

# Educator's Sentiments and Time Values of Zhang Jian

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**Abstract:** As a preeminent patriotic industrialist and educator in modern and contemporary Chinese history, Zhang Jian not only ventured into industrial enterprises to improve people's livelihood during the exploration and practice of early modernization in China but also initiated educational endeavors, holding profuse educational thoughts and concepts. Zhang Jian's educationalist sentiments are manifested in such aspects as his aspiration for enlightening and strengthening the nation, his advocacy of morality and culture, and his pragmatic and innovative demeanor. Propagating Zhang Jian's educationalist sentiments not only contributes to our comprehensive and profound understanding of the essence, essentials, undertones, and characteristics of the spirit of educationalists in the new era but also facilitates our steadfast establishment of the historical sense of mission and responsibility for educating talents for the Party and the country, and ultimately promotes the high-quality development of Chinese education and Chinese-style modernization.

**Keywords:** Educator's Sentiments; Time Values; Zhang Jian.

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## 1. Introduction

Zhang Jian, a distinguished and patriotic industrialist in modern and contemporary China, played a pivotal role in founding industries aimed at enhancing the livelihood of the populace during the early stages of China's modernization. His endeavors exemplified a robust entrepreneurial spirit, earning him recognition by General Secretary Xi Jinping as a paragon among patriotic entrepreneurs, a pioneer within national entrepreneurship, and an exemplary model for private entrepreneurs. Concurrently, Zhang Jian was also an illustrious educator in modern history. Upholding the principle that "Education is like father and industry is like mother", he personally initiated, sustained and endowed more than 400 educational institutions at all levels. He established a comprehensive education system spanning from primary school, secondary school to university, and from general education, vocational education to social education in Nantong. The sentiments Zhang Jian held towards education—akin to his entrepreneurial spirit—possess significant guiding value and enlightening implications for our contemporary era [1].

## 2. Zhang Jian: A Great Educator in Modern Times

Zhang Jian is recognized not only for his remarkable contributions to the establishment and management of educational institutions but also for his profound insights and theories regarding education.

The educational endeavors undertaken by Zhang Jian are vivid. In 1895, he founded the Dasheng Cotton Mill at Tangzha Port, adjacent to the Tonglu Canal. This venture marked a significant milestone in its development, culminating in its operational launch in April 1899 after four years of rigorous fundraising efforts. Utilizing the substantial profits generated by Dasheng Cotton Mill as a foundation, Zhang Jian began to conceptualize a new type of educational system. His vision was comprehensive and systematic; it encompassed pedagogical training followed by primary schools, secondary schools, universities, vocational education, and social education—aiming to construct a relatively

complete educational framework characterized by coherence, orderliness, complementarity, practicality, and applicability within Nantong. During his tenure from 1912 to 1920 alone, an average of 24 primary schools were established annually due to his initiatives. By 1922, this number had reached an impressive total of 350 primary schools. Industrial education under Zhang's guidance prioritized community welfare. The vocational programs he instituted were distinctive in their close alignment with Nantong's economic and social development needs. In addition to establishing training institutions focused on politics and law enforcement—as well as sectors such as sericulture (silk production), childcare services for women's employment opportunities like nickel plating—he also introduced specialized fields including surveying and mapping, civil engineering, banking among others. Moreover, specialized institutions such as textile schools, agricultural colleges, commercial academies, medical institutes, Hehai Engineering Specialized School, and Ling Gong Xue She (the first professional opera school in modern Chinese history) emerged under his leadership. Vocational education in Nantong played a significant demonstrative role and exerted considerable influence throughout the country during that period [2]. Zhang Jian not only emphasized formal education but also placed great importance on engaging social education that was accessible and impactful. To this end, he established museums and libraries; founded Ling Gong Xue She; constructed parks and public stadiums; and organized sports meetings biennially to promote the positive trend of national physical fitness.

Zhang Jian's ideology on establishing education is profound. As one of the pioneers and founders of new-style education in modern China, Zhang Jian was not merely a pragmatic individual, but also a thinker who deeply contemplated the modernization of early education. Firstly, these schools prioritize livelihood as their utmost concern. Zhang Jian proposed that the fundamental mission of running a school lies in serving the people's livelihood. School education should not serve any other purpose but to address the livelihood issues faced by the populace. The principle of "Livelihood First" has been a central tenet in Zhang Jian's educational philosophy and serves as both the foundational starting point and anchor for his approach to education [5].

Secondly, enlightening the nation is his primary objective for education. Zhang Jian viewed strengthening the country, enriching its people, and fostering public wisdom as essential purposes for operating schools. He believed that only by cultivating public awareness among citizens, officials, and scholars could we enhance overall societal quality and foster patriotism. Thirdly, it is imperative to adapt to local economic and social development requirements. Education—regardless of type, level, scale, or duration—should be grounded in principles that align with and serve local economic and social needs. Fourthly, practice constitutes the main mode of teaching. Zhang Jian placed significant emphasis on knowledge application through field practice for students; he advocated for prioritizing practical exercises to improve skill acquisition within real working environments. Fifthly, schools should commit to an educational policy promoting all-round development encompassing moral character, intellectual growth, and physical fitness—with moral education taking precedence. Furthermore, school education ought to empower students not only to become morally upright but also academically proficient while excelling in various other domains.

### 3. The Connotation of Zhang Jian's Educator's Sentiments

Zhang Jian's sentiments as an educator are reflected in several key aspects: firstly, a sincere commitment to enlightening and empowering the nation; secondly, a dedication to respecting virtue and promoting culture through an emphasis on the moral development of students; thirdly, a spirit of pragmatism and innovation; fourthly, perseverance; fifthly, originality and refinement; sixthly, a mindset of learning from others' strengths; and seventhly, a heartfelt affection for students akin to that for his own children. Zhang Jian asserts that education is fundamental to unlocking human wisdom and serves as the cornerstone of patriotism. He articulated his motivation for dedicating himself to both industry and education by stating, "Coming from humble beginnings without any notable background, I had not previously engaged in extensive studies related to business or industry. However, upon observing China's declining national strength coupled with increasing foreign aggression, I felt an intense passion arise within me. This compelled me to enter the business realm with determination—devoting all my efforts towards bridging academia and industry while striving to establish a genuinely self-reliant foundation for China.[4]" In various contexts — whether delivering speeches at opening ceremonies or graduation events or through relevant documents and correspondence — he consistently emphasized the paramount importance of moral education. Fully aware of the principle that cultural cultivation fosters personal growth while enriching society through knowledge strengthens national identity, he vigorously established numerous educational initiatives alongside cultural undertakings. In the process of managing schools and establishing educational frameworks, Zhang Jian consistently grounded his initiatives in the specific context of Nantong. He made steady progress while emphasizing relevance, applicability, and effectiveness. Moreover, he demonstrated a remarkable ability to seek change and innovation through exploration. During the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, the people of Nantong faced not only challenging material conditions but also a deprived spiritual existence.

Developing education in such an environment was exceedingly difficult; however, Zhang Jian remained undeterred by these challenges. He adopted "One's demise should be due to diligent labor" as his guiding life motto [3]. His commitment to originality and refinement extended beyond industries to encompass schools and education. Zhang Jian articulated clear expectations for students' conduct and work ethic while placing significant emphasis on rewards and punishments within educational management practices. His approach to education encompassed both a courageous spirit of exploration and innovation as well as an advanced, open-minded attitude toward learning. From the perspective of promoting regional economic development, enhancing national quality, and cultivating urgently needed talents, Zhang Jian personally founded numerous schools with high hopes for young students. His guidance included not only warm advice and ardent expectations but also methodological support, detailed instructions, and stringent requirements—elements that fully reflected his dual nature of kindness coupled with strictness.

### 4. The Contemporary Value of Zhang Jian's Educator's Sentiments

Zhang Jian's educational sentiments represent a beacon of knowledge and wisdom that awakens people's consciousness, as well as an inspiring force that ignites their emotional connection to homeland and country, invigorating their spirits. His contributions and presence in the field of education are profoundly significant. Advancing, developing, and innovating the cultural tradition of traditional educational thought within the context of China's modernization is precisely aligned with General Secretary Xi Jinping's proposed scientific methodology known as "Two Integrations"—the integration of Marxist fundamental principles with China's specific realities and its rich traditional culture.

First and foremost, advancing Zhang Jian's sentiments as an educator is essential for deepening our understanding of the significant concepts and rich connotations associated with the spirit of education in the new era. In his letter to outstanding teachers across the nation on Teachers' Day 2023, General Secretary Xi Jinping introduced the pivotal concept of "educator's spirit" within contemporary China and provided a profound analysis of six key aspects that characterize this spirit: idealism and belief, moral integrity, educational wisdom, diligence, benevolence, and a commitment to teaching. This framework not only represents an inheritance and evolution of Marxist educational thought but also serves as a highly condensed embodiment of the values, noble qualities, professional attitudes, and love for life exhibited by generations of Chinese educators, distinguished educators and exemplary teachers throughout their extensive teaching careers. This synthesis reflects both an inheritance from Marxist educational principles and a concentrated summary of value systems, virtuous characteristics, dedicated approaches to education, and affection for students cultivated over time by numerous educators in China during their prolonged engagement in educational practices. It integrates elements from China's traditional educational culture while simultaneously embodying the essence of contemporary pedagogical ideals. Although distinct characteristics define the spirit of Chinese educators in this new era compared to their traditional counterparts, there exists a coherent

developmental trajectory alongside considerable consistency in value systems. Collectively emphasized are themes such as patriotism coupled with national strength; moral cultivation; perseverance; and innovation. Understanding both the historical origins and content underlying Zhang Jian's sentiments regarding education is crucial for appreciating these developments fully.

Secondly, promoting Zhang Jian's sentiments as an educator is advantageous for reinforcing the fundamental objective of cultivating builders and laborers for Chinese modernization. The core interest and essence of Zhang Jian's educational philosophy lie in enlightening and nurturing talents for the nation. The contemporary practice of Chinese-style modernization necessitates a substantial number of skilled individuals who can fully utilize their intellect to design a blueprint for a better and more fulfilling life. This task represents both the responsibility and obligation of educators in this new era. Consequently, it is imperative that educators cultivate a strong sense of historical mission and accountability towards educating individuals for the Party and the country as we embark on this new journey.

Propagating the sentiments of educator Zhang Jian is instrumental in enhancing the awareness of aspiring to be an educator and embodying the ideals of an "Esteemed Teacher" in the new era. The majority of teachers serve as implementers of the fundamental task of teaching and educating individuals, while also acting as practitioners, embodiment, promoters, developers, and innovators of the spirit inherent to educators. As leaders among their peers in education, these educators represent guiding figures for career growth and development. Consequently, it is essential to inspire teachers to embrace the spirit and character exemplified by educators like Zhang Jian. They should resolutely commit themselves to educational ideals and beliefs within a vigorous and passionate teaching practice. This commitment will enhance their personal strength in teaching, cultivate a pure and noble spiritual world, accumulate extraordinary wisdom in pedagogy, develop exceptional abilities for profound learning, and ultimately strive towards becoming "Esteemed" and outstanding teachers.

## 5. Conclusion

Advancing the educational ideals of Zhang Jian is instrumental in promoting the high-quality development of

Chinese education and facilitating Chinese-style modernization. As a distinguished industrialist, educator, philanthropist, and social activist, Zhang Jian devoted significant efforts to establishing various types of schools at all levels. His objective was to enhance local autonomy in Nantong by meticulously nurturing practical talents across different strata. His philosophies and initiatives represent some of the earliest calls for and vivid expressions of the strength inherent in Chinese education as well as its early modernization. Let us inherit Zhang Jian's relentless spirit for educational empowerment and modernization, thereby striving to advance the high-quality development associated with Chinese-style modernization while cultivating exceptional construction talents.

## Acknowledgments

2023 University Philosophy and Social Science Research of Jiangsu Province, General Project: Research on the Construction of the Second English Classroom in Universities Based on Zhang Jian Culture (Project ID: 2023SJYB1732).

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