.85 (95% CI: 0.81-0.89), indicating high agreement. Disagreements (9.8% of total codes) were resolved through discussion. For unresolved items (<2%), a third coder (education professor at a top Chinese university) adjudicated. Final coding agreement rate reached 98.5%.

To test theoretical saturation, we coded five additional teacher or education-related incidents. Four were similar to the main cases: a teacher suspended after reporting an unfair promotion (discourse controversy); a teacher resigning after being complained about for criticizing a student (home-school conflict); a teacher injuring a student through corporal punishment; a teacher verbally abusing a student (improper speech). One heterogeneous case was added: parents' protest against a teacher rotation policy in Shenzhen (an education policy controversy, not individual teacher behavior). Independent coding showed all concepts subsumed under the existing 23 categories (b1-b23); no new categories emerged. Moreover, the six stages of the Emotional Polarization Spiral were fully reproduced in each incident, including the heterogeneous case, without the emergence of new evolutionary branches. Theoretical saturation was therefore achieved.

4. Results

The grounded analysis reveals three intertwined pathologies in teacher-related discussions: emotionalization, extremism, and fragmentation. Selective coding yields a six-stage chain: fragmented triggering, emotional arousal, algorithmic amplification, echo chamber reinforcement, group polarization, and labeling simplification. However, this chain does not explain why these stages accelerate or what drives them. To address this, we construct an Emotional Polarization Spiral model (Fig 1) that analyzes deep driving mechanisms across technological, psychological, discursive, and power dimensions. The spiral begins with context stripping, then rapid emotional arousal, algorithmic traffic favoring extreme content, self-intensification within homophilous circles, and finally binary camp alignment with suspension of institutional reflection. The spiral revolves around the vulnerability of public trust in teachers; each incident depletes trust capital, setting the stage for even more intense polarization.

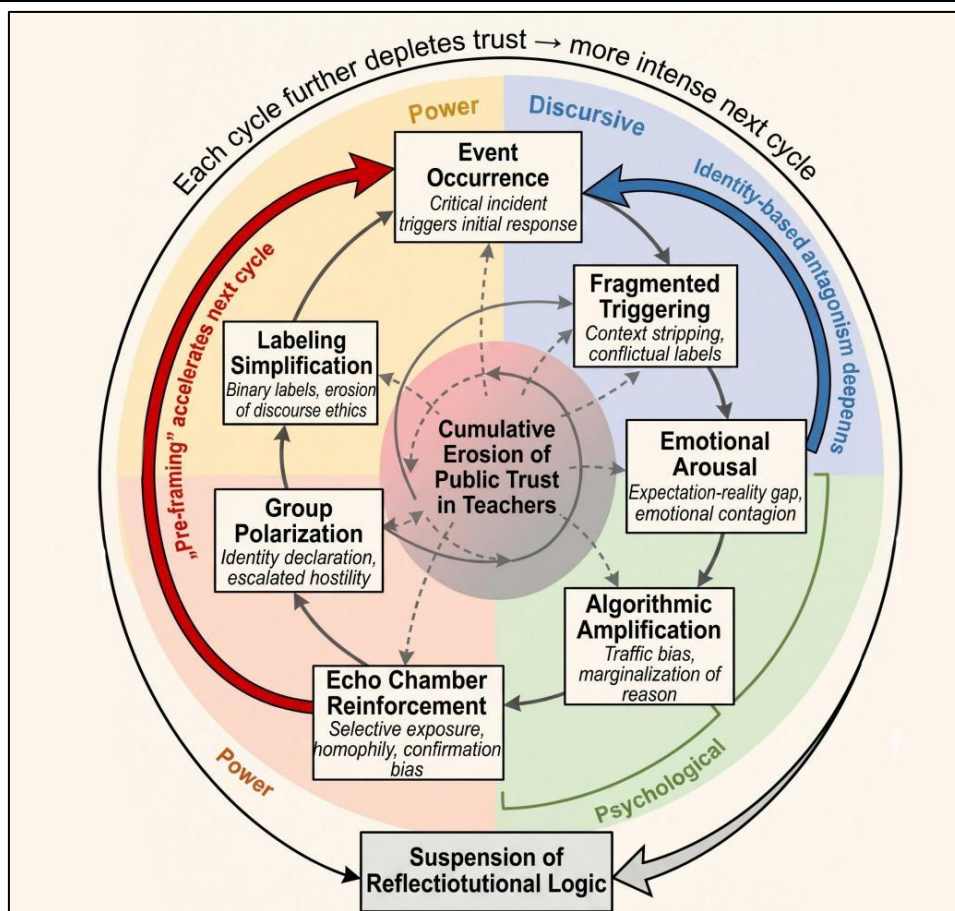


Figure 1: The Emotional Polarization Spiral Model

4.1 Fragmented Triggering: The Starting Point of Context Stripping and Emotional Mobilization

Platform format constraints, such as the 15-second limit of short videos, and the commercial logic of the attention economy, compress events into decontextualized highlight clips. In Case 1, the teacher’s isolated comment, “*The worst in the class, are you an orphan?*” circulated without the full dialogue of prior patient guidance. In Case 3, the corporal punishment video lacked background on the teacher’s long-term work stress or the student’s daily behavior. In Case 5, the complaint materials disclosed the teacher’s name, photo, and personal details such as “wearing a skirt” without any investigation. Such fragmentation strips away causal complexity, exposing the public only to simplified conflictual labels (Lang & Xie, 2020). The deep driver of fragmentation lies in the commercial nature of platforms. Fragmented content enables rapid consumption, whereas complete narratives require cognitive investment. As a result, information fragmentation prevents any discussion from crystallizing into consensus; each cycle starts from scratch with emotional repetition (Zhou & Wang, 2018). In teacher-related issues, contextual factors such as fatigue, pressure, and institutional constraints are filtered out, erasing the complexity of teachers as human beings. This fragmentation-induced context stripping is a manifestation of refeudalization at the information level: rational debate that should occur within complete narratives is replaced by fragmentary

emotional stimuli, and public discussion loses its factual basis for judging the case on its merits, degenerating into conditioned responses to fragmented symbols.

4.2 Emotional Arousal: The Conjunction of Symbolic Expectations and Emotional Contagion

Fragmented information stripped of context quickly triggers emotional arousal. Cultural metaphors such as “candle” and “gardener” construct public expectations of teachers’ unlimited responsibility. Teachers should be eternally tolerant and selfless (Yang, 2010). When a teacher displays ordinary fatigue or impatience, the gap between expectation and reality is magnified into a moral flaw. Emotional contagion suppresses rational analysis and increases forwarding (Lai & Tang, 2016). In Case 2, the teacher’s remark “*I have a permanent position; if you don’t like it, don’t bother me*” triggered outrage over institutional privilege. Case 4’s student suicide pushed emotions to extreme fear and hatred. Case 6’s chat records sparked disgust over an ethical transgression. Case 8’s curse, “*may the whole class get H1N1,*” combined with privilege-triggered fear and discontent. These emotions are encoded by fragmented information. Emotional arousal is not limited to anger. In Case 7, a teacher disciplined for arriving late after saving a patient activated public empathy and righteous anger toward institutional coldness, reversing the usual presumption of teacher fault. After some complaints are proven false, public sympathy may replace prior anger, yet the pattern of emotion first remains unchanged. The ideal speech situation requires suspending status differences for rational argument, but symbolic expectations reinforce identity labels, sliding discussion from fact-seeking into moral condemnation. This erosion of communicative reason is a typical manifestation.

4.3 Algorithmic Amplification: Traffic Bias and the Marginalization of Rational Content

Awakened emotions require channels for transmission, and algorithmic recommendations serve as a traffic amplifier. The commercial nature of social media platforms determines that their core objective is to maximize user dwell time and interaction frequency. Research has shown that emotionally charged content, especially negative emotions such as anger and indignation, significantly outperforms neutral or rational analytical content in completion rates, shares, and comment volumes (Song & Yuan, 2019). Content distribution platforms, through excessive use of algorithmic techniques, push users into information cocoons, leading to a marked increase in extreme opinions driven by group polarization. In teacher-related incidents, a cropped conflictual screenshot can reach trending status within two hours precisely because the algorithm detects its high emotional value and grants it traffic preference. A long, rational analysis, lacking an emotional hook, is filtered out during the algorithm’s cold-start phase. This technological logic is not neutral but is embedded with commercial capital preferences: high emotion content equals high interaction equals high advertising revenue. Consequently, the traffic champions of any discussion are always those most adept at inciting emotion, not those closest to the truth. The commercial logic of algorithms

deepens refeudalization at the technological level. Capital, mediated by technology, manipulates the visibility of public discussion, enabling manipulated publicity to achieve automated, large-scale production on digital platforms.

4.4 Echo Chamber Reinforcement: Selective Exposure and the Filtering of Dissent

Once emotionally charged content is algorithmically pushed to users, the echo chamber effect begins. Algorithms and user self-selection generate homogeneous discussion circles in which members receive information consistent with their pre-existing positions, while dissenting views are filtered out (Chen, 2013). Discussion reinforces original inclinations rather than revising perspectives. In teacher incidents, a user with negative attitudes is persistently fed similar misconduct content, encounters mutual affirmation, and escalates from suspicion to conviction to extreme aversion. The spiral of silence further compresses rational voices. Those who urge verification before commenting fall silent for fear of isolation or ridicule, making extreme opinions appear more mainstream. Confirmation bias also reinforces echo chambers. Individuals favor information supporting their beliefs while doubting contradictory evidence. In Case 5, a female teacher was repeatedly reported for absurd reasons, like wearing a skirt. After investigation, most complaints were found to be unsubstantiated. Yet when officials confirmed the accusations were false, few of the initial accusers admitted they had overreacted. Instead, they found new attacks: *"no smoke without fire," "even if falsely accused, there must still be something wrong,"* or *"the teacher certainly has other problems."* Confirmation bias prevents factual clarification from reversing public opinion. People do not revise their judgments based on new evidence; they use new evidence to fortify old positions. Communicative reason presupposes a willingness to change views in the face of better arguments, but echo chambers and confirmation bias harden positions, depriving public discussion of any corrective mechanisms.

4.5 Group Polarization: Position Drift and Escalation of Hostility

Group polarization follows echo chamber reinforcement. Group members adopt more extreme positions than their initial inclinations (Tao, 2007). In teacher incidents, comment sections are split into opposing factions, ignoring the middle ground that both sides share responsibility. Even after full records were released in Case 1, few condemners admitted overreacting; instead, they shifted to a new extreme: teachers must always remain emotionally stable or be unworthy. Polarization mechanisms include anonymity, which reduces ethical accountability. Online spaces free individuals from reputational costs of face-to-face interaction, weakening self-restraint and making emotional venting low-cost. Every day, polarization persists diffusely in routine topics as long-term confrontational alignment between fans and haters (Xia & Yuan, 2017). In teacher issues, polarization leads to entrenched positions: some see all teachers as irresponsible, others see parents as troublemakers. Each incident reinforces existing positions instead of prompting re-examination. Discussion becomes identity declaration, not debate. Hostility escalates into doxxing, curses, and abuse directed at teachers and families. This transformation means

the public sphere has degenerated into an arena for interest groups and emotional tribes, a digital-age variant of pre-bourgeois power central to refeudalization.

4.6 Labeling Simplification: Erosion of Discourse Ethics and the Silencing of Rational Voices

The ultimate product of polarization is the simplification of labeling. Complex events are compressed into binary moral labels such as “*good teacher versus bad teacher.*” At the core lies the erosion of discourse ethics. Healthy public discussion requires basic dialogic ethics: participants should base arguments on facts, respect each other’s right to speak, advance discussion through reasoning rather than coercion, and aim for consensus. Yet online discussions exhibit instrumental dispute, where participants seek not understanding but victory (Song, 2021). Instrumental dispute substitutes motive speculation for factual argumentation, for example, “*You just want to whitewash teachers.*” It also includes personal attacks like “*You must be that kind of garbage teacher too*” and replacing reasoning with labels such as “*false neutral*” or “*paid troll.*” When a netizen suggests waiting for full information before commenting, they are quickly tagged as a “*lǐ zhōng kè*” (理中客). This term, originally an abbreviation of “*rational, neutral, objective,*” has become a sarcastic epithet implying feigned impartiality. Rational voices are weak not because they are logically untenable, but because they violate the binary game rules of online comments, where there is only condemnation or praise. Prudence is seen as weakness, while taking sides is seen as virtue. Questioning is fault-finding, pronouncing judgment is justice. Labeling simplification represents the apex of discourse ethics erosion, standing in sharp contrast to the four validity claims of the ideal speech situation: truth, rightness, sincerity, and comprehensibility. The replacement of rational dialogue by instrumental dispute means public discussion has lost its drive toward consensus, degenerating into a pure display of power. The consequence is that fragmented information is progressively reduced to ever more extreme labels, for instance, “*This teacher is trash,*” until even the original fragments are no longer sharp enough, requiring further cropping and exaggeration. These labeled products become prefabricated materials for the next fragmentation round. When a new incident occurs, the public directly invokes pre-existing labels for rapid judgment, bypassing fact-checking, thereby accelerating the spiral.

5. Discussion

The spiral resonates strongly with Habermas’s diagnosis of refeudalization. In the original formulation, the crisis of the public sphere in the mass media era was marked by the penetration of pre-bourgeois forms of power, the erosion of the media’s critical function, and the displacement of rational debate by manipulated publicity (Habermas, 1991; Wang, 2011). Our findings suggest that digital platforms have intensified rather than reversed this trajectory. Algorithms that prioritize emotionally charged content for engagement, as observed in the rapid trending of cropped conflictual screenshots,

represent a technologically mediated extension of refeudalization. Capital embedded in platform architecture systematically de-prioritizes rational analysis while amplifying emotional stimuli. Moreover, silencing rational voices through labeling, for example, the derogatory labeling of "lǐ zhōng kè," constitutes a form of discursive power that forecloses the possibility of consensus-oriented deliberation. This is what scholars have described as the manipulation of publicity in the digital public sphere under both commercial and state logics (Chen, 2025; Liu & Li, 2017).

A key theoretical contribution of this study is the identification of emotion as a cross-layer mechanism that connects psychological, social, and technological levels in the production of polarization spirals. While recent research has conceptualized the filter bubble as a self-reinforcing loop composed of confirmation bias, identity signaling, affective motivation, and algorithmic feedback, He and Fan (2025) specifically identify emotion as the underrecognized yet central mechanism that operates across these layers. By integrating psychological, social, and technological perspectives, they demonstrate how affective states guide information seeking, reinforce group affiliation, and shape algorithmic recommendation patterns, thereby intensifying filtering dynamics and contributing to attitude extremization. Our findings provide empirical support for this multi-level model in the specific context of teacher-related discourse. Emotional states such as anger and perceived threat guide selective exposure and identity-based group affiliation, which in turn shape algorithmic recommendation patterns. This recursive dynamic is particularly evident in how teacher-related incidents unfold. An initial fragment that triggers moral outrage is algorithmically amplified, reinforcing selective exposure within echo chambers, which, in turn, intensifies identity-based antagonism, leading to group polarization and, finally, to binary labeling that pre-frames the next incident. This spiral logic echoes the idea that extreme messages, emotional engagement, media amplification, and societal polarization constitute a cyclical causal mechanism.

The model also advances understanding of how identity operates in the context of affective polarization. Social identity theory predicts that individuals derive self-concept from group memberships and exhibit ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In teacher-related discourse, participants rapidly align with competing identity categories such as defenders of teachers versus critics of the system, and this alignment becomes a stronger predictor of online behavior than incident-specific facts. Our findings show that group identity is not merely a background condition but is actively constituted and reinforced through the spiral. Labeling simplification produces prefabricated identity positions that are invoked in subsequent incidents, bypassing deliberation. Moreover, the spiral reveals that identity-based hostility deepens when emotionally charged content is algorithmically curated to like-minded users, suggesting that technological mediation does not merely reflect but actively structures the conditions of identity formation and intergroup antagonism.

Finally, this study does not advocate wholesale de-emotionalization of public discourse. Rather, it makes a principled distinction between productive moral emotions, such as fact-based outrage, empathy, and disappointment at institutional failures, and

pathological emotional expressions, such as undifferentiated hatred, performative abuse, and hostile ridicule (Yuan, 2016; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). This distinction is critical for understanding the ambivalence of affective publics. On one hand, emotion can serve as a legitimate vehicle for drawing attention to systemic problems, as illustrated in the affective counterpublics literature, where emotional expression on Chinese social media has pressured policy adjustments. On the other hand, when stripped of factual grounding and amplified through algorithmic feedback loops, emotion becomes a mechanism for accelerating polarization and foreclosing reflection. The Emotional Polarization Spiral model thus offers a diagnostic tool for distinguishing between these two trajectories, identifying the point at which productive moral concern tips into destructive emotional escalation.

6. Conclusion

The Emotional Polarization Spiral model offers a systematic framework for understanding how online discussions of teacher misconduct in China degenerate into cycles of emotional escalation and rational atrophy. The model delineates a six-stage chain: fragmented triggering, emotional arousal, algorithmic amplification, echo chamber reinforcement, group polarization, and labeling simplification, revealing self-reinforcing, accelerating dynamics. Applying the model to China requires attention to what Shao and Zhan (2013) term “*administered publicness*,” in which platform governance, state regulation, and commercial logic jointly define the boundaries of public discourse. Unlike liberal democratic contexts, the Chinese digital public sphere operates through strategic negotiation among state, capital, and users.

Reconstruction requires institutional correction, technological intervention, and shielded spaces. At the platform level, limited fact-checking tags, cooling-off periods, and delayed commenting (initially verified media only) should be introduced. Schools need rapid-response protocols (internal verification within 1 hour, full facts within 24 hours) and legal aid to avoid hasty actions. Culturally, we distinguish moral emotions (fact-based outrage, empathy) from impulsive hatred. A three-layer guide (facts before positions; distinguish emotion from argument; reject labeling insults) can reinforce rational dialogue. Professionally, improving teachers’ working conditions, providing psychological hotlines, and establishing reverse accountability for false reporting are essential. Encouraging teacher podcasts and training union spokespersons would provide inside perspectives. Finally, shielded spaces, small rule-governed backstage arenas, should be cultivated locally to cool emotions, cross-check facts, and produce calibrated narratives. Interconnected, they form a seed network for renewing the public sphere.

Platform governance mechanisms shape which emotions are visible. The administered character of Chinese publicness means the spiral is both driven by commercial algorithms and constrained by regulation. Affective discourse can pressure

policy adjustments, but this comes at the cost of depleted trust capital and marginalization of institutional reflection.

Several limitations are acknowledged. Data came only from short-form, high-emotion platforms (Weibo, Douyin); longer-form platforms (Zhihu, WeChat) may differ. The temporal window (T0-24h to T0) captured peak escalation but not the aftermath. Generalizability to other professional groups requires cross-occupational comparisons. Additional feedback loops warrant further investigation, and proposed interventions were not experimentally tested. Future research should address these gaps.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. Any remaining errors are solely our responsibility.

Ethics Statement

All data were collected from publicly accessible comments on Sina Weibo and Douyin (Chinese TikTok). No non-public sources were used. User nicknames, profile pictures, and bios were fully anonymized, making re-identification impossible. For Case 4 (sexual assault of a student by a teacher resulting in suicide), additional protections included: (1) automatic deletion of comments containing victim identifiers (name, address, school, class); (2) exclusion of explicit assault details; and (3) a ban on team members disseminating victim information. Any comment that could identify the victim was excluded. The same redaction applied to minors in other cases. Raw data and coding files were stored on password-protected local devices accessible only to the research team, and used solely for academic purposes. Given the use of fully anonymized public comments, a waiver of informed consent was granted by the ethics committee.

Funding Statement

This article is a phased research outcome of the planning project of Ningxia's philosophy and social sciences (education discipline) titled "Research on the Correlation between the Regional Competitiveness of Basic Education and the Regional Economic Competitiveness in Ningxia" (Approval Number: 20NXJC06).

Creative Commons License Statement

This research work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>. To view the complete legal code, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.en>. Under the terms of this license, members of the community may copy, distribute, and transmit the article, provided that proper, prominent, and unambiguous attribution is given to the authors, and the material is not used for commercial purposes or modified in any way. Reuse is only allowed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

About the Author(s)

Fahui Fei is a high school teacher at Ningxia Shizuishan No.1 Middle School, China. He holds a Master of Education from Ningxia University. His research interests include digital public discourse, teacher professional identity, social media and public opinion, and the application of critical theory in educational contexts.

References

- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed., Introducing Qualitative Methods series). Sage Publications. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/Constructing_Grounded_Theory.html?id=y0oAwAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y
- Chen, D. (2013). Patterns of consumer behavior under user information fragmentation background [In Chinese]. *Frontier Science*, 7(4), 36–44.
- Chen, Y. (2025). Philosophical reflection on the digital transformation of the public sphere [In Chinese]. *Advances in Philosophy*, 14(12), 91–98. <https://doi.org/10.12677/acpp.2025.1412606>
- Du, D. (2023). From structural transformation to new structural transformation: Reflection on the public sphere theory of Habermas in the digital age [In Chinese]. *Journal of Guangzhou University (Social Science Edition)*, 22(3), 26–32.
- Fenstermacher, G. D., Osguthorpe, R. D., & Sanger, M. N. (2009). Teaching morally and teaching morality. *Teacher education quarterly*, 36(3), 7-19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479186>
- Flick, U. (2022). *An introduction to qualitative research*. SAGE. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/An_Introduction_to_Qualitative_Research.html?id=RR1tEAAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2017). *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Routledge. (Original work published 1967). http://www.sxf.uevora.pt/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Glaser_1967.pdf
- Habermas, J. (1991). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. MIT press. (Original work published 1962) <https://books.google.com/books?id=e799caakIW0C>
- Habermas, J. (2023). A new structural transformation of the public sphere and deliberative politics. *Polity*. <https://books.google.com/books?id=I1XcEAAAQBAJ>
- He, S., & Fan, Y. (2025). Emotion as a cross-layer mechanism in filter bubbles: a social-psychological perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1740709>

- Huang, Y., Wang, Y. U., Wang, H., Liu, Z., Yu, X., Yan, J., ... & Wu, Y. (2019). Prevalence of mental disorders in China: a cross-sectional epidemiological study. *The lancet psychiatry*, 6(3), 211-224. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(18\)30511-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(18)30511-X)
- Iyengar, S., & Westwood, S. J. (2015). Fear and loathing across party lines: New evidence on group polarization. *American journal of political science*, 59(3), 690-707. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12152>
- Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual review of political science*, 22(1), 129-146. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034>
- Jin, J., & Yu, G. (2024). Teachers' mental health: The current situation and risk prevention [In Chinese]. *Educational Research*, 45(7), 134-147.
- Kasper, J., Bakker, B. N., Lelkes, Y., & Schumacher, G. (2025). Beyond Valence: Arousal as a Core Dimension of Affective Polarization. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/5dfbj_v1
- Lai, S., & Tang, X. (2016). On the impact of emotional information on online rumor spread [In Chinese]. *Intelligence Journal*, 35(1), 116-121. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1002-1965.2016.01.021>
- Lang, Y., & Xie, A. (2020). Representing society or mediating society? A review of local public sphere research in China [In Chinese]. *Journal of the Party School of Ningbo Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China*, 42(1), 61-68. <https://doi.org/10.16444/j.cnki.cn33-1228/d.2020.01.009>
- Liu, W., & Li, K. (2017). A research framework for online verbal violence based on critical discourse analysis [In Chinese]. *Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, (1), 119-124. <http://dx.chinadoi.cn/10.16164/j.cnki.22-1062/c.2017.01.017>
- Liu, X., & Zhang, L. (2024). Research on emotional polarization in social media in the post-truth era [In Chinese]. *Youth Journalist*, (7), 84-88. <https://doi.org/10.15997/j.cnki.qnjz.20240403.002>
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2024). Notice on carrying out the "Standardized Management Year" campaign in basic education. http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/202405/t20240514_1130447.html
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2025, **May 27**). Notice on carrying out the "Standardized Management Enhancement Year" campaign in basic education. http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s7053/202505/t20250527_1192052.html
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2026, **March 25**). Notice on carrying out the "Standardized Management Consolidation Year" campaign in basic education. http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3321/202603/t20260325_1432050.html

- Osguthorpe, R. D. (2008). On the reasons we want teachers of good disposition and moral character. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4), 288-299. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487108321377>
- Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*. Oxford University Press. <https://books.google.com/books?id=ffMVDAAAQBAJ>
- Russell Hochschild, A. (2012). *The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling*. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etextbooks/878>
- Russell, J. A. (1980). A circumplex model of affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39(6), 1161–1178. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0077714>
- Sanger, M. N., & Osguthorpe, R. D. (2011). Teacher education, preservice teacher beliefs, and the moral work of teaching. *Teaching and teacher education*, 27(3), 569-578. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.10.011>.
- Sanger, M. N., & Osguthorpe, R. D. (2013). Modeling as moral education: Documenting, analyzing, and addressing a central belief of preservice teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 29, 167-176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.08.002>.
- Shao, P., & Zhan, N. (2013). The Chinese myth of the public sphere: A text analysis of Habermas's public sphere [In Chinese]. *Journal of Zhejiang University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 43(5), 82–102. <http://dx.chinadoi.cn/10.3785/j.issn.1008-942X.2013.05.008>
- Song, K., & Yuan, H. (2019). Netizens' emotional communication from the perspective of post-truth [In Chinese]. *Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China)*, 41(8), 146–150, 156. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1007-8770.2019.08.027>
- Song, M. (2015). The rationality of Habermas's theory of social communication and the construction of the public sphere [In Chinese]. *Seeker*, (1), 88–92. <https://doi.org/10.16059/j.cnki.cn43-1008/c.2015.01.018>
- Song, P. (2021). Study of discourse ethics in network public spheres from the perspective of Habermas' communicative thought [In Chinese]. *Journal of Ludong University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 38(4), 44–51. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1673-8039.2021.04.007>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/Basics_of_Qualitative_Research.html?id=nwOQAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/Basics_of_Qualitative_Research.html?id=hZ6kBQAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–37). Brooks/Cole. <https://alnap.org/help-library/resources/an-integrative-theory-of-intergroup-conflict/>

- Tao, W. (2007). Analysis of group polarization on the internet [In Chinese]. *Ideological and Theoretical Education*, (17), 9–12, 45. <https://doi.org/10.16075/j.cnki.cn31-1220/g4.2007.17.012>
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2019). *Emotions, media and politics*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://books.google.com/books?id=4h-EDwAAQBAJ>
- Wang, X. (2011). Strong ideology, weak ideology, and rational consensus: An analysis of ideological struggle strategies from the perspective of Habermas's public sphere theory [In Chinese]. *Academic Research*, (4), 14–21.
- Wolf, S. (1982). Moral saints. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 79(8), 419-439. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2026228>
- Xia, Q., & Yuan, Y. (2017). From group polarization to public polarization: The trajectory and turn of polarization research [In Chinese]. *Journalism and Communication Research*, 24(6), 5–32, 126.
- Xu, L., Lin, H., Pan, Y., Ren, H., & Chen, J. (2008). Constructing the affective lexicon ontology [In Chinese]. *Journal of the China Society for Scientific and Technical Information*, 27(2), 180–185. <http://dx.chinadoin.cn/10.3969/j.issn.1000-0135.2008.02.004>
- Xuan, C., & Wang, X. (2025). The construction of an "emotion-order" framework in digital social governance [In Chinese]. *Journal of University of Jinan (Social Science Edition)*, 35(5), 63–71. <https://doi.org/10.20004/j.cnki.ujn.2025.05.007>
- Yang, F. (2010). Seeking the construction of "true self" in teachers' discourse ethics: The significance of communicative action in teachers' professional life [In Chinese]. *Education Academic Monthly*, (11), 59–62. <https://doi.org/10.16477/j.cnki.issn1674-2311.2010.11.015>
- Yu, G. (2025). The mental health problems of teachers in China in the new century: Detection rates and coping strategies [In Chinese]. *Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, (1), 73–84. <http://dx.chinadoin.cn/10.3969/j.issn.1002-0209.2025.01.009>
- Yuan, G. (2016). What is "emotion"? Reflections on the rationalist paradigm in public sphere research [In Chinese]. *International Journal of Journalism & Communication*, 38(9), 104–118. <https://doi.org/10.13495/j.cnki.cjjc.2016.09.008>
- Zhang, L., & Liu, J. (2025). Trench warfare dynamic: A study of affective polarization in controversial topics [In Chinese]. *China Computer-Mediated Communication Studies*, (2), 70–98, 303–304.
- Zhou, Y., & Wang, C. (2018). The challenges and countermeasures of fragmented information dissemination on ideological and political education in colleges and universities [In Chinese]. *School Party Building and Ideological Education*, (17), 69–71. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1007-5968.2018.17.022>