

Contemporary Digital Transformation in Chinese Education, by Shutao Wang and Junwei Bao

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As the global digital transformation of education continues to deepen, technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and big data are increasingly being embedded in educational contexts. Consequently, the focus of educational reform has gradually expanded from the renewal of teaching tools and the construction of digital platforms to a more systemic transformation involving institutional arrangements, resource allocation, governance capacity, and the reconfiguration of educational values. Existing studies have mainly examined the digital transformation in education from the perspectives of digital technology application, educational quality improvement, and the promotion of educational equity (Awaghade 2022; Nazarova et al. 2021; Qarkaxhja et al. 2021), thereby providing an important foundation for understanding its practical value. Situated within the broader process of China's educational modernisation, the digital transformation of education in China exhibits distinctive features of policy guidance and practice-oriented governance. Its advancement involves not only the integration of technology into educational settings, but also the coordination of national strategic planning, regional resource allocation, and grassroots educational practice.



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Contemporary Digital Transformation in Chinese Education is developed within this problem field. Taking “macro-level policy support, meso-level resource provision, and micro-level practice governance” (p. 2) as its main analytical thread, the book systematically presents the practical progress, operational logic, and mechanism characteristics of China’s digital transformation of education. It thus provides a valuable reference for understanding China’s path to educational modernisation as well as the digital transformation of education in developing countries.

The authors situate the book within an analytical framework that interweaves China’s digital transformation of education with Chinese-style educational modernisation. Against the backdrop of the Digital China strategy, the book foregrounds the continuous restructuring of the education system across such dimensions as policy guidance, resource allocation, governance mechanisms, and forms of practice. It emphasises that, as digital technologies become deeply embedded in educational contexts, tensions related to educational equity, technological governance, talent cultivation, and human-centred values remain unresolved. While digital technologies have played a positive role in expanding access to high-quality educational resources, facilitating coordinated urban-rural educational governance, and enhancing the efficiency of educational services, risks such as algorithmic bias, data surveillance, the digital divide, and the alienation of educational subjects by technological rationality may still constrain the substantive effectiveness of the digital transformation in education. As Hu and Wang (2023) argue, Chinese-style educational modernisation, as a core component of China’s overall modernisation, plays a foundational, long-term, and leading role. The digital transformation of education should not be reduced to a mere process of technological upgrading; rather, it should be examined within the broader trajectory of educational modernisation. Notably, the authors do not treat schools and the education system as passive sites that simply receive or adapt to technology. Instead, they are understood as active agents in reshaping educational governance, advancing educational equity, and responding to ethical challenges in the age of intelligence. In this regard, the book points towards a future for Chinese education that is more equitable, inclusive, intelligent, and imbued with humanistic concern.

The book centres on the core issue of China’s digital transformation of education, covering a wide range of topics, including the digital pathway of Chinese-style educational modernisation, policy-driven mechanisms, coordinated governance of urban and rural compulsory education, the role of digitalisation in advancing common prosperity, the restructuring of school time in the age of artificial intelligence, and the governance of social experiments in AI education. Taken together, these themes reveal the authors’ effort to understand China’s educational digital transformation through multiple dimensions, including policy, resources, governance, and practice. Structurally, the book adopts a macro–meso–micro analytical framework. At the macro level, it examines the socio-cultural background, national strategies, and policy environment that shape the digital transformation of education. At the meso level, it explores how digital technologies contribute to regional equity, urban-rural resource sharing, and the

realisation of common prosperity. At the micro level, it investigates the opportunities and risks brought about by the integration of artificial intelligence into school settings, particularly in relation to teaching governance, student development, and educational ethics. Each chapter situates its discussion within the broader contexts of Chinese-style educational modernisation, the construction of Digital China, and the pursuit of high-quality educational development. In this way, the book presents the institutional foundations, practical evolution, and future orientation of China's digital transformation of education.

The first part of the book focuses primarily on the macro-level logic and policy foundations of China's digital transformation of education. Chapter 1 begins with the broader construction of Chinese-style educational modernisation, examining the internal mechanisms through which digital transformation contributes to educational modernisation. At the same time, it offers a critical reflection on the potential tensions between digital logic and educational logic, arguing that educational digitalisation embodies value orientations such as integration, ethics, equity, responsibility, autonomy, and inclusion, while also facing the risk that technological rationality may obscure the intrinsic purposes of education. Chapter 2 then turns to policy analysis. Drawing on the multiple streams theory, it investigates the driving mechanisms behind the formation and evolution of China's educational digital transformation policies. The chapter emphasises that the digitalisation of education represents a new stage built upon educational informatisation, moving towards greater intelligence, automation, and deep integration.

The second part of the book shifts its focus to meso-level issues of resource allocation, regional equity, and urban-rural educational governance. Chapter 3 takes the theory of common prosperity as its analytical starting point and examines how educational digitalisation can contribute to this goal by optimising the structure of human capital, promoting the co-construction and sharing of educational resources, and enhancing social equity and well-being. Chapter 4 further explores the role of educational digitalisation in the co-governance of urban and rural compulsory education. It argues that digital technologies can facilitate information flow, multi-actor coordination, and resource sharing, thereby promoting the transformation of urban-rural compulsory education governance from technology-enabled co-governance to intelligent co-governance and, ultimately, smart co-governance.

The third part of the book mainly addresses micro-level issues concerning school practice and the governance of artificial intelligence. Chapter 5 focuses on how artificial intelligence reshapes the temporal structure of schooling, examining the ways in which intelligent technologies transform the spatio-temporal order of education, modes of talent cultivation, and pathways of student development. At the same time, it cautions against the risk that students' free time may be alienated by technological rationality. Chapter 6 approaches the educational application of artificial intelligence from the perspective of social experimentation, exploring its ethical boundaries, governance

mechanisms, and pathways of social transformation. Overall, by developing its analysis across three levels—macro-level policy support, meso-level resource provision, and micro-level practice governance—the book offers a relatively systematic account of the practical progress, internal mechanisms, and future challenges of China’s digital transformation of education.

The book situates China’s digital transformation of education within the broader contexts of Chinese-style educational modernisation, the construction of Digital China, and the pursuit of high-quality educational development. Drawing on policy analysis, educational governance studies, the theory of common prosperity, cooperative systems theory, Marx’s theory of free time, and the philosophy of technology, the authors systematically examine the interactions among macro-level policy support, meso-level resource allocation, and micro-level school practice. The book not only highlights the positive role of educational digitalisation in advancing educational modernisation, promoting the sharing of high-quality resources, supporting the co-governance of urban and rural compulsory education, and reshaping school practice, but also reveals a series of unresolved tensions and risks. These risks include the tension between digital logic and educational logic, disparities in resources across regions and social groups, the risk of subject alienation when artificial intelligence intervenes in school time, and the ethical boundaries and governance challenges involved in the educational application of intelligent technologies. The authors emphasise that genuine digital transformation in education should not be confined to the construction of platforms or the application of technological tools. Rather, it should aim at a comprehensive renewal of educational values, governance mechanisms, and forms of practice. In this sense, the book offers a valuable reference for understanding the digital pathway of Chinese-style educational modernisation, as well as for developing countries seeking to balance efficiency, equity, and human-centred values amid technological change.

However, although the book provides a relatively systematic account of the policy logic, key issues, and practical challenges of China’s digital transformation of education, and develops a clear analytical framework around macro-level policy support, meso-level resource provision, and micro-level digital practice, there remains room for further theoretical refinement. As a work centred on China’s digital transformation of education, the book addresses a range of issues, including educational modernisation, common prosperity, the co-governance of urban and rural compulsory education, the restructuring of school time, and the governance of artificial intelligence in education. These discussions demonstrate a strong sense of problem awareness and practical concern. Nevertheless, because the chapters vary in research focus, theoretical resources, and analytical methods, the book’s overall interpretation of the internal mechanisms of educational digital transformation and its theoretical coherence remain somewhat dispersed. Future research could further integrate policy drivers, resource allocation, school practice, and technological ethics within a more unified analytical framework, so as to clarify the connections among macro-level institutional arrangements, meso-level resource flows, and micro-level subject experiences. It is also necessary to

examine the actual effects of digital transformation across different regions, school types, and teaching contexts, thereby providing a stronger basis for comparative studies, longitudinal research, and policy-tracking research.

Undoubtedly, the book's distinctive contribution lies in its examination of China's digital transformation of education within the broader process of Chinese-style educational modernisation. Maintaining an interdisciplinary analytical perspective, the book systematically presents the policy evolution, key issues, and practical challenges of China's digital transformation of education. Focusing on core themes such as macro-level policy support, meso-level resource provision, and micro-level practice governance, the book not only reveals the positive role of digital transformation in advancing educational modernisation, optimising resource allocation, and promoting governance innovation, but also brings to light the tensions between digital logic and educational logic, as well as the ethical risks that may accompany the expansion of technological rationality. The authors emphasise that educational digitalisation is not merely an extension of educational informatisation, but an important stage in which the education system moves from the basic application of digital information towards the deeper development of smart education. This transformation is concerned not only with the efficiency of technological application, but also with broader value goals such as educational equity, subject autonomy, ethical responsibility, and inclusive development. In this sense, the book provides an important reference for understanding the internal mechanisms and practical pathways of China's digital transformation of education. It also offers the international community an illuminating Chinese perspective on educational digital reform in different institutional contexts.

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