

## Translation



*The following policy document describes how China should go about creating a system for ethics reviews of scientific research. The policy assigns the main responsibility for ethics reviews to universities, labs, and other institutions that conduct scientific research, with China's Ministry of Science and Technology in an overall oversight role. It identifies human subject research, use of laboratory animals, and research in fields such as life science, medicine, and AI as particularly deserving of ethical scrutiny.*

### Title

Opinions on Strengthening the Governance of Science and Technology Ethics  
关于加强科技伦理治理的意见

### Authors

The General Office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (中共中央办公厅) and the General Office of the State Council (国务院办公厅)

### Source

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The Chinese source text is available online at:

[https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-03/20/content\\_5680105.htm](https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-03/20/content_5680105.htm)

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## Opinions on Strengthening the Governance of Science and Technology Ethics

Xinhua News Agency, Beijing, March 20, [2022]. Recently, the General Office of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the *Opinions on Strengthening the Governance of Science and Technology Ethics*,<sup>1</sup> and also issued a notice requiring all regions and departments to

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: China's Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) released a draft version of these *Opinions* in July 2021. Note that MOST named the draft "Guiding Opinions," whereas in this final version, the issuers—the General Office of the CCP Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council—downgraded it in authoritativeness to mere "Opinions." CSET's English translation of the draft

conscientiously implement this document in light of their actual conditions.

The full text of the *Opinions on Strengthening the Governance of Science and Technology Ethics* is as follows:

Scientific and technological (S&T) ethics are the value concepts and behavioral norms that must be followed in carrying out scientific research, technology development, and other S&T activities, and are an important assurance for the healthy development of S&T undertakings. China's S&T innovation is developing rapidly at present, and while the S&T ethics challenges it faces are growing, problems exist in the governance of S&T ethics, such as imperfect institutional mechanisms, incomplete systems, and uneven development in different fields, and responding to the practical requirements of S&T innovation and development has become difficult. The following opinions on strengthening the governance of S&T ethics are put forward in order to further improve the system of S&T ethics, increase S&T ethics governance capabilities, effectively prevent and control S&T ethics risks, continuously promote the development of tech for social good (科技向善) and to better benefit humanity, and achieve a high-level of S&T self-reliance (自立自强).

## I. Overall Requirements

**1. Guiding ideology.** Taking Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as the guide, and deeply implementing the spirit of the 19th Party Congress and successive Plenums of the 19th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee, we shall persist in and strengthen the Party's centralized and unified leadership in S&T work, accelerate the construction of the S&T ethics system with Chinese characteristics, and improve the institutions and mechanisms of S&T ethics governance with multilateral participation and collaborative governance. Persisting in unifying innovation promotion and risk prevention, and combining institutional regulation and self-restraint (自我约束), we shall strengthen the bottom-line mindset and risk awareness, establish and improve a system of S&T ethics that is consistent with our national conditions and aligned with international trends, and shape the cultural concept and assurance mechanisms of tech for social good, striving to achieve positive interaction between high-quality S&T innovation and development and high levels of security, and to promote the healthy development of China's S&T undertakings, so as to provide strong S&T support for improving human wellbeing and promoting the building of a community of common destiny for humanity (人类命运共同体).

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*Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Governance of Science and Technology Ethics* is available online at: <https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/china-science-ethics-guiding-opinions-draft/>.

## **2. Governance requirements.**

—Ethics first. Strengthen the governance at the source (源头治理), focus on prevention, infuse S&T ethics requirements throughout the entire process of S&T activities such as scientific research and technology development, and promote coordinated development and positive interaction between S&T activities and S&T ethics, so as to achieve responsible innovation.

—Compliance with laws and regulations. Persisting in carrying out S&T ethics work in compliance with laws and regulations, we shall accelerate the construction of the legal system for S&T governance.

—Agile governance. Strengthen the early warning, tracking, and analysis of S&T ethics risks, and adjust governance methods and ethical norms dynamically in a timely manner, responding quickly and flexibly to the ethical challenges brought about by S&T innovation.

—Be firmly rooted in national conditions. Firmly rooted in the historical stage of China's S&T development and its social and cultural characteristics, and abiding by the underlying principles of S&T innovation, we shall establish and improve an S&T ethics system that conforms to China's national conditions.

—Open cooperation. Adhering to the open development concept, we shall strengthen external exchanges, establish multilateral coordination and cooperation mechanisms, build consensus, and form a joint force. Actively advance global governance of S&T ethics, contributing Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions.

## **II. Clarifying S&T Ethics Principles**

**1. Advance human wellbeing.** S&T activities shall adhere to the people-centered philosophy of development, be conducive to promoting economic development, social progress, improving the people's livelihoods, and protecting the ecological environment, continuously enhance people's sense of gain, happiness, and sense of security, and promote the peaceful and sustainable development of human society.

**2 Respect the right to life.** To the greatest extent possible, S&T activities shall avoid causing harm or potential threats to people's physical safety, physical health, and mental and psychological health. Human dignity and personal privacy shall be respected, and participants in S&T activities shall be guaranteed the right to know and the right to choose. The use of laboratory animals shall meet requirements such as "reduction, replacement, and optimization" ( “减少、替代、优化” ).

**3 Persist in fairness and justice.** S&T activities shall respect differences in religious beliefs, cultural traditions, etc., treat different social groups justly, fairly, and inclusively, and prevent discrimination and prejudice.

**4 Rationally control risks.** S&T activities shall objectively assess and prudently deal with uncertainties and technology application risks, strive to avoid and prevent possible risks, avoid the misuse and prevent the abuse of S&T achievements, and avoid endangering societal security, public security, and biological and ecological security.

**5 Maintain openness and transparency.** S&T activities shall encourage the reasonable participation of stakeholders and the public, and establish mechanisms for the disclosure of S&T activities involving major and sensitive ethical issues. When announcing information on S&T activities, transparency shall be enhanced to ensure it is objective and truthful.

### **III. Improving the S&T Ethics Governance System**

**1. Improve the government's S&T ethics management system.** The National Science and Technology Ethics Commission (国家科技伦理委员会) is responsible for guiding, coordinating, and promoting the construction of the national S&T ethics governance system. The Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) is responsible for the day-to-day work of the Secretariat of the National Science and Technology Ethics Commission, and the member institutions of the National Science and Technology Ethics Commission are responsible for the formulation of S&T ethics norms, review and oversight, propaganda and education, and other related work in accordance with the division of responsibilities. Local and relevant main industrial oversight departments (地方、相关行业主管部门) are specifically responsible for the governance of S&T ethics in their respective localities and systems, in accordance with their responsibilities and affiliations.

**2. Consolidate (压实) the main responsibility of innovation entities (创新主体) for S&T ethics management.** Institutes of higher education, scientific research institutions, medical and health institutions, enterprises, and other work units (单位) shall fulfill their responsibilities as the main entities for S&T ethics management, establish regularized working mechanisms, strengthen the day-to-day management of S&T ethics, and actively identify and promptly resolve ethical risks of S&T activities in their own units. Based on their actual situations, they shall establish S&T ethics (review) committees for their own work units, and shall provide the necessary conditions for them to conduct their work independently. Work units engaged in S&T activities in areas such as life sciences, medicine, and artificial intelligence (AI), or whose research involves sensitive S&T ethics areas, shall establish S&T ethics (review)

committees.

**3. Give full play to the role of S&T community groups (社会团体).** Promote the establishment of a China Society for Science and Technology Ethics (中国科技伦理学会), improve the community organization system for S&T ethics governance, and strengthen support for scholarly research. Relevant S&T community groups such as societies, associations, and research institutes shall organize the mobilization of S&T personnel to actively participate in the governance of S&T ethics, promote industry self-discipline, and strengthen cooperation with institutes of higher education, scientific research institutions, medical and health institutions, enterprises, etc., and shall carry out propaganda and popularization of knowledge about S&T ethics so as to raise public awareness of S&T ethics.

**4. Guide S&T personnel to consciously comply with S&T ethics requirements.** S&T personnel shall take the initiative to learn about S&T ethics, enhance their awareness of S&T ethics, consciously practice S&T ethics principles, adhere to the bottom line of S&T ethics, and take the initiative to actively report and resolutely resist conduct that violates S&T ethics requirements. The person responsible for an S&T project (topic) must carry out research in strict accordance with the scope of the S&T ethics review and approval, strengthen the ethics management of team members and the entire process of project (topic) research implementation, and comply with relevant provisions and be rigorously prudent when publishing, disseminating, and applying research results involving sensitive S&T ethics issues.

#### **IV. Improving Assurance for the S&T Ethics Governance System**

**1. Formulate and improve the S&T ethics norms and standards.** We shall formulate S&T ethics norms and guidelines for key areas such as life science, medicine, and AI, improve standards related to S&T ethics, and clarify S&T ethics requirements, so as to guide S&T institutions and personnel to conduct S&T activities in a compliant manner.

**2. Establish a review and oversight system for S&T ethics.** We shall clarify the review and oversight responsibilities for S&T ethics, and improve the rules and processes for the review of S&T ethics, handling of risks, and punishment of violations. We shall establish and improve the establishment standards, operating mechanisms, registration system, oversight system, etc., for S&T ethics (review) committees, and explore S&T ethics (review) committee certification mechanisms.

**3. Raise the level of the rule of law (法治化) in the governance of S&T ethics.** We shall promote the inclusion of clear provisions on the oversight of S&T ethics, the investigation and punishment of violations, and other governance work in the basic

legislation for S&T innovation, and implement S&T ethics requirements in other relevant legislation. During the “14th Five-Year Plan” period [2021-2025], we shall focus on strengthening legislative research on S&T ethics in areas such as life sciences, medicine, and AI, and promote the upgrading of important S&T ethics norms into laws and regulations in a timely fashion. Where provisions already exist in the law, we must persist in strictly enforcing the law and investigating violations.

**4. Strengthen theoretical research on S&T ethics.** We shall support relevant institutions, think tanks, community groups, S&T personnel, etc., in carrying out exploration of S&T ethics, strengthen forward-looking research on ethical issues in S&T innovation, and actively promote and participate in international discussions of major S&T ethics issues and the formulation of rules.

## **V. Strengthening the Review and Oversight of S&T Ethics**

**1. Strict review of S&T ethics.** An ethical risk assessment or review shall be carried out in order to conduct S&T activities. S&T activities involving humans or laboratory animals shall be reviewed and approved in accordance with regulations by the S&T ethics (review) committee of the work unit concerned. A work unit that does not meet the conditions for establishing an S&T ethics (review) committee shall commission the S&T ethics (review) committee of another work unit to conduct reviews. S&T ethics (review) committees shall adhere to the principles of scientific basis, independence, impartiality, and transparency in carrying out the S&T ethics review, supervision, and guidance of S&T activities, and effectively grasp the relationship between S&T and ethics. The establishment of professional and regional S&T ethics review centers should be explored. We shall gradually establish a mutual recognition mechanism for S&T ethics review results.

We shall establish and improve an emergency S&T ethics review mechanism for emergencies such as public health incidents, improve emergency review procedures and rules, and achieve rapid response.

**2. Strengthen oversight of S&T ethics.** Local and relevant main industrial oversight departments must: Refine and improve the S&T ethics oversight frameworks and institutional norms of their respective localities and systems; strengthen the supervision and management of the S&T ethics (review) committees of work units, and of high-ethics-risk S&T activities; establish an expert review mechanism for the results of ethics reviews of high-ethics risk S&T activities; organize and carry out the investigation and handling of major S&T ethics cases; and use typical cases to strengthen warning and education. Work units that engage in S&T activities must establish and improve S&T ethics oversight mechanisms and mechanisms for the

quality control, supervision, and evaluation of reviews; and for high-ethics-risk S&T activities, they shall strengthen dynamic tracking, risk assessment, and the emergency handling of ethics-related incidents. The National Science and Technology Ethics Commission shall study and formulate a list of high-ethics-risk S&T activities. Registration in accordance with regulations shall be required in order to carry out high-ethics-risk S&T activities.

Science and technology plans (special projects, funds, etc.) established with government fiscal funding shall strengthen oversight of S&T ethics, covering all aspects such as preparation of guidelines, review and approval of project proposals, process management, project completion and acceptance, and oversight and assessment.

The review and oversight of S&T ethics in international collaborative research activities shall be strengthened. International collaborative research activities shall comply with the S&T ethics management requirements of the countries where the collaborating parties are located, and shall pass the S&T ethics reviews of the countries where the collaborating parties are located. For international collaborative research activities with high S&T ethics risks, the results of S&T ethics reviews shall be reviewed by experts organized by local and relevant main industrial oversight departments.

**3. Monitoring and early warning of S&T ethics risks.** Relevant departments shall push institutes of higher education, research institutions, medical and health institutions, community groups, enterprises, etc., to improve risk monitoring and early warning mechanisms, track cutting-edge developments in emerging technologies, and strengthen analysis of, and propose countermeasures for, the rules conflicts, societal risks, and ethics challenges that S&T innovation may engender.

**4. Strictly investigate and punish violations of S&T ethics laws and regulations.** Institutes of higher education, scientific research institutions, medical and health institutions, enterprises, etc., are the entities with primary responsibility for the investigation and handling of S&T ethics violations within work units. They shall formulate and improve relevant investigation and punishment provisions of their work units, promptly and proactively investigate S&T ethics violations, and strictly hold violators accountable and apportion blame in accordance with laws and regulations. Where work units and their principals are suspected of ethics violations, they shall be investigated and punished by their superior oversight departments. Local and relevant main industrial oversight departments should strengthen their guidance and supervision of the investigation and punishment of S&T ethics violations in their respective localities and systems in accordance with their duties, powers, and

affiliations.

No work unit, organization, or individual shall carry out S&T activities that endanger societal security, public security, biological security, or ecological security, cause harm to human life, physical and mental health, or personal dignity, infringe on S&T activity participants' right to know or right to choose, or fund S&T activities that violate S&T ethics requirements. The relevant main industrial oversight department, funding agency, or work unit of the person responsible shall, distinguishing between different situations and in accordance with law, impose punishments such as ordering the person responsible for the S&T ethics violation to correct or stop the relevant S&T activity, recovering funding, revoking rewards or honors received, canceling relevant professional certifications, and prohibiting the person from undertaking or participating in government-funded S&T activities for a certain period. If the person responsible for the S&T ethics violation is a public servant, they shall be punished in accordance with laws and regulations; if they are a Party member, they shall be punished according to regulations and Party discipline; those suspected of committing crimes shall be punished in accordance with law.

## **VI. Launch In-Depth S&T Ethics Education and Propaganda**

**1. Emphasize S&T ethics education.** S&T ethics education should be made an important part of the education of undergraduate and graduate students in relevant professional disciplines, and institutes of higher education should be encouraged to offer S&T ethics education courses, and to educate young students so they establish a correct awareness of S&T ethics and comply with S&T ethics requirements. Mechanisms for training S&T ethics talent should be improved to accelerate the training of a high-quality, professional S&T ethics talent cadre.

**2. Promote institutionalization of S&T ethics training.** S&T ethics training should be integrated into activities such as training of new S&T personnel, undertaking of scientific research tasks, and academic exchanges and seminars, to guide S&T personnel in consciously complying with S&T ethics requirements and conducting responsible research and innovation. Main industrial oversight departments, and local and relevant work units, shall regularly carry out training of S&T ethics (review) committees to enhance their ability to perform their duties and increase the quality and efficiency of S&T ethics reviews.

**3. Do a good job of S&T ethics propaganda.** S&T ethics propaganda directed at the general public should be conducted, so as to motivate the public to increase its awareness of S&T ethics and to deal with S&T ethics issues rationally. S&T personnel shall be encouraged to engage with the public regarding ethical issues in technological

innovation. For S&T activities that may bring about S&T ethics challenges due to differences in public perception, relevant work units and S&T personnel shall strengthen science popularization and guide the public to view such matters scientifically. The news media shall consciously raise their S&T ethics literacy and report on S&T ethics issues in a scientific, objective, and accurate manner, and must also avoid generalization on S&T ethics issues. Societies, associations, research institutes, etc., are encouraged to set up S&T ethics propaganda and exchange platforms to disseminate knowledge of S&T ethics.

Relevant departments in all regions must attach great importance to the governance of S&T ethics, refine and put into practice the work arrangements of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council on improving the S&T ethics system and strengthening governance of S&T ethics, improve organizational leadership mechanisms, clarify the division of labor, strengthen coordination, make solid progress, and effectively prevent major S&T ethics risks. Relevant main industrial oversight departments and localities shall regularly report to the National Science and Technology Ethics Commission on their work in performing their S&T ethics oversight duties, and accept supervision.