

ПОЛИТИКА КНР В СФЕРЕ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ ПОСЛЕ ПАНДЕМИИ COVID-19

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Для эффективного преодоления вызовов, связанных с пандемией коронавируса, Китай внес соответствующие изменения в свои национальные планы развития, затрагивающие экономическую, политическую, социальную, культурную и образовательную сферы. Эти изменения повлияли не только на международное сообщество, но и на стратегию приоритетного развития страны в постпандемическую эпоху. Рассматриваются особенности внешней политики КНР в сфере высшего образования, анализируется международное сотрудничество в период пандемии. Делается вывод о том, что новая политика в определенной степени ускорила развитие международного образования в КНР. Посредством процессов модернизации и локализации новая политика государства вносит посильный вклад в международное высшее образование постпандемической эпохи, предоставляя новые возможности для глобального развития высшего образования.

Ключевые слова: международное высшее образование; пандемия COVID-19; китайская модернизация; локализация высшего образования; китайско-белорусское сотрудничество.

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CHINA'S INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY AMID THE POST-COVID LANDSCAPE

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To effectively overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, China have made adjustments to national development plans in various fields such as economics, politics, society, culture, and particularly in education. These adjustments have impacted not only the development direction of the international community but also the national priority development

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strategy in the post-pandemic era. This paper focuses on China's higher education and examines the international cooperation it engaged in during the pandemic as well as the relevant policies that were adopted. The analysis shows that these policies have contributed to the acceleration of China's international education development, furthering its modernisation, localisation processes and paving the way for the development of international higher education in the post-pandemic era in the global context.

Keywords: international higher education; COVID-19 pandemic; Chinese modernisation; localisation of higher education; Sino-Belarusian cooperation.

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Introduction

Over the past three years, China has implemented measures to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts, however, have not resulted in a reduction of overall initiatives related to international affairs, particularly in the realm of international education. In fact, the pandemic has expedited China's progress towards innovative approaches, including online education and remote collaboration, which have enabled continued international engagement despite the constraints of travel and face-to-face interactions. China has also pledged to promote its «Study in China» and Belt and road initiative to facilitate stronger international partnerships, deploying online learning and remote collaboration, as well as utilising digital platforms to facilitate communication and collaboration.

In the same time higher education serves as a convergence point for a diverse range of ideological movements and cultural transmissions. In this context, students are required to maintain a sound ideological comprehension while navigating through various cultures to regulate their thoughts and actions and avoid

deviating from the desired path. The objective of incorporating ideological and political background in higher education is to provide students with a moral compass to enable them to shoulder modern national and international responsibilities, irrespective of their linguistic or religious affiliations. This approach has become increasingly important for fostering accurate values and perspectives on life, particularly in the current era, which is marked by significant obstacles and challenges.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, challenges facing the education sector have become more prominent. The outbreak has necessitated a shift in teaching methodologies, resulting in the adoption of new models such as online and hybrid teaching. Furthermore, China has prioritised two crucial concepts, namely, internationalisation-at-home and Chinese modernisation, in its efforts to align its global education vision with its unique characteristics. The present article endeavours to examine the obstacles confronting China's international higher education and analyse its approach towards future development in the post-epidemic era.

Conceptual framework and sources analysis

In recent years, China's policy for international higher education has centered around two core themes: modernisation and localisation. These themes have gained significant importance in evaluating outcomes and formulating future plans. The China's education modernisation – 2035 plan aims to modernise China's higher education system by 2035, thereby enabling it to join the ranks of educational powerhouses and positioning the country as a leader in education, human resources, and talent excellence. Consequently, the modernisation of education has emerged as a top priority for the Chinese government in its efforts to achieve national modernisation, particularly in the higher education sector. This viewpoint is widely supported by scholars in the Chinese academic community.

Chinese modernisation is a crucial concept that holds significant importance in understanding China's plans for social development. The concept is grounded in a unique local intellectual context that aligns with global trends in globalisation, while also adhering to China's national conditions and possessing distinct

Chinese characteristics. Over time, Chinese modernisation has progressed from its initial stages of imitation of Western models to independent exploration, from a state of one-sided imbalance to overall coordination, from a rudimentary stage to a perfected pattern, and from a single focus on development to multiple areas of advancement. At its core, Chinese modernisation is driven by a people-centered approach, which serves as the fundamental standpoint and motivation for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Scholars have expressed their opinions on the modernisation of higher education, with varying attitudes. Li Xiaoqiong [1, p. 1] and Gao Shuguo [2, p. 1] believe that high-quality development is the key to achieving modernisation in higher education. They suggest that it is necessary to not only improve the quality of talent training in a comprehensive manner but also establish a world talent centre and innovation base, and pave the way for constructing a world-class university with Chinese characteristics [3, p. 6]. Zhang Xiaoge [4, p. 148] views the modernisation of higher education as the

extension of functions, manifestation of characteristics, educational innovation, improvement of the system, and international cooperation. The modernisation of higher education emphasises its function in promoting the all-round development of individuals and serving the sustainable development of society.

The modernisation of higher education in China is ultimately geared towards achieving national modernisation, according to various scholars. Wu Zhihui argues that education modernisation entails gradually improving people's learning abilities, values, and quality of life, which in turn promotes the continuous improvement of people's modernisation levels [5, p. 49]. Meanwhile, Feng Jianjun posits that education modernisation involves enhancing people's modernity and cultivating a modern personality [6, p. 138]. Ding Xiaochang contends that human modernisation is a critical factor in realising economic and social modernisation, and it supports the modernisation of higher education [7, p. 6]. Wang Hongcai argues that the modernisation of higher education is a continuous process of internalisation and reshaping of educational values, rather than a mere adoption of Western educational models and values. According to him, China's educational modernisation path has its unique historical logic and represents an endogenous form of educational modernisation [8, p. 3].

Indeed, the new development concept plays a crucial role in guiding the modernisation of education in China. It emphasises innovation, coordination, green development, openness, and inclusiveness, which are in line with the goal of building a modern and innovative education system with Chinese characteristics. In addition, the implementation of the Belt and road initiative and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind provide opportunities for China's international higher education to promote mutual learning and cooperation among different cultures and civilisations. The modernisation of education in China is not only about catching up with the rest of the world but also about creating a unique education system that embodies Chinese values and serves the country's national rejuvenation.

The localisation of higher education in China is the second important concept and is not just about preserving traditional culture but also about adapting and integrating it with modern education structure. This approach emphasises the importance of cultural integration as the main focus of localisation. There are two main aspects to the localisation of higher education in China. The first aspect is the simple localisation, which focuses on incorporating traditional culture into national higher education. This means that traditional culture plays a significant role in shaping the education system and curriculum, ensuring that it reflects the country's unique cultural identity. The second aspect is building on the international level, where localisation involves developing local education culture and foreign education culture while engaging in equal and harmonious international exchange. The primary aim of

this approach is to maximise China's higher education's advantages while also ensuring that it remains globally relevant and competitive.

The concept of localisation in higher education includes not only communication but also integration, with an emphasis on cultural traditions, such as Chinese traditional culture, traditional education culture, and modern educational concepts. In particular, the focus is on cultural integration, which can be achieved through simple localisation by basing national higher education on traditional culture, or building on an international level by ensuring the development of local education culture and foreign education culture while engaging in equal and harmonious international exchange. Additionally, localisation encompasses the promotion of China's traditional education and culture in the international community, known as outflow, which allows for the continuation of the local education and teaching culture's educational advantages at the international level, ultimately establishing China's actual position in the international education field. Therefore, localisation plays a vital role in the modernisation process of higher education in China. Scholars, including Yin Da and Xu Feng, believe that realising the modernisation of Chinese education requires a foundation based on China's national conditions [9, p. 19]. Wang Xingyu suggests that the modernisation of higher education in China involves navigating the relationship between traditional higher education, the Western experience of higher education, and the modernity of higher education [10, p. 58]. Ye Fugui argues that the modernisation process of education must involve a mixing and entanglement of tradition (local) and the West (international) [11, p. 5].

In determining the success or failure of educational modernisation, the interaction between China and Western countries, whether supportive, generative, dismantling, or antagonistic, has become pivotal. According to Zheng Kaiyue [12, p. 114], the localisation and modernisation of higher education are interdependent and in a contradictory relationship. The former refers to the Chinese model of developing higher education, while the latter is a comprehensive system with the same guiding philosophy and ideology but with different developmental models depending on the university type and period. Additionally, the modernisation and localisation of higher education must navigate three sets of relationships: China and foreign countries, tradition and modernity, and inheritance and development.

In essence, Chinese scholars view the modernisation of higher education as a fusion of westernisation and localisation. It is a qualitative transformation of education achieved through high-quality methods, which involves expanding and integrating global educational resources to modernise national education and promote the comprehensive development of individuals. This process is crucial for maintaining the momentum of modernisation and providing the necessary support for the country's modernisation efforts.

Results and discussion

The level of development of a state is intrinsically connected to the extent of advancement in higher education. Universities play a crucial role in various areas such as education, research, cultural heritage preservation, innovation promotion, as well as facilitating international collaboration and exchange. As a result of these functions, higher education has gained widespread recognition from national governments and international organisations as a vital driver of development, leading to rapid expansion of higher education systems to cater to increasing demands [13, p. 505]. In this regard, the significance of higher education is further emphasised as it trains professionals who contribute significantly to social development.

The contemporary social changes in China are largely driven by population size and composition. Recent analyses of China's population structure have shown a shift from a predominantly young adult population to a more elderly one. Despite the shift in demographic policy from birth control to encouraging fertility since 2016, the total population growth rate has continued to decline (fig. 1). Nevertheless, national statistics reveal a significant increase in the number of higher education graduates in China, from 876 000 in 1997 to 9 038 000 in 2021 (fig. 2). The gross enrolment ratio for higher education currently stands at 59.6 %, reflecting the transition from mass higher education to quality improvement through scaling up. This highlights the critical role of higher education in training professionals and promoting social development in China.

The Chinese government has implemented a reform and openness policy to address the shortage of skilled individuals in society. In 1997, a national economic development strategy was adopted, prioritising science, education, and sustainable development as crucial components of the country's modernisation. As part of this strategy, talent development projects, such as

«Project 211» and «Project 985», were launched with the aim of establishing world-class universities that meet international academic standards and attract global talent. Consequently, between 1997 and 2021, the number of universities in China increased from 1020 to 2756, and the number of research institutions at universities rose from 3306 to 22 859, accompanied by an increase in international academic exchange (fig. 3). Furthermore, the education poverty alleviation project has contributed to the widespread availability of education and economic growth. Therefore, higher education is playing a positive role in the development of Chinese society by providing a pool of skilled individuals and fostering scientific and technological advancement, among other things.

Higher education has long played a significant role in China's modernisation process, serving as a crucial link between China and the rest of the world. On the one hand, through joint training, educational projects, and joint laboratories, it acquires advanced international knowledge and technologies. On the other hand, it also shares this knowledge and experience with other developing countries, and in the last 10 years, China's higher education has had a positive impact globally. Notably, all of China's efforts for sustainable development have been united under the umbrella of the Belt and road initiative. This multilateral platform for regional cooperation between China and relevant countries includes education, which is primarily implemented in accordance with the action plan to promote education and joint construction of One belt and one road issued in 2016 by Ministry of Education of China. The initiative has strengthened multifaceted cooperation in education. As of the end of 2019, China had signed mutual recognition agreements for higher education degrees with 24 countries along the Belt and road route, established foreign education programmes with 60 universities, and set up 17 joint laboratories for international cooperation.

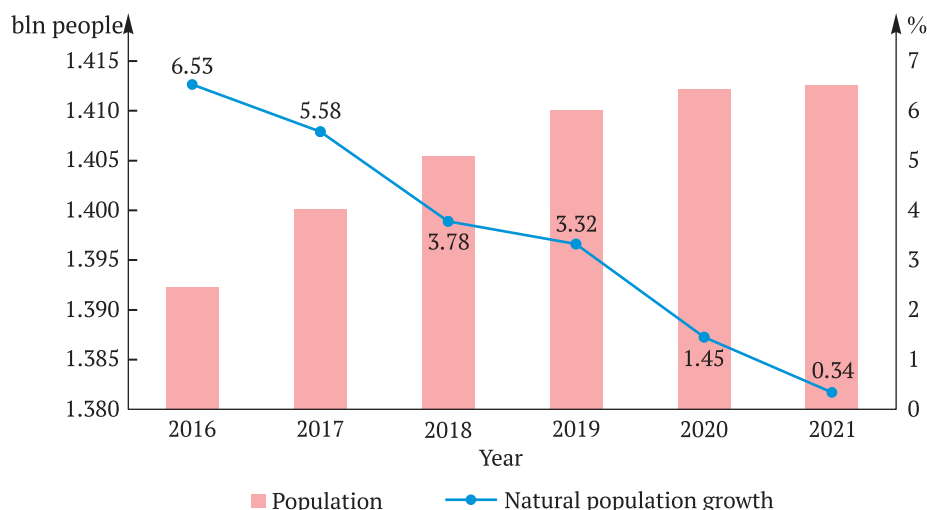


Fig. 1. China's population and natural growth

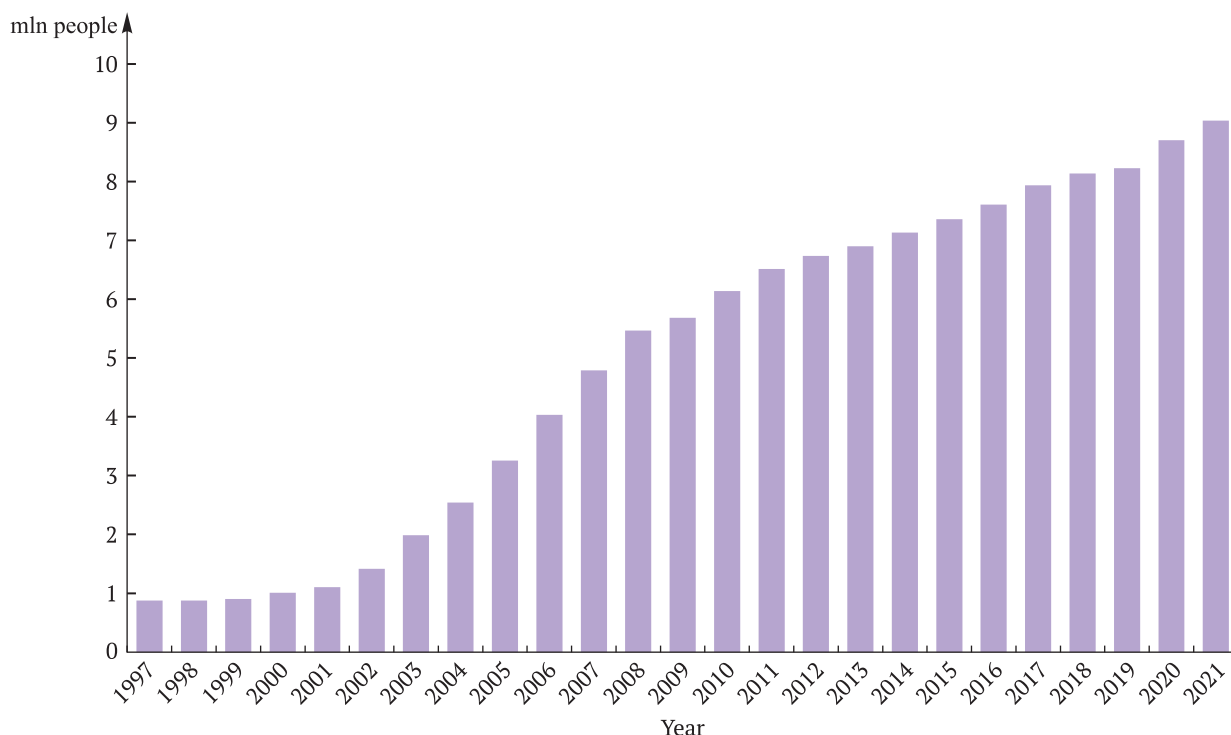


Fig. 2. Number of higher education graduates

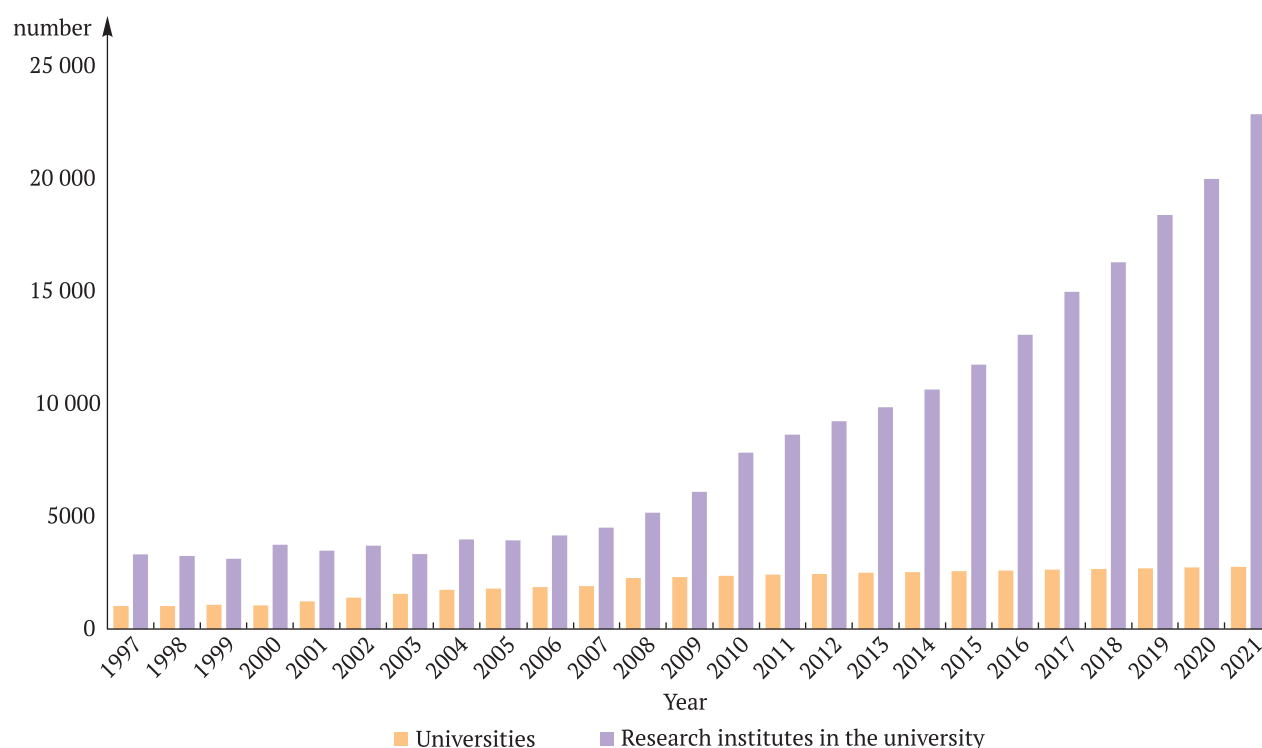


Fig. 3. Universities and research institutions

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on Chinese international cooperation in higher education, with varying outcomes for different partner countries. Notably, 2022 marked the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Belarus, and the two countries have continuously upgraded and

deepened their cooperation in various fields, including education. In fact, education has emerged as one of the fastest-growing areas of Belarus – China cooperation. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the Academy of Sciences of Gansu Province jointly published

a collective monograph entitled «The history of friendly relationships between Belarus and China». This publication serves as an excellent example of how the pandemic did not hinder cooperation and communication in scientific research and publishing projects.

The cooperation in higher education between China and Belarus has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 2019, the number of Chinese students studying in Belarus had exceeded 4000, while over 1000 Belarusian students were pursuing their education in China¹. The cultural ties between the two nations have grown increasingly stronger, as evident from the signing of more than 500 cooperative agreements between universities in China and Belarus. One Sino-Belarusian cooperative school-running institution and 20 Sino-Belarusian university cooperative school-running projects have also been established. The deepening of educational collaboration between the two countries has led to a significant increase in the number of international students². In recent years, the number of Chinese students enrolled in Belarusian universities has surged from around 2000 to over 7000, making Belarus the second most popular destination for Chinese students in the Russian-speaking region after Russia. Additionally, amidst the pandemic, 477 Belarusian students have resorted to online learning in China.

Belarus and China have established cultural centres to promote mutual understanding and exchange. Presently, Belarus hosts six Confucius institutes and two Confucius classrooms, while China has set up 14 Belarusian language and cultural research centres. In the domain of Chinese language education, 35 schools in Belarus have introduced Chinese classes, with 11 universities offering Chinese as a standalone subject³. Notably, Minsk State Linguistic University has established a dedicated department for Chinese language and culture. Over the years, there has been a steady increase in the number of international students sent between the two countries, which is a testament to their growing collaboration in education. Despite the pandemic, the two countries have been actively implementing joint teaching plans and have even established a joint teaching institution.

China has opened 11 Belarusian research centres which have continued to function effectively even during the pandemic. Notably, the Belarusian Research Institute at Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics was inaugurated just prior to the outbreak. Over the years, these centres have played a crucial role

in welcoming high-level Belarusian delegations and have served as a venue for numerous bilateral meetings. Their primary objective is to promote Belarusian culture, traditions, literature, and art, thus reflecting the national consciousness of Belarus. Through these centres, China and Belarus have jointly organised many international academic seminars, leveraging these institutions as platforms for collaboration. The Confucius institutes and the Belarusian research centres have significantly contributed to the integration of higher education between the two nations, and their continued operation during the pandemic has helped to maintain and further develop cooperation.

In response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, China has made significant adjustments to its higher education policy. One key focus has been on promoting «local internationalisation» to ensure that the internationalisation process is tailored to meet local needs. In 2020, the Ministry of Education of China introduced the Opinions of the Ministry of Education and other eight departments on accelerating and expanding the opening up of education to the outside world in the new era. It is crucial to maintain the policy of opening up education to the world and actively enhance mutual learning, tolerance, and exchanges with countries globally. This will lead to the formation of a more comprehensive, diverse, and proactive field for education's global outreach [14, p. 6]. On one hand, the promotion of broader and more extensive international educational exchanges and cooperation is encouraged for both teachers and students. On the other hand, the development of globally competitive talents is emphasised as a significant priority, and the international understanding education for local students is continuously strengthened to elevate the level of internationalisation in education to new heights. Additionally, while China had previously prioritised the management of the Greater Guangdong – Hong Kong – Macau Bay area, postgraduate education, and the development of top-tier universities capable of offering international-standard education, the current emphasis has shifted towards integrating online learning, local internationalisation, and modernisation.

In this context, China has formulated several plans to prioritise online education and develop better tools for online teaching to attract high-quality students. The country also aims to streamline administrative procedures for admission to Chinese universities, thereby removing any obstacles that may impede the process. Furthermore, there is a proposal to establish more

¹Ambassador Cui Qiming attends the 2020 spring festival gala for Chinese students out of work [Electronic resource]. URL: http://by.china-embassy.gov.cn/zbqx/jylx/202001/t20200111_2541132.htm (date of access: 18.04.2023) (in Chin.).

²Ambassador Xie Xiaoyong attends the award ceremony of the 21st «Chinese bridge» Chinese proficiency competition for foreign college students and the 15th «Chinese bridge» Chinese proficiency competition for foreign secondary school students in Belarus [Electronic resource]. URL: http://by.china-embassy.gov.cn/zbqx/jylx/202206/t20220607_10699393.htm (date of access: 18.04.2023) (in Chin.).

³Speech by ambassador Xie Xiaoyong at the 2023 online Chinese New Year gala for Chinese and Belarusian students [Electronic resource]. URL: http://by.china-embassy.gov.cn/zbqx/jylx/202301/t20230121_11013916.htm (date of access: 18.04.2023) (in Chin.).

Sino-foreign institutions and projects, including double diploma programmes, which will help address compatibility issues such as academic degree certification. These measures seek to provide more opportunities for students who are unable to study abroad and for those who desire a more international experience while studying in Chinese universities. The objective is to encourage students to adopt a loyal approach to distance education abroad and to equip them with the necessary skills to secure employment upon graduation.

To address the challenges arising from the pandemic and enhance internationalisation efforts, China's current national strategy prioritises the attraction of global talent through the «study in China» brand. The strategy also incorporates «Internet+» and «Intelligence+» approaches to maintain educational quality in institutions that may lack high-level teaching staff. At the global level, the strategy seeks to upgrade the Belt and road initiative by collaborating with countries and international organisations that are willing to cooperate with China, even remotely. To overcome the challenges caused by the pandemic, the proposal suggests strengthening the implementation of various measures, such as prioritising online education, providing English language education for key majors, offering mixed (online-offline) programmes for students who were previously required to attend in-person, and developing a national online platform that can replace existing foreign counterparts to ensure the quality of education and create unique educational content.

In addition to the previously mentioned aspects, there are also challenges related to combining online and offline learning in ideological education, which is an important part of localising China's higher education. Ideological and political theory courses in China have traditionally relied on a one-way method of instruction that does not promote constructive dialogue and critical thinking. This has led many students to view these courses as a form of ideological indoctrination rather than an opportunity for intellectual exploration. To address this issue, it is crucial to explore new and innovative teaching methods that can effectively engage students and foster an environment of open and constructive dialogue. This will require a shift away from traditional teaching methods towards more interactive and participatory approaches that can better accommodate the needs and interests of today's students. By doing so, China's higher education system can better prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

China's emphasis on the development of an information and education platform highlights the importance of technology in education. The platform is designed to provide students with easy access to information sources and to facilitate effective communication between teachers and students. The platform's development requires the collaboration of teaching staff and developers to ensure that the platform meets the needs of students and teachers alike. In addition, the development of the platform requires rigorous screening of information source materials to ensure that the quality of education is maintained. This places a greater responsibility on teachers to ensure that they are using accurate and reliable information sources in their teaching. It also highlights the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers to keep up with the latest developments in their field. Overall, the development of the information and education platform is an important aspect of China's efforts to improve the quality of higher education and enhance internationalisation. It will provide students with greater access to information and resources, and facilitate communication and collaboration between teachers and students.

To achieve this, China has put forward the concept of cyber sovereignty, which emphasises that each country has the right to control and manage its own cyberspace. This includes regulating online content and activities to protect national interests and promote a positive online environment. In the field of education, China has implemented strict regulations to control the content of online courses and ensure that they conform to the country's core values and policies. Additionally, China is actively promoting the development of domestic educational resources to reduce dependence on foreign materials and platforms. Through these efforts, China aims to safeguard its cultural and ideological values while promoting cultural exchange and cooperation on a global level.

As a result, in the post-pandemic era, China has placed a greater emphasis on international cooperation and exchanges in the education sector. To achieve this objective, besides traditional methods, students can learn across borders or regions to gain additional knowledge and skills, while also focusing on strengthening online education and developing information platforms. To some extent, these approaches have expanded the external scope for education to be opened up to the world, thereby promoting the modernisation and advancement of Chinese education, and providing a boost for social development.

Conclusions

In conclusion it is important to say that China has always placed high importance on higher education, recognising its role in developing talent, advancing science and technology, and fostering international exchange. Today, modernising higher education is seen as a crucial factor in China's overall modernisation efforts.

By leveraging global education resources to cultivate people's comprehensive development, China aims to promote high-quality social development.

During the epidemic, the Chinese government implemented policies and measures to address the challenges posed by the outbreak. Internet education emerged

as a key way to increase international exchange and cooperation in higher education, as well as to provide an alternative form of international education cooperation through online learning. On the one hand, building an informational and educational platform helped to meet the demands of internationalising Chinese

education during the epidemic. On the other hand, it addressed the uneven distribution of educational resources in China and improved the overall quality of education. Consequently, online education is set to become a vital means for China to enhance the level of internationalisation in education.

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