

# The Potential Role of University Trade Unions in Supporting the Development of New Quality Productive Forces

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## Abstract

New quality productive forces are advanced forms of productivity that prioritize innovation and move away from traditional economic growth models and pathways for productivity development. A series of important discussions by General Secretary Xi Jinping on new quality productive forces deepens our understanding of the laws governing productivity development, providing a scientific guide for promoting high-quality development on the new journey ahead. Human society continuously advances through the movement of contradictions; the demand for new types of laborers is gradually increasing, the tools of labor are constantly being updated, and the nature of labor objects is also evolving. Coupled with the self-reform and innovation of university trade unions, these factors urge university trade unions to take an active role in the development of new quality productive forces. Compared to other mass organizations, university trade unions have distinct advantages in human resources, organization, and positional strength to support the development of new quality productive forces. University trade unions can offer faculty and staff digital and multidisciplinary educational training to reinforce their talent advantages, organize innovative competitions to cultivate a positive atmosphere for innovation, and employ data-driven decision-making and management to enhance organizational advantages. Thus, they can better contribute to the development of new quality productive forces with the “power of university trade unions.”

## Keywords

New Quality Productive Forces, University Trade Unions, Innovation

## 1. Introduction

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party has embarked on a new

journey toward the comprehensive construction of a modern socialist country and the promotion of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The core and urgent task in achieving the grand goals of modernization and national rejuvenation is further liberating and developing social productivity. Developing new quality productive forces is the need of the times and an inevitable choice for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Unions are an important social pillar of socialist state power and are one of the key entities in modern state governance; therefore, they should contribute to the development of new quality productive forces. As grassroots unions, university trade unions in particular should take active measures in the development of new quality productive forces.

This article aims to present innovative ideas and practical methodologies for university trade unions to catalyze the advancement of new qualitative productive forces, with the ultimate goal of fostering improved development for both universities and society as a whole. To provide a clearer explanation of how University Trade Unions can facilitate the development of new quality productive forces, firstly, this article explains the concept of new quality productive forces; secondly, the underlying reasons why university trade unions advocate for the advancement of new quality productive forces are clarified; thirdly, an exploration is conducted into the distinct advantages that university trade unions possess in fostering the growth of new quality productive forces; finally, pathways for university trade unions to promote the development of new qualitative productive forces are proposed.

## **2. The Basic Concept of New Quality Productive Forces**

The term “New Quality Productive Forces” was proposed by President Xi Jinping during his inspection and research tour in Heilongjiang Province in September 2023. New Quality Productive Forces represent a new type of advanced productivity that is compatible with the new development philosophy. Granting a leading role to innovation, they mark a break with traditional economic growth models and development pathways for productive forces and feature a high level of technology, efficiency, and quality.

They are born out of revolutionary breakthroughs in technology, the innovative allocation of production factors, and the in-depth transformation and upgrading of industry. They are primarily based on the transformation of laborers, the instruments of labor, and the subjects of labor, as well as their optimal combination. A central hallmark of these forces is a significant increase in total factor productivity, and their defining characteristic is innovation, with a key focus on quality. In essence, they represent advanced productivity.

As a tangible expression of advanced productive forces, the New Quality Productive Forces represent the Chinese innovation and practical application of Marxist productivity theory. They are the fundamental results of the convergence and breakthroughs in scientific and technological innovations.

The “newness” of these forces manifests primarily in new technologies, new

models, new industries, new business formats, new domains, new competition tracks, new driving forces, and new advantages. Meanwhile, their “quality” is mainly embodied in high efficiency, high productivity, and high standards. The first essential element of the New Quality Productive Forces is a workforce of higher quality, which necessitates greater knowledge and skills from laborers. The driving force behind these forces lies in the instruments of labor with a higher technological content, specifically new types of production tools that are smarter, more efficient, lower in carbon emissions, and safer.

The material foundation of the New Quality Productive Forces consists of a broader range of labor objects, which extend beyond tangible substances to include information, data, and knowledge as new labor objects.

The New Quality Productive Forces represent a new type and structure of productivity characterized by advanced technology, high quality, high efficiency, and sustainability. They constitute a previously unseen category and structure of productive forces that, compared to traditional productive forces, exhibit higher technological levels, better quality, greater efficiency, and greater sustainability.

### **3. The Actual Motives Behind University Trade Unions Supporting the Development of New Quality Productive Forces**

New quality productive forces are proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping in response to both domestic and international conditions and the objective needs of China’s modernization development. The development of new quality productive forces requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders. The reasons why university trade unions should support the development of new quality productive forces can be explored from three perspectives.

#### **3.1. The Dimension of Basic Contradictions in Human Society**

Contradictions are the fundamental driving force behind the development of things. The continuous advancement of human society ultimately stems from the movement of social contradictions, with the basic contradictions of society playing a crucial role—namely, the contradictions between productivity and production relations, as well as between the economic base and the superstructure. Their movement and development constitute the basic laws of history, which include the principle that production relations must correspond to the state of productivity and that the superstructure must adapt to the economic base. When productivity further develops, production relations must change to adapt accordingly. The combination of all aspects of the dominant production relations in societal development forms the economic base, which in turn determines the superstructure. This means that for society to develop healthily, the superstructure must change to accommodate the development of the economic base. When the production relations and superstructure undergo transformations, labor relations and the existing union systems must also change. Unions are the products

designed to resolve such conflicts, and to better address new contradictions, the reform of unions becomes necessary. As grassroots unions, university trade unions consist mainly of intellectuals who possess active innovative thinking and strong creativity. Therefore, the new problems and contradictions arising from innovation cannot be compared to those faced by other mass organizations. This means that university trade unions must address a series of new problems generated by technological innovation, such as data ownership, while also creating a positive working environment that enhances happiness and stimulates ongoing innovation. This demands corresponding reforms in the systems and regulations established to mediate conflicts within the unions, making it clear that the union's support for the development of new quality productive forces is an essential pathway for resolving contradictions.

### **3.2. The Dimension of Constitutive Elements of New Quality Productive Forces**

The productivity system is formed during the labor process and consists of laborers, labor means, and labor objects. "New quality productive forces represent a new type of advanced productivity that is compatible with the new development philosophy. Granting a leading role to innovation, they mark a break with traditional economic growth models and development pathways for productive forces and feature a high level of technology, efficiency, and quality. They are born out of revolutionary breakthroughs in technology, the innovative allocation of production factors, and the in-depth transformation and upgrading of industry. They are primarily based on the transformation of laborers, the instruments of labor, and the subjects of labor, as well as their optimal combination. A central hallmark of these forces is a significant increase in total factor productivity, and their defining characteristic is innovation, with a key focus on quality. In essence, they represent advanced productivity (2024)." Laborers are the most active element in new quality productive forces, and if their motivation and creativity can be fully harnessed, it will surely provide a continuous driving force for the development of new quality productive forces. Unions maintain a close connection with laborers. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) was established to represent the interests of workers and has significantly contributed to the Party's cause by fighting against imperialism and warlords. The current development of new quality productive forces also relies on diligent laborers. However, unlike traditional laborers, the laborers needed for new quality productive forces must possess high skills, strong creative thinking, and lifelong learning capabilities. University trade unions congregate a group of such high-quality faculty and staff, aligning perfectly with the new types of laborers required for the development of new quality productive forces.

### **3.3. The Dimension of Self-Revolution of University Trade Unions**

The development of new quality productive forces requires collaborative efforts

from all parties. As part of mass organizations, unions have an intrinsic responsibility to support the development of new quality productive forces as part of high-quality development, which is also a long-term political task. Upholding high-quality development necessitates comprehensive deepening of reforms across various fields and dimensions, and the high-quality development of university trade unions must naturally involve continuous reform and innovation. Questions regarding how to reform, what to reform, and the specifics of the reform are essential considerations for union self-reform and innovation. The development of new quality productive forces provides new ideas for the reform of university trade unions. Analyzing the components of new quality productive forces reveals that laborers, labor objects, and labor means are all potential entry points for reform and innovation within university trade unions. The labor objects, previously confined to faculty and staff and their employment relationships, must gradually extend to include data and the protection of intellectual property rights. Meanwhile, labor means are becoming increasingly intelligent and automated. In summary, university trade unions must consciously utilize the spirit of reform to plan and advance union work, establishing appropriate management modes, operational mechanisms, and working methods through these reforms to ensure that various high-quality production elements flow smoothly toward the development of new quality productive forces, thereby promoting their growth.

#### **4. The Practical Foundations for University Trade Unions Supporting the Development of New Quality Productive Forces**

In the process of developing new quality productive forces, we must assess whether university trade unions can effectively contribute and identify the conditions that facilitate this contribution. By clarifying these questions, we can address how to provide support.

##### **4.1. Human Resource Advantages**

Humans are the primary element in the development of productivity, and new quality productive forces cannot exist without a significant number of high-skill, high-quality, and creative laborers. Without such a workforce, the formation and growth of new quality productive forces would be impossible. University trade unions are grassroots organizations established under the leadership of the Party, encompassing various categories of staff including professional teachers, administrative personnel, and support staff. The members of university staff exhibit distinctive collective characteristics:

**(A) High Research and Innovation Capabilities:** Most university staff have a higher education background—many possess bachelor's degrees, while numerous others hold doctoral degrees or doctoral degrees. Most have received systematic academic training, which equips them with solid theoretical foundations and practical experience in their respective fields. This strong academic background

allows them to conduct high-quality scientific research. Moreover, the academic environment encourages innovation and independent research, leading them to actively participate in national and international academic exchanges, adopt the latest research findings, and stay at the forefront of academia. The high standards set by the institution for teaching and research further encourage ongoing improvements in work methods and research tools, thereby continuously fueling technological innovation.

**(B) Strong Collaborative Abilities:** Though the work environment in universities may seem simpler than others, university faculty must engage in teamwork for both research projects and teaching assignments. They coordinate efforts, allocate tasks, and actively listen to and understand different perspectives, ensuring effective communication that facilitates the smooth advancement of research and teaching objectives. This collaborative skill is essential for the new types of laborers required to advance new quality productive forces.

**(C) A Strong Commitment to Lifelong Learning:** Continual learning and self-updating are critical for maintaining competitiveness and innovative capacity in dynamic academic and educational fields. University staff strive to keep abreast of the latest knowledge by participating in various academic training programs, seminars, and professional development courses, which help them acquire new knowledge and skills. This lifelong learning mentality not only drives individuals to continually enhance their knowledge and skills, but also provides the necessary support and momentum for the development of new quality productive forces.

## 4.2. Organizational Advantages

The trade union of colleges and universities is a mass organization of voluntary union of faculty and staff under the leadership of the party committee of the university, safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the vast number of faculty and staff, a bridge and link between the party and the masses of workers, and an important pillar of the construction and development of colleges and universities (Wu, 2023). University trade unions typically adopt a three-tier organizational structure: school unions, secondary branch unions, and union groups (department unions). The primary union organization is the school union, which operates under the guidance of the school Party committee and higher-level unions, directing lower-level union organizations in their work. Secondary branch unions are set up according to the organizational frameworks of secondary units—like college unions established in various colleges. Finally, union groups are formed based on academic disciplines or work departments, covering all faculty and staff within the university. This three-tier organizational structure demonstrates how university trade unions unite and consolidate a large body of faculty and staff, establishing a scientific, rigorous, and comprehensive organizational system that possesses strong mobilization, coordination, and organizational capacity. Such a comprehensive organizational network grants unions a distinct advantage when promoting the development of new quality productive forces, which

is mainly showcased through:

**(A) Rapid Information Transmission and Feedback:** University trade unions can leverage their organizational system to mobilize faculty and staff promptly, effectively linking various resources collaboratively to promote high-quality development across the university. As a bridge between faculty/staff and school management, unions can quickly gather and relay the opinions and needs of faculty/staff back to the institution. This bidirectional flow of information enhances communication efficiency and organizational transparency.

**(B) Strong Resource Integration Capability:** University trade unions can effectively integrate a variety of internal resources—human, material, and financial—such as research equipment and libraries, to provide comprehensive support for faculty and staff. This integration facilitates resource sharing and collaborative action, thereby improving overall work efficiency and providing organizational backing for the innovative development of faculty.

### 4.3. Positional Advantages

**The positional advantages of university trade unions manifest in three main areas:**

**(A) Strong Policy Influence:** University trade unions, as voluntarily formed organizations representing faculty and staff, play a vital role in the democratic governance and management of institutions, possessing significant policy influence. They can represent the interests of faculty/staff, participate in the formulation and revision of policies related to faculty welfare, and ensure the protection of their legitimate rights so that faculty can fully commit to their work and create greater value. Additionally, unions can present policy suggestions to school leadership and government departments to secure more support and resources conducive to the development of new quality productive forces. For example, by actively promoting various innovative incentive policies through faculty representative assemblies, they encourage faculty engagement in research and teaching innovations.

**(B) Superior Promotion Resources:** University trade unions enjoy unique advantages in communication and promotion. Many union members include representatives from central or provincial publicity teams, who possess robust theoretical knowledge and compelling presentation skills. They can convey the latest theoretical advancements in an accessible manner, empowering faculty and staff with cutting-edge knowledge that guides practice and promotes the development of new quality productive forces, ultimately enhancing national competitiveness. Furthermore, union members may also include role models or outstanding workers known for their willingness to innovate in technology and improve processes, which contributes to technological advancement and optimization of production flows. University trade unions must always place great importance on the role of labor models and outstanding workers.” and actively promote local examples, thereby imparting advanced techniques and experiences to colleagues, enhancing

their skill levels, and fostering a positive culture of innovation.

**(C) Strong Training and Educational Foundations:** Universities offer numerous educational and training opportunities annually, including professional development training allowing staff to master the latest methodologies and improve their vocational skills. There are also psychological training programs aimed at promoting mental health. Given the considerable psychological pressure faced by faculty and staff in teaching and research, psychological health training helps alleviate stress and avoid the decline in creativity that anxiety may cause. Furthermore, it enhances cognitive flexibility and adaptability, enabling faculty and staff to better handle changes and embrace new concepts, which is essential for driving technological innovation.

## 5. Practical Paths for University Trade Unions to Support the Development of New Quality Productive Forces

“Developing new quality productive forces is an inherent requirement and an important focal point for promoting high-quality development (2024)” (People’s Daily, 2024), which is an objective demand in the new era and the new journey. The primary distinction between one era and another often lies not in the nature of the labor objects but rather in the differences in laborers and production means. Understanding who produces and what is produced will clarify the pathways for university trade unions to assist in the development of new quality productive forces.

### 5.1. Providing Digital Skills and Multidisciplinary Education and Training

The entire history of the world is essentially the process by which human beings create through their labor and to possess and utilize the means of production, we need a large number of technically literate individuals. The new quality productive forces require a higher standard concerning the elements of productivity compared to previous models. This is particularly evident in that laborers must exhibit higher quality of skills, while production means should embody features of information technology, digitization, and intelligence, with data and information becoming critical labor objects. “Laborers must possess digital literacy and master digital skills to operate, control, and maintain digital tools and equipment, thus becoming components of the new quality productive forces.” (Xiao, 2024). To adapt to the trends of technological development, our laborers need solid foundations in scientific knowledge and a keen understanding of cutting-edge technology. It is imperative that they become proficient in high-tech labor means to improve new labor objects and thereby facilitate the formation and growth of new quality productive forces. This means that universities must focus on their human talent and leverage their existing advantages by providing multifaceted education and training for faculty and staff who are already highly specialized and eager to learn. On one hand, university trade unions should offer not only traditional



vocational training but also specialized digital skills training in emerging technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things. This training will not only help staff master the latest technologies but also enhance their adaptability in the new technological landscape, ultimately improving overall productivity. At the same time, it is essential to incorporate ethics training into technological education; only through benevolent technology can technological productivity truly benefit humanity. On the other hand, providing multidisciplinary training to faculty will equip them with the background knowledge necessary for solving complex problems, thus fostering innovation and creativity.

## 5.2. Creating an Atmosphere for Innovation and Creativity

The key to developing new quality productive forces lies in the transformation of the mode of production, which heavily depends on scientific and technological innovation (Xie et al., 2024). One significant question that university trade unions must address is how to cultivate innovative thinking and stimulate the innovative capabilities of faculty and staff. On one hand, engaging in “competition” can promote “innovation.” University trade unions can regularly host innovation competitions and creative workshops to encourage faculty to propose novel ideas and solutions, thus enhancing their innovative capabilities and creative thinking. However, to fully unleash the innovative power of faculty, there must be corresponding incentive and fault-tolerant mechanisms for innovation. University trade unions can use their policy influence to continuously advocate for improved innovation reward and fault-tolerance mechanisms, thereby fostering a culture of innovation among laborers.

On the other hand, it is crucial to support innovation with empathy. Innovation inherently involves significant pressure for faculty, and university trade unions must provide mental health support services. Union psychological assistance in the digital age can enhance work efficiency through big data and artificial intelligence (Cai, 2024). In addition to physical psychological support centers, utilizing online consultation and smart applications can help staff relieve stress and ensure their mental well-being, enabling sustained innovation.

## 5.3. Digitalizing Decision-Making and Management

Improving labor productivity primarily involves collaboration, division of labor, and the application of machinery or scientific power, and university trade unions need to fully utilize their organizational advantages. Merely relying on traditional communication methods limits the ability of unions to maximize their organizational strengths. Therefore, university trade unions should adeptly use technology to enhance their organizational efficacy and advance the development of new quality productive forces. In terms of decision-making and management, it is vital to implement data-driven approaches. On one hand, introducing big data analytics tools will facilitate intelligent management, allowing for a better understanding of faculty needs and the creation of personalized services and activity plans,

thereby enhancing the scientific and precise nature of decision-making and improving management efficiency and service quality. On the other hand, establishing virtual collaboration and participation platforms can enhance faculty involvement and interactivity. This approach allows faculty to share knowledge and exchange experiences across time and space, boosting activity flexibility and coverage, thereby fostering the union's cohesiveness and influence, and providing a continuous impetus for the development of new quality productive forces.

## 6. Conclusion

New quality productive forces represent a novel state of productivity emerging from the iterative enhancement of various productive factors, driven by a new wave of technological revolution and industrial transformation, with innovation playing a pivotal role. The advantages in talent, position, and organization that university trade unions possess create opportunities for technological innovation. Furthermore, the laborers required for new-quality productivity exhibit distinct characteristics of information and digitization. University trade unions facilitate the acquisition of digital skills and provide interdisciplinary education and training for laborers, thus reinforcing the talent base necessary for the advancement of new quality productive forces. Moreover, the contribution of university trade unions to productivity development necessitates a transition towards data-driven management and decision-making, harnessing technology to fully leverage organizational advantages. New quality productive forces signify an elevated combination of laborers, labor materials, labor objects, and their optimal arrangement. The role of university trade unions in fostering the growth of new productive force is a long-term commitment. While this paper primarily focuses on the labor factor in examining how university trade unions can support the advancement of new productive force, it is essential that future efforts also focus on optimizing labor materials and labor objects to further enhance the development of new productive force.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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