



# **A Preliminary Exploration of the Development and Significance of Chinese-Style Education Modernization**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Education modernization is a vital component of Chinese-style modernization. This paper reviews three key stages: the exploration of a socialist education system, the basic establishment of a modern education framework, and the entry into a new era of modernization. It summarizes six prominent characteristics of Chinese-style education modernization: political orientation, people-centeredness, cultural inheritance, equity, openness, and innovation. Advancing education modernization in the new era has significantly promoted the all-round development of individuals and common prosperity among all people. It has supported China's progress toward becoming a major power in education, culture, and science and technology, accelerated the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and contributed Chinese wisdom to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Keywords: Education modernization; Chinese characteristics; Development process; Significance

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## **1. The Historical Journey of Education Modernization in New China**

In today's world, political multipolarity, economic globalization, cultural diversity, and social informatization are accelerating. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012, the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new historical stage. The Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee established an ambitious long-term goal: to basically realize socialist modernization by 2035. Education is the foundation of national rejuvenation and a driving force for socialist modernization. Reviewing the development of Chinese-style education modernization and understanding its characteristics and significance help us better implement strategic educational tasks, build a powerful education system, and promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The modernization of education represents a transformation from tradition to modernity, involving changes in values, norms, systems, and structures. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, especially after the reform and opening-up, China has gradually explored a path of education modernization with Chinese characteristics.

### **1.1 Exploration and Establishment of a Socialist Education System (1949 – 1978)**

In 1949, the “Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference” defined education in New China as “national, scientific, and popular.” In the early years, drawing on the experience of education in revolutionary base areas and liberated regions during the New Democratic Revolution, China reformed the old educational system and implemented the policy of “opening education to workers and peasants.”

According to the “Decision on the Reform of the Educational System” issued in 1951, in addition to formal school education, a massive literacy campaign and cultural education for workers and peasants were launched, laying a basic cultural foundation for socialist modernization.

In 1952, to cultivate talent for industrial construction and teaching, two rounds of nationwide departmental restructuring in higher education were conducted. Specialized colleges were expanded, particularly in engineering, teacher training, and agriculture and forestry, producing a large number of skilled professionals essential for China's economic development and laying the groundwork for industrialization.

In 1956, with the completion of socialist transformation of the means of production, China entered a new stage of comprehensive socialist construction. Serving socialist development became a key educational mission. In 1957, Mao Zedong emphasized in *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* that the goal of education was to train individuals who are both ideologically conscious of socialism and culturally educated laborers. The integration of Marx's theory of all-round development with China's socialist education goals marked the formation of a comprehensive socialist educational policy in New China.

Although the pursuit of modernization continued during the Cultural Revolution, China's education modernization was severely disrupted. After the Cultural Revolution ended, efforts were made to correct errors, and the national college entrance examination system—suspended for a decade—was restored in 1977.

From the founding of New China to the beginning of reform and opening-up, the unique characteristics of Chinese-style education modernization gradually emerged. A relatively complete national education system took shape, supplying socialist revolution and construction with a steady stream of high-quality labor reserves and capable, educated talent.

### ***1.2 Continued Development Since 2012***

Education reform has continued to deepen in recent years. The country has comprehensively promoted the rule of law in education, enhanced education's role in serving the full establishment of a moderately prosperous society, and strengthened the leadership of the Party within the educational system. With the moral goal of cultivating well-rounded individuals, ideological and political work in schools has been revitalized under the strong leadership of the CPC.

The report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC in 2017 set even higher goals for education in the new era: to accelerate development, push forward education modernization, and build a strong education nation. Greater emphasis was placed on strengthening the comprehensive capabilities of the education system and enhancing its ability to support the holistic national development strategy known as Five-in-One.

In 2018, the Central Committee established two major bodies—the Central Leading Group for Deepening Overall Reform and the Central Education Work Leading Group—to coordinate reform efforts, promote the modernization and legalization of education governance, and foster new relationships among government, schools, and society. Significant progress was achieved in improving education quality, fairness, and structure—especially in reforming the admissions system. Social support for education reform and private investment in the learning sector have shown renewed vitality. New models integrating the internet, big data, and artificial intelligence into education services are increasingly taking shape.

In February 2019, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the China Education Modernization 2035 plan, setting a strategic goal to basically achieve education modernization by 2035. This roadmap provided strong guidance for the future of China's education system.

Overall, in the ten years since the 18th National Congress, China's educational attainment has seen historic breakthroughs. Citizens' right to education has been more fully safeguarded. Reforms and opening in the education sector have deepened, and a more robust lifelong learning system for all people has emerged. As education services continue to expand, a dual-driving model of talent cultivation and technological innovation has developed, supporting China's strategic goals and fueling social and economic progress.

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## **2. Characteristics of Chinese-Style Education Modernization**

Looking back on the development of education modernization in New China, it is clear that Chinese-style education modernization exhibits distinct national characteristics.

### ***2.1 Political Orientation***

The political nature of Chinese-style education modernization is first and foremost reflected in upholding the comprehensive and firm leadership of the Communist Party of China and adhering to the socialist direction in school operations. This is the core guarantee of the Chinese path to education modernization. Only by following the Party's leadership and implementing ideological and political work throughout the education management process can a strong political and organizational foundation for modernization be secured.

Second, the scientific theories of Marxism adapted to the Chinese context and the current era serve as guiding ideologies. Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era provides the basic principles and top-priority foundation for building education modernization in China.

### ***2.2 People-Centeredness***

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Historically, education in New China has always aimed to serve the people. People-centeredness is a core concept of Chinese-style education modernization. In terms of reality, this modernization is built on a vast population base. Looking to the future, China Education Modernization 2035 emphasizes inclusive education and serving all citizens as core principles, aiming to establish a modern education system that supports lifelong learning for everyone.

### ***2.3 Cultural Inheritance***

Chinese-style education modernization is deeply rooted in the profound and rich traditional Chinese culture. Traditional values, revolutionary heritage, and patriotism are inexhaustible resources for modernization. A distinct national feature is the cultivation of correct historical, national, cultural, and civic perspectives in students, along with strong national pride and confidence—serving as lasting sources of cultural vitality.

## **2.4 Equity**

Since the founding of New China, significant progress has been made in educational equity. In the new era, promoting equal access to basic public education services has become a strategic task. Chinese-style education modernization aims to build a fairer education system that meets the expectations of the people, supports common prosperity for all, and fosters social fairness and harmony.

## **2.5 Openness**

Chinese-style education modernization has developed under globalization and the policy of reform and opening-up. It actively serves the Belt and Road Initiative, enhances cooperation with other countries and international organizations, and continuously enriches the concept of openness. By learning from and innovating upon international experiences, China has improved its educational influence globally and actively participated in global education governance, contributing to the building of a shared future for mankind.

Furthermore, education is expected to integrate with society and industry. The fusion of industry and education, science and education, as well as the coordination among school, society, and family education, enhances the alignment between talent cultivation, industrial needs, and innovation. This promotes deep and coordinated development between education and the economy.

## **2.6 Innovation**

Chinese-style education modernization focuses on cultivating innovative talents and enhancing students' overall competencies. It guides students to develop comprehensive skills, innovative thinking, creative spirit, and practical abilities.

Such innovation relies on deepening teaching reforms and advancing quality-oriented education. Promoting flexible classroom structures, elective course systems, and diverse teaching methods encourages students to learn through observation, practice, and reflection—thereby stimulating curiosity and a genuine passion for learning.

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# **3. The Significance of Chinese-Style Education Modernization**

## **3.1 Promoting Holistic Development and Common Prosperity**

At its core, education modernization centers on the modernization of people. Throughout the development of education modernization in New China, promoting the all-round development of individuals has remained a central goal. The meaning of comprehensive development has evolved with the times. Chinese-style education modernization emphasizes equitable, high-quality, and inclusive education, upholds the principle of teaching according to individual aptitude, and expands opportunities and choices for students—thereby better facilitating human development.

This modernization approach adheres to the values of fairness and public benefit. It emphasizes inclusive access to education and guarantees equal rights to learning for all citizens. The average years of schooling for China's working-age population continue to rise. The benefits of educational reform and development are being shared more equitably among the population, making education a fundamental channel for achieving common prosperity.

## **3.2 Advancing China as a Power in Education, Culture, and Science and Technology**

Education modernization forms the foundation of national competitiveness and is a vital source for cultivating innovative talent. As educational levels rise among the working population, China is shifting from a population-rich nation to one rich in human resources—transforming into a learning society and a talent-driven country. By 2035, China aims to establish a modern educational system that supports lifelong learning for all. This system will build bridges across different education levels and learning outcomes (formal, informal, and non-formal) and will foster innovation in service delivery. A dynamic ecosystem of diversified, balanced education and learning services—driven by both government and market—will support the creation of a society where everyone learns, everywhere, at all times.

Education is also the foundation of cultural inheritance. Chinese-style education modernization plays a key role in promoting advanced socialist culture, revitalizing national cultural confidence, and cultivating socialist core values. While preserving and developing traditional Chinese culture, it also encourages innovation. By nurturing innovative talents, drawing on the best of global civilizations, and enhancing cultural soft power, China can take confident steps onto the global stage.

Today, a new scientific and technological revolution is reshaping society. Since the founding of New China, the nation has made significant scientific breakthroughs and cultivated a group of leading innovators. By producing top-tier strategic scientists, technological leaders, young researchers, and elite innovation teams, education modernization is helping China transition from a technology follower to a leader—accelerating its transformation into a global science and technology power.

### 3.3 Realizing the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation

Chinese-style education modernization contributes to comprehensive human development, common prosperity, and the advancement of education, culture, and science. These developments are closely aligned with and reinforce broader economic and social progress. By fostering highly skilled and innovative talent, it provides strong support for China's modernization strategy. It also focuses on cultivating students with global perspectives and intercultural communication skills—boosting national competitiveness and influence and advancing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

### 3.4 Contributing to a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind

In today's world, nations face many shared challenges. Chinese-style education modernization emphasizes openness and cooperation. It promotes educational exchanges, cultural interaction, and mutual learning between civilizations, contributing to a better future for all humanity.

Furthermore, China's approach offers new insights for developing countries—such as how to achieve leapfrog development, balanced growth, educational equity, and successful modernization transitions. It proposes a model that balances consistency and flexibility, global learning and local innovation, universality and applicability—helping to construct a community with a shared future for mankind.

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