

## Article

# AI Era: Empowering Modern Education with Educational Philosophy of Ancient Chinese Shuyuan

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**Abstract:** While artificial intelligence (AI) has brought an unprecedented revolution in efficiency and accessibility to modern education, it has simultaneously triggered profound structural and ethical problems. Chief among these are the alarming decline in humanistic literacy, the over-reliance on algorithmic learning, and the fundamental alienation of the true essence of education. As a historical paragon of traditional pedagogy, the ancient Chinese Shuyuan (academy) system has accumulated profound humanistic educational wisdom over thousands of years. This classical model emphasizes moral cultivation, holistic personal development, and the intrinsic value of the teacher-student relationship, thereby providing crucial traditional support for resolving contemporary educational predicaments. Starting from the core connotation and contemporary value of the Shuyuan philosophy, this paper systematically analyzes the practical challenges currently faced by education in the AI era, particularly focusing on the weakening of humanistic care, the erosion of independent critical thinking abilities, and the mechanization of learning processes. Furthermore, the study explores actionable practical paths for the organic integration of traditional Shuyuan wisdom with modern intelligent technology. By synthesizing classical pedagogical virtues with advanced digital tools, this research aims to construct a novel, humanistic-oriented educational paradigm centered on effective human-machine collaboration. Ultimately, this integrated approach seeks to lay a solid cultural foundation, mitigate the adverse effects of technological determinism, and provide robust practical references for the sustainable, high-quality development of global education in the new digital era.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence; modern education; shuyuan philosophy; humanistic value; human-machine collaboration

## 1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has injected new vitality into the modernization of education. However, its instrumental rationality has led modern education into significant challenges: algorithms and data dominate the entire educational process, the emotional connection between teachers and students is weakened by technical intermediaries, students' critical thinking and innovative abilities face the risk of homogenization under the standardized discipline of algorithms, and education is increasingly deviating from the fundamental purpose of cultivating integrated individuals. Faced with the alienation crisis of modern education, it has become a consensus in academic circles to explore solutions from the fine traditional Chinese culture. Having evolved over thousands of years, ancient Chinese Shuyuan has forged a distinctive educational philosophy and talent cultivation model [1]. The educational philosophy of ancient Chinese Shuyuan, centered on humanistic nurturing, rooted in moral cultivation, and oriented towards speculative inquiry, accurately responds to the urgent demand for value rationality and humanistic care in education in the AI era. The in-depth integration of Chinese Shuyuan's wisdom and artificial intelligence technology not only opens up new ideas for solving

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educational dilemmas in the AI era but also enriches the cultural connotation of the modern education system with Chinese characteristics.

Based on this, this paper focuses on the core proposition of empowering modern education in the AI era with the educational philosophy of ancient Chinese Shuyuan. It sorts out the core connotation of Chinese Shuyuan's spirit, analyzes the practical challenges of education in the AI era, and explores the practical paths for their integration. The aim is to construct a modern educational ecosystem that advocates ethical technology and takes humanism as its soul. By delving into the philosophical underpinnings of Shuyuan, we can identify how its principles can be harmoniously integrated with contemporary educational practices. This integration seeks to address the pressing issues of the AI era, such as the erosion of personal connections and the risk of intellectual homogenization, by fostering an environment where ethical considerations and humanistic values are paramount. Through this approach, the paper aspires to contribute to the development of an educational framework that not only embraces technological advancements but also prioritizes the holistic development of individuals.

## **2. The Core Connotation and Contemporary Value of Chinese Shuyuan's Philosophy**

As a distinctive form of private educational institution in ancient China, Shuyuan represents the concentrated essence of traditional Chinese educational wisdom. Over thousands of years, it has accumulated a rich educational spirit and cultural connotation. In today's context, where artificial intelligence is reshaping the educational landscape, the humanistic core, educational philosophy, and teaching traditions inherent in the spirit of Shuyuan hold significant contemporary value [2]. They are crucial for addressing the instrumental tendencies of modern education and for re-establishing its humanistic foundation. Furthermore, these elements provide essential support in tackling the challenges associated with the "soul loss" predicament that can arise in intelligent education systems, ensuring that education remains a deeply human-centered endeavor [3].

### *2.1. The Educational Tenet of "Cultivating to Recover One's True Nature"*

The core principle of Shuyuan education is centered on "cultivating to recover one's true nature," with fundamental objectives that include understanding ethical relationships, nurturing moral character, and pursuing truth [4]. This philosophy stands in opposition to the transformation of education into a mere tool for achieving fame and fortune. The educational guidelines emphasize the importance of explaining the principles of righteousness to cultivate oneself, and then extending such virtues to others. This approach underscores the unity of imparting knowledge and moral cultivation, focusing on the awakening of human nature and the perfection of personality through the study of classical texts and moral nurturing. This educational philosophy transcends basic skill training, orienting education towards the holistic development of individuals. It encompasses emotional nurturing, rational enlightenment, moral cultivation, and spiritual transcendence. Such an approach aligns closely with the core goal of cultivating well-rounded individuals in the era of artificial intelligence. The philosophy of "education for recovering one's true nature" serves as a reminder that the essence of education is to cultivate individuals rather than produce tools. Its core lies in safeguarding the subjectivity and integrity of human beings, thereby providing profound cultural support for correcting the instrumental tendency of education. This approach ensures that education remains a process of personal development and moral growth.

### *2.2. The Teaching Tradition of "Seeking Truth through Speculation"*

The Chinese Shuyuan has developed a distinctive teaching tradition characterized by independent learning and comprehension, debating to resolve doubts, and gathering for lectures and exchanges. This approach fosters an academic atmosphere that emphasizes inclusiveness and the pursuit of truth through speculation. The tradition is centered on guiding students to question assumptions, engage in logical analysis, and

conduct in-depth inquiry. Its core objective is to cultivate independent and critical thinking abilities. This is particularly relevant in the current era, where students are increasingly susceptible to cognitive outsourcing due to the rapid availability of information and "standard answers" provided by intelligent technologies. The speculative teaching tradition of academies encourages students to break free from an over-reliance on algorithmic solutions, thereby nurturing the ability to resist the information cocoon effect. This aligns with the essential requirements for cultivating innovative talents in the age of artificial intelligence, where the ability to think independently and critically is more crucial than ever.

### *2.3. The Teacher-Student Relationship of "Learning and Growing Together in Association"*

Shuyuan education promotes a teacher-student relationship characterized by being both educators and friends, fostering an environment where learning and personal growth occur collaboratively. This approach dismantles the traditional hierarchical barriers associated with the "dignity of the teacher" found in conventional educational systems. Instead, it cultivates a learning atmosphere where teachers and students coexist closely, engaging in shared studies and forming profound emotional connections. Historical figures such as Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming exemplified this model by engaging in activities like studying classics in informal settings or participating in poetic gatherings and philosophical discussions with their students. These daily interactions facilitated not only the transmission of knowledge but also the development of moral values and personal character. In the context of Shuyuan education, teachers serve as both knowledge disseminators and mentors who guide the moral and spiritual development of their students. The emotional and spiritual bonds formed between teachers and students are integral to the educational process. This tradition addresses the emotional disconnect often observed in modern education, particularly in the era of artificial intelligence, by offering a paradigm that emphasizes the importance of humanistic warmth and emotional bonds in education. Such a model is crucial for reconstructing the emotional connections between educators and learners, ensuring that education retains its essential humanistic qualities.

## **3. The Practical Challenges of Modern Education in the AI Era**

The integration of artificial intelligence into education presents significant opportunities for advancement, yet it also introduces a range of challenges. While AI technologies can enhance educational processes, they may inadvertently undermine the humanistic aspects of learning. This shift can lead to a reduction in the emphasis on humanistic care and a decline in the development of higher-order thinking skills. Furthermore, the ethical implications of AI in education cannot be overlooked, as they pose risks that need to be carefully managed. These challenges underscore the importance of incorporating the educational philosophies of ancient Chinese Shuyuan, which emphasize a balanced approach to education that values both technological and humanistic elements.

### *3.1. The Weakening of Humanistic Care and the Erosion of Education's Emotional Core*

The essence of education lies in the spiritual exchange and heart-to-heart dialogue between individuals, with emotional nurturing and humanistic care being its core elements. However, the AI-driven education model prioritizes efficiency, thereby reducing opportunities for meaningful face-to-face interactions between teachers and students. Chatbots and intelligent question-answering systems have increasingly supplanted the personalized guidance traditionally offered by teachers. Furthermore, algorithmic data analysis has overshadowed the attention to students' emotional well-being, transforming education into a mechanical process focused on information transmission and technical operations. This dehumanized approach undermines the emotional core of education, conflicting with the educational philosophy that emphasizes

emotional nurturing and spiritual integration. As a result, it becomes challenging to cultivate individuals with well-rounded personalities and deep humanistic sensibilities. The shift towards a more mechanized educational framework raises concerns about the future development of students' emotional and social skills, which are crucial for their overall growth and integration into society.

### *3.2. The Decline of Higher-Order Thinking and the Restriction of Students' Innovative Abilities*

Higher-order thinking abilities, such as critical thinking, innovative thinking, and logical reasoning, are fundamental components of human literacy and represent key objectives in modern educational systems [5–7]. The advanced capabilities of artificial intelligence in information retrieval, content generation, and answer provision offer students an efficient means of acquiring knowledge. However, this convenience can lead to a dependency on cognitive outsourcing. When students have easy access to vast amounts of information and standardized answers through AI, their motivation for independent thought, deep inquiry, and questioning diminishes significantly, resulting in a gradual weakening of their critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the content produced by artificial intelligence often relies on the imitation and reorganization of pre-existing data, which limits the emergence of original ideas that are rooted in individuals' unique life experiences. An over-reliance on AI can lead to a homogenization of innovative abilities, confining students within the cognitive frameworks established by algorithms. This situation contradicts the educational goals of fostering truth-seeking through speculation and nurturing individuality, as well as the essential educational requirement to cultivate innovative talents. Therefore, it is crucial to balance the use of AI with the development of students' independent cognitive abilities to ensure a well-rounded educational experience.

### *3.3. The Accumulation of Ethical Risks and the New Impact on Educational Equity*

The integration of artificial intelligence into the educational sector has introduced a range of ethical challenges that not only intensify existing educational inequalities but also present new obstacles to achieving fairness. One significant issue is algorithmic bias, which can entrench educational disparities. The data used to train AI systems often contain inherent social biases, leading to skewed identification and evaluation of students from diverse backgrounds, thereby fostering systemic discrimination [8–10]. Additionally, the privacy of students' data is at considerable risk. AI educational tools gather extensive amounts of personal and learning information from students, which can be susceptible to leaks, commercial exploitation, and excessive surveillance due to inadequate operational protocols. Furthermore, the 'intelligent divide' is becoming more pronounced. Disparities in the distribution of AI educational resources and the development of digital literacy across different regions and schools have exacerbated educational inequalities between various areas and institutions. Moreover, the integrity of academic systems is under threat. The widespread use of generative AI has increased the likelihood of plagiarism, cheating, and other dishonest practices, making them more challenging to detect. These ethical concerns pose a significant test to educational equity, and the educational philosophy of openness, inclusiveness, and shared learning offers valuable insights for addressing these challenges and ensuring fairness in education.

## **4. Practical Paths for Empowering Modern Education with Shuyuan's Educational Philosophy in the AI Era**

Empowering modern education in the AI era with the educational practice of Chinese Shuyuan is not merely a return to traditional methods, but rather an innovative evolution [11–13]. This approach builds upon the core principles of Shuyuan philosophy while integrating the unique capabilities of artificial intelligence technology. The goal is to foster a harmonious blend of traditional educational wisdom and contemporary technological advancements. This new educational paradigm emphasizes ethical technology, a

humanistic approach, and collaboration between humans and machines. It seeks to balance instrumental rationality with value rationality, addressing the challenges of alienation in intelligent education. By doing so, it aims to create a more holistic and effective educational environment that is well-suited to the demands of the modern world.

#### *4.1. Restructuring Educational Goals with the "Education for Recovering One's True Nature" to Balance Instrumental and Value Rationality*

Guided by the educational tenet of "cultivating to recover one's true nature," it is essential to move beyond the instrumental educational orientation that focuses solely on "producing tools." Instead, we should return to the core essence of education, which is to cultivate well-rounded individuals. This involves constructing a talent cultivation goal system that integrates both technological empowerment and humanistic nurturing [14–16]. On one hand, we should leverage the technological advantages of artificial intelligence by utilizing intelligent platforms to facilitate personalized learning paths and precise delivery of learning resources. This approach can significantly enhance teaching efficiency and the level of personalized instruction, making technology a valuable tool in the educational process. On the other hand, it is crucial to incorporate humanistic literacy, moral cultivation, and rational enlightenment into the core educational goals. This includes increasing the emphasis on humanistic education and seamlessly integrating traditional Chinese culture, ethics, and morality with professional courses. Such integration promotes the unity of knowledge acquisition and personal development. In educational practice, it is important to move away from the utilitarian focus on skills and scores alone, placing the all-round development of students at the forefront. The aim is to cultivate new talents who possess both professional capabilities and a strong sense of humanistic literacy and ethical awareness, ensuring that artificial intelligence technology consistently serves the fundamental goal of nurturing individuals.

#### *4.2. Innovating Teaching Models with the "Seeking Truth through Speculation" to Cultivate Students' Higher-Order Thinking Abilities*

Building on the traditional educational practices of independent learning, comprehension, and debate, there is a need to innovate the human-machine collaborative teaching model. In this model, artificial intelligence should be positioned as a supportive tool that aids in the educational process rather than replacing the critical thinking and inquiry skills of students. Initially, artificial intelligence can handle repetitive tasks such as the dissemination of basic knowledge and exercises, thereby freeing up time and energy for both teachers and students. This allows students to engage more deeply in independent inquiry and speculative communication. Furthermore, the role of teachers should evolve from being mere transmitters of knowledge to becoming designers and facilitators of learning experiences. They should create tasks that are resistant to AI automation, focusing on deep understanding and original expression. This approach encourages students to critically engage with AI, question its outputs, and verify information from multiple sources. Additionally, an integrated online-offline platform should be developed to facilitate speculative communication [2]. By drawing on traditional lecture systems, organizing classroom debates, and hosting academic salons, students are encouraged to think independently and express their opinions freely. This creates an inclusive academic environment that values truth-seeking through speculation and addresses the issue of students relying too heavily on external cognitive resources.

#### *4.3. Reshaping the Teacher-Student Relationship with the "Learning and Growing Together in Association" to Safeguard Humanistic Warmth of Education*

In the realm of education, it is essential to maintain the core value of interpersonal interaction. By integrating the convenience of artificial intelligence technology with the traditional teacher-student relationship, characterized by mutual learning and growth, we can reconstruct the emotional bond and spiritual communication between teachers and students. This approach addresses the "dehumanization" crisis that education faces in the

AI era. Artificial intelligence can be utilized to expand the channels and forms of teacher-student interaction, enabling real-time communication and precise guidance through online seminar rooms and intelligent feedback systems. This innovation helps overcome the limitations of time and space that traditional education encounters. Simultaneously, it is crucial to ensure ample opportunities for offline teacher-student interaction. Regular activities such as tutor meetings, group research, and classic reading sessions should be organized to recreate the learning environment where teachers and students engage closely and grow together [17]. This setting allows teachers to deeply understand students' emotional states and learning challenges, providing personalized humanistic care and guidance. Teachers should act as "guardians of the soul," nurturing students' minds through their words and actions. By doing so, they can build a harmonious, equal, and symbiotic new teacher-student relationship, achieving an organic unity of technological convenience and humanistic warmth. This balanced approach ensures that education remains a deeply personal and enriching experience, even in an era dominated by technological advancements.

## 5. Conclusion

The development of education in the AI era represents a harmonious blend of technological empowerment and humanistic values. Artificial intelligence offers new avenues for educational reform, yet the core humanistic essence of education remains steadfast. The educational spirit of ancient Chinese Shuyuan is a valuable component of traditional Chinese culture, embodying principles such as "cultivating to recover one's true nature," a teaching tradition of "seeking truth through speculation," a teacher-student relationship characterized by "learning and growing together in association," and a school-running philosophy of "academic autonomy." These principles provide rich humanistic educational wisdom, addressing the core demand of education in the AI era to transcend instrumental limitations and return to the essence of nurturing individuals. This approach offers cultural support and ideological resources for addressing challenges such as the diminishing of humanistic care and critical thinking skills due to intelligent technology. Empowering modern education with the educational philosophy of ancient Chinese Shuyuan represents a creative transformation and innovative development of traditional educational wisdom, integrating tradition with modernity. In practice, by restructuring educational goals with "education for recovering one's true nature," innovating teaching models with "seeking truth through speculation," reshaping the teacher-student relationship with "learning and growing together in association," and optimizing educational governance with "academic autonomy," we can achieve a deep integration of artificial intelligence technology and Shuyuan's spirit. This balance between instrumental rationality and value rationality can fundamentally resolve the multiple challenges faced by education in the AI era, constructing a new educational paradigm of human-machine collaboration, humanistic soul, and all-round development. Looking forward, as artificial intelligence technology advances and Shuyuan's spirit continues to be revitalized, their integration will become more profound and diverse. In this new era, it is essential to actively embrace artificial intelligence technology, leveraging its advantages to empower education and promote its digital and intelligent transformation. Simultaneously, we must adhere to the humanistic essence of education, drawing wisdom from traditional Chinese culture, activating the contemporary value of ancient Chinese Shuyuan's spirit, and allowing technology to shine with the glory of humanity. Only by achieving the resonance of technology and humanism can we cultivate more "integrated individuals" with professional capabilities, humanistic literacy, critical thinking, and innovative spirit. This will inject profound cultural strength into the construction of an educational powerhouse and contribute valuable insights and solutions to the development of education in the global AI era.

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