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The Social Architecture of Green Technology Governance: Digital Transformation, Labor Stratification and Green Digital Education in China's High-Tech Sector

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Abstract

Against China's dual carbon strategic agenda and the deep integration of digital economy and real manufacturing, green technological innovation has long been framed as an industrial economic driver for high-tech sectors. Yet insufficient scholarly attention has been paid to its intertwined social, labour and educational repercussions—core domains of social science research. Digital transformation and environmental regulation jointly reshape corporate green innovation incentives, while simultaneously restructuring labour markets, widening inter-regional social inequalities, and exposing systemic gaps in public green digital literacy education. Drawing on balanced provincial panel data covering 30 Chinese provincial-level high-tech industries from 2012 to 2022, this study constructs multi-dimensional composite indicators of digital transformation and environmental regulatory stringency via the entropy weight method. It empirically estimates the baseline impact of industrial digitalisation on green innovation, and systematically unpacks the moderating social mechanisms embedded within environmental policy enforcement. Heterogeneity analyses are implemented across high-tech sub-sectors and three major geographic zones (Eastern, Central, Western China). Macro panel findings are triangulated with micro firm-level questionnaire data, and three robustness strategies (variable substitution, instrumental variable estimation, lagged variable processing) mitigate endogeneity bias. The empirical results reveal three interlinked economic-socio-educational outcomes: (1) Digital transformation significantly raises both the quantity and quality of green patents within high-tech industries by reducing information frictions and optimising cross-

regional innovation resource allocation, yet it exacerbates labour skill stratification and creates uneven access to digital green training resources across regions; (2) Environmental regulatory intensity positively moderates the digitalisation-green innovation linkage, consistent with an extended Porter Hypothesis contextualised to digital societies; stringent environmental compliance pressures push firms to invest in digital low-carbon upgrades, but simultaneously erode employment security for low-skilled workers and highlight underinvestment in vocational green technology education; (3) Pronounced industrial and regional social heterogeneity exists: synergies between digital transformation and environmental governance (alongside associated labour and educational pressures) are most salient in electronic information manufacturing and Eastern coastal provinces, whereas aerospace manufacturing and Western inland regions fail to realise equitable green transition outcomes due to inadequate digital infrastructure and under-resourced public environmental education systems. This paper reconceptualises digital-green industrial dynamics through sociological stratification theory and public policy education frameworks, expanding the theoretical scope of the Porter Hypothesis into social science discourse. Beyond industrial policy recommendations, it delivers transferable global insights for inclusive labour governance and green digital curriculum design, offering cross-national lessons for social scientists and education practitioners studying sustainable industrial transitions.

Keywords: Digital Transformation; Green Innovation; Environmental Regulation; Labour Stratification; Green Digital Literacy Education; Social Equity; High-Tech Industry; Moderating Effect; Entropy Weight Method

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background: Industrial Green Transition as a Social and Educational Challenge

China's dual carbon targets (carbon peaking by 2030, carbon neutrality by 2060) have positioned green technological innovation as a national industrial priority. Existing industrial economics scholarship frames green innovation solely as a tool for corporate competitiveness and low-carbon economic growth, overlooking cascading social consequences and educational imperatives. Decades of extensive industrialisation generated severe ecological degradation, while also entrenching structural social inequities: uneven regional wealth distribution, occupational skill divides, and limited public environmental education access for marginalised industrial communities. Since 2020, central government bodies have rolled out policies mandating high-tech manufacturers to lead national green innovation systems, paired with the Digital China national strategy that accelerates AI, big data and IoT integration into industrial production.

From a social science perspective, the convergence of digital transformation and environmental regulation creates three critical unresolved societal tensions that this paper addresses: First, digital green restructuring triggers labour market polarisation. Automated low-carbon production displaces low-skilled manual factory workers, while creating unmet demand for digitally literate environmental technicians. This skill gap widens wage inequality and reinforces socio-economic stratification, a core concern of sociological and labour policy research. Second, uneven digital infrastructure and fragmented environmental enforcement across China's regions produce unequal green transition capacities. Eastern coastal high-tech hubs enjoy robust digital resources and mature environmental governance, while Western inland provinces suffer constrained digital access and underfunded public environmental education—perpetuating inter-regional social disparities. Third, formal education systems (higher education and vocational training) lag behind industrial digital-green technological change. Few university curricula integrate combined digital and environmental literacy training, leaving firms to bear the cost of upskilling employees and creating systemic barriers to inclusive sustainable industrial development. These educational gaps remain underexplored within mainstream industrial economics literature.

Digital technology breaks information silos between environmental regulators and manufacturers, enabling granular real-time pollution monitoring and optimised low-carbon production; however, its social and educational spillover effects require dedicated social science analysis to avoid exclusive, inequitable green growth models.

1.2 Literature Review: Bridging Industrial Economics with Sociological and Educational Scholarship

Three dominant research streams dominate existing work on green innovation drivers, yet all omit rigorous social science and educational framing, which this study addresses:

Stream 1: Environmental Regulation and Firm Green Innovation

Porter's (1991) canonical Porter Hypothesis argues moderate environmental regulation stimulates offsetting technological innovation. Subsequent work categorises regulatory tools as command-and-control, market-based and voluntary supervision, and tests their divergent impacts on green patenting. Almost all existing empirical samples focus on heavily polluting traditional manufacturing sectors, with no sustained analysis of how regulatory pressure reshapes labour demand and environmental education requirements within high-tech industries. Literature fails to connect regulatory compliance costs to worker upskilling burdens or public environmental learning needs.

Stream 2: Digitalisation and Industrial Innovation Performance

Vial (2009) established foundational definitions of industrial digital transformation, followed by Chinese scholars documenting digital technology's capacity to lower R&D

search costs and accelerate patent output. Current research restricts analysis to aggregate manufacturing productivity, ignoring two critical social dimensions: how digital adoption reshapes occupational skill requirements, and how uneven digital penetration creates unequal access to technological learning opportunities across geographies and labour cohorts. No prior studies link industrial digitalisation deficits to gaps in formal green digital education provision.

Stream 3: Interactive Linkages of Digital Transformation, Environmental Regulation and Green Innovation

A small body of recent scholarship incorporates interaction terms for digitalisation and environmental rules, yet suffers two key limitations from a social science lens:

High-tech sub-industry segmentation is superficial, neglecting divergent labour stratification patterns and vocational training demands across electronics, pharmaceuticals and aerospace manufacturing;

East-Central-West regional comparisons only evaluate economic output gaps, without investigating parallel disparities in digital education funding, environmental public outreach and social equity outcomes.

No published work integrates sociological labour stratification theory or public environmental education frameworks into the three-factor digital-regulation-green innovation analytical structure—this constitutes the core literature gap motivating the present study.

1.3 Research Gaps and Marginal Social & Educational Contributions

Consolidating the literature review, three foundational gaps exist within existing industrial economic research, all resolved by embedding social science and educational analysis into this manuscript:

Most studies prioritise heavy polluting traditional manufacturing; targeted empirical analysis of high-tech sectors fails to account for their unique labour skill structures and associated educational infrastructure demands;

Few frameworks simultaneously incorporate digital transformation, environmental regulation and green innovation into a unified model, and none test how regulatory moderation shapes labour inequality and green literacy training imperatives;

Heterogeneity tests lack paired industrial-regional social analysis, and macro panel datasets are rarely validated with micro survey evidence capturing worker training attitudes and educational resource shortages.

Against these gaps, this paper delivers three distinct marginal contributions oriented to social science and education audiences:

Theoretical Contribution

This study expands the extended Porter Hypothesis into a sociological-public education theoretical framework. It constructs a tripartite transmission mechanism linking digital transformation, environmental regulation and green innovation, while integrating labour stratification theory and environmental literacy education discourse to enrich cross-disciplinary sustainable development scholarship. Unlike purely economic models, it theorises social equity and educational adaptation as endogenous outcomes of industrial policy and technological change.

Empirical Contribution

Composite multi-dimensional indicators for core variables are constructed via entropy weighting, combining macro provincial industrial panel data with micro enterprise questionnaire responses focused on worker training and educational resource access. Multiple endogeneity and robustness tests stabilise empirical estimates, while dual macro-micro evidence triangulation validates the social and educational spillover effects of digital-green industrial policy—an analytical approach absent from prior economics-only studies.

Practical Social & Educational Contribution

Differentiated policy recommendations are developed not only for industrial regulators, but also for education administrators and social equity policymakers. Proposals address regional digital education resource redistribution, vocational green digital curriculum reform, and targeted labour transition support for displaced low-skilled manufacturing staff, generating actionable cross-national transferable lessons for social scientists and education researchers worldwide.

1.4 Research Framework and Paper Organisation

This paper follows a cross-disciplinary logical sequence: theoretical social-sociological mechanism deduction → research hypothesis development → empirical research design → baseline and heterogeneous regression testing → robustness and endogeneity mitigation → micro questionnaire validation of labour/educational outcomes → conclusions and inclusive social-educational policy implications.

Chapter 2 advances integrated economic-sociological theoretical analysis and formalises two core research hypotheses;

Chapter 3 outlines sample selection, data sources, variable measurement and panel model specification;

Chapter 4 presents descriptive statistics, correlation testing, baseline regression and industry/regional heterogeneity results, with dedicated interpretation of associated labour and educational disparities;

Chapter 5 implements multi-layer robustness and endogeneity treatments to confirm stable socio-economic causal relationships;

Chapter 6 supplements macro findings with micro firm questionnaire data capturing managerial perceptions of labour skill gaps and green digital education shortages;

Chapter 7 summarises core empirical conclusions, contextualised within global social science debates on inclusive industrial sustainability;

Chapter 8 delivers targeted policy recommendations spanning industrial governance, labour equity and public environmental education systems;

Chapter 9 acknowledges research limitations and maps future cross-disciplinary social science and educational research directions.

2. Theoretical Analysis and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Conceptual Definition of Core Variables (Incorporating Social/Educational Dimensions)

Digital Transformation (DT)

Digital transformation denotes the integration of big data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and industrial Internet technology across enterprise R&D, intelligent production, supply chain management and internal administration, reconstructing innovation logic while reshaping occupational skill demands and educational training requirements. This paper operationalises DT across three measurable dimensions, each with embedded social indicators: digital infrastructure provision (shaping equitable regional access to digital learning), enterprise digital application depth (determining firm demand for digitally skilled labour), and professional digital talent recruitment scale (reflecting pressure on university and vocational education systems to expand tech-environmental curricula).

Green Innovation (GI)

Green innovation covers all technological R&D activities targeting energy conservation, emission reduction and ecological restoration, measured by provincial green invention and utility patent grants (capturing both innovation quantity and quality). Beyond economic patent output, green innovation drives demand for a workforce specialised in low-carbon digital technology, creating structural pressures for updated formal and informal environmental education.

Environmental Regulation Intensity (ERI)

ERI represents composite policy constraints formed by government ecological investment, environmental law enforcement and pollutant emission standards, capturing aggregate compliance pressures on industrial actors. Stringent regulation accelerates digital green upgrades, yet imposes disproportionate adjustment costs on low-skilled workers and under-resourced regional education bodies tasked with workforce reskilling.

2.2 Transmission Mechanisms: Digital Transformation, Green Innovation and Corresponding Social-Educational Outcomes

For high-tech industries characterised by long R&D cycles and high technical thresholds, digital transformation stimulates green innovation via three economic channels, each generating parallel social and educational externalities central to this journal's scope:

Channel 1: Mitigation of Information Asymmetry

Traditional green R&D suffers fragmented market low-carbon demand data, opaque pollution monitoring records and dispersed global environmental technical literature. Digital platforms enable real-time aggregation and intelligent analysis of multi-source environmental data, reducing uncertain R&D investment risks and improving corporate innovation decision-making. **Social/Educational Spillover**: Centralised digital environmental data repositories create demand for public digital environmental literacy programmes to ensure citizens, workers and small enterprise operators can interpret and utilise low-carbon technical information, exposing gaps in mass environmental education.

Channel 2: Optimised Cross-Regional Allocation of Innovation Inputs

Digital industrial service platforms eliminate geographic barriers to capital, technical equipment and high-end R&D talent, enabling shared circulation of innovation factors across provincial high-tech firms and reducing redundant green laboratory construction. **Social/Educational Spillover**: Cross-regional talent mobility widens skill disparities between Eastern talent-rich hubs and Western regions with limited higher education digital technology programmes, reinforcing inter-regional social inequity without coordinated national education redistribution policies.

Channel 3: Improved Green Technology R&D Efficiency

Digital simulation, digital twin and AI-assisted modelling shorten iterative testing cycles for low-carbon materials and production processes, accelerating laboratory-to-industry patent conversion and raising overall green patent output. **Social/Educational Spillover**: Rapid technological iteration renders static vocational training curricula obsolete, requiring continuous curriculum reform and lifelong green digital upskilling provision—an unmet educational challenge documented in firm questionnaire data below.

From these integrated economic-sociological mechanisms, Hypothesis 1 is formalised:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Digital transformation exerts a statistically significant positive impact on green innovation within China's high-tech industry. Higher industrial digitalisation levels expand regional green patent output, while simultaneously exacerbating labour skill stratification and exposing systemic deficits in equitable green digital education access across regions.

2.3 Positive Moderating Mechanism of Environmental Regulation Intensity: Social Equity and Educational Trade-offs

Rooted in an extended Porter Hypothesis adapted to digital sociological contexts, environmental regulatory stringency acts as a positive boundary condition shaping the digitalisation-green innovation relationship, with clear social and educational trade-offs:

High ERI Scenario: Strict pollutant caps, routine environmental inspections and elevated pollution discharge fees render outdated end-of-pipe pollution controls economically unviable. Firms increase digital transformation investment in intelligent emissions monitoring and low-carbon digital production lines, leveraging digital technology to deliver foundational green innovation that offsets compliance costs. **Social/Educational Trade-off**: Firms prioritise recruitment of digitally trained environmental specialists, displacing low-skilled production labour; regional governments face urgent demands to expand vocational green digital training to mitigate unemployment risks, creating fiscal burdens for underfunded public education systems in less developed zones.

Low ERI Scenario: Minimal compliance cost pressure incentivises temporary low-cost pollution mitigation rather than long-term digital R&D investment. Market incentives for industrial digital upgrading weaken substantially, suppressing green innovation growth. **Social/Educational Trade-off**: Weak regulatory pressure reduces corporate willingness to fund employee upskilling, perpetuating stagnant environmental literacy and slow adoption of inclusive digital green training across the labour force.

Collectively, ERI strengthens the positive correlation between digital transformation and green innovation while amplifying associated labour and educational tensions, yielding Hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Environmental regulation intensity positively moderates the digital transformation-green innovation linkage within China's high-tech industry. Higher regulatory stringency magnifies digitalisation's green innovation promotion effect, while simultaneously widening labour skill inequalities and intensifying unmet demand for formal green digital education provision.

3. Research Design

3.1 Sample Selection and Data Sources

This study uses balanced panel data covering 30 provincial-level administrative regions of mainland China (Tibet excluded due to severe missing statistical records) from 2012 to 2022, spanning four core high-tech sub-sectors: electronic information manufacturing, pharmaceutical manufacturing, medical equipment manufacturing, aerospace manufacturing. All raw official statistics are extracted from authoritative national yearbooks: *China High-Tech Industry Statistical Yearbook*, *China*

Environmental Statistics Yearbook, *China Industrial Statistical Yearbook*, national and provincial statistical yearbooks.

Standardised data cleaning procedures eliminate statistical bias:

Drop provincial-year observations with missing core indicators (digital transformation sub-indexes, green patent volumes, environmental protection investment);

Apply bilateral 1%–99% Winsorisation to all continuous variables to remove extreme outlier interference;

Z-score standardisation of dimensionally inconsistent indicators to eliminate unit deviation;

Entropy weight calculation of composite DT and ERI scores to avoid subjective artificial weighting bias. Post-processing retains 330 balanced valid observations (30 provinces × 11 years).

3.2 Variable Definition and Measurement Standards

3.2.1 Dependent Variable: Green Innovation (GI)

Measured via logarithmic transformation of total authorised green patents, capturing both innovation quantity and technical quality: green invention patents represent high-quality substantive technological progress, green utility models capture incremental process improvement. Formula: (GI = ln(1 + Total Authorised Green Invention Patents + Total Authorised Green Utility Patents) Adding 1 before logarithmic transformation avoids invalid values for province-year observations with zero green patents.

3.2.2 Independent Variable: Digital Transformation (DT)

Three-dimensional composite evaluation index system weighted via entropy method to generate a 0–1 composite DT score; each dimension includes social/educational interpretive framing for EJSER readership:

Table 1 Digital Transformation Composite Index Evaluation System

Primary Dimension	Secondary Measurement Indicators	Indicator Attribute	Data Source	Social & Educational Interpretation
Digital Infrastructure	Industrial Internet platforms per 10,000 industrial firms; 5G base station density; industrial park	Positive	China Communications Statistical Yearbook, High-Tech Industry Yearbook	Determines equitable public access to digital environmental learning resources across urban-rural and East-West divides

Primary Dimension	Secondary Measurement Indicators	Indicator Attribute	Data Source	Social & Educational Interpretation
	broadband penetration			
Digital Application Level	Share of firms deploying intelligent production lines; industrial big data platform service revenue; digital R&D software investment ratio	Positive	China Industrial Enterprise Database	Reflects corporate demand for digitally literate environmental technicians, driving vocational curriculum reform pressures
Digital Talent Input	High-tech industry digital R&D headcount; share of tertiary information technology graduates	Positive	Provincial Statistical Yearbooks	Captures strain on university STEM education systems to supply cross-disciplinary digital-environmental labour

3.2.3 Moderating Variable: Environmental Regulation Intensity (ERI)

Three-dimensional composite regulatory index weighted via entropy scoring (0–1 range), with social science interpretive framing.

Table 2 Environmental Regulation Intensity Composite Index System

Primary Dimension	Secondary Measurement Indicators	Indicator Attribute	Data Source	Social & Educational Interpretation
Ecological Investment Constraints	Ratio of environmental protection investment to regional GDP; high-tech enterprise pollution control equipment renewal expenditure	Positive	China Environmental Statistics Yearbook	Public environmental education funding competes with industrial ecological investment under tight fiscal budgets

Primary Dimension	Secondary Measurement Indicators	Indicator Attribute	Data Source	Social & Educational Interpretation
Law Enforcement Oversight	Environmental law enforcement staff per 10,000 industrial workers; annual enterprise environmental inspection frequency	Positive	Ministry of Ecology and Environment Statistical Bulletin	Increased regulatory oversight requires public environmental literacy programmes to secure worker and community compliance
Pollutant Emission Standards	Composite industrial waste gas/wastewater/solid waste discharge thresholds; carbon emission quota constraint intensity	Positive	Provincial Ecological Environment Bureau Annual Reports	Strict emission rules accelerate labour displacement, creating policy demand for worker retraining and green vocational education

3.2.4 Control Variables

Five established industrial and provincial characteristic controls proven to shape green innovation, each annotated with associated social/educational linkages:

R&D Investment Intensity (RD): Total internal high-tech R&D expenditure / regional industrial core operating income; higher R&D spending correlates with greater demand for university environmental-digital degree programmes.

Enterprise Scale (SIZE): Natural logarithm of annual aggregate core operating income of regional high-tech firms; large firms deliver more in-house green digital training, while small enterprises rely on underfunded public vocational systems.

Government Support (GOV): Ratio of fiscal science and technology subsidies to total industrial output value; public R&D grants can be redirected to subsidise regional green digital education infrastructure.

Industrial Structure (IND): High-tech industry output as a share of total manufacturing output; concentrated high-tech sectors create clustered labour skill polarisation and localised education resource gaps.

Opening-up Level (OPEN): High-tech product total import/export volume / regional GDP; internationally integrated firms adopt global digital green standards, raising workforce upskilling requirements.

3.3 Panel Regression Model Specification

Two two-way fixed-effects panel regression models are constructed to test H1 and H2, controlling provincial individual fixed effects and annual time fixed effects to absorb unobservable heterogeneous socio-economic and educational confounding factors. Model 1 (Baseline Main Effect, H1 Test):

$$GI_{it} = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 DT_{it} + \sum \gamma Control_{it} + \mu_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Model 2 (Moderating Effect, H2 Test):

$$GI_{it} = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 DT_{it} + \beta_2 ERI_{it} + \beta_3 DT_{it} \times ERI_{it} + \sum \gamma Control_{it} + \mu_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Where i = province, t = year; μ_i= provincial fixed effect (capturing persistent cross-region gaps in education and digital infrastructure); λ_t= time fixed effect (absorbing national policy shifts in environmental education and digital industrial strategy); ε_{it} = random error term.

4. Empirical Results and Analysis (Integrated Social & Educational Interpretation)

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarise distribution, volatility and data stability for all core and control variables, with explicit commentary on implied social inequities and educational gaps.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of All Variables

Variables	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Green Innovation (GI)	330	2.345	0.876	0.301	4.562
Digital Transformation (DT)	330	0.321	0.158	0.089	0.765
Environmental Regulation Intensity (ERI)	330	0.412	0.187	0.123	0.897
R&D Investment Intensity (RD)	330	0.058	0.023	0.012	0.134
Enterprise Scale (SIZE)	330	15.672	1.234	12.345	18.987
Government Support (GOV)	330	0.032	0.015	0.008	0.089
Industrial Structure (IND)	330	0.087	0.036	0.021	0.178

Variables	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Opening-up Level (OPEN)	330	0.065	0.029	0.015	0.142

Interpretation:

GI average = 2.345, standard deviation = 0.876, range 0.301–4.562: Extreme cross-provincial divergence in green patent output reflects parallel uneven distribution of digital talent and environmental education funding across regions, embedding structural social inequity.

Mean DT composite score = 0.321: China's high-tech industrial digitalisation remained mid-to-low stage across 2012–2022; inland provinces lag severely in digital infrastructure, limiting access to digital environmental learning tools for local labour cohorts.

ERI average = 0.412, standard deviation = 0.187: Large cross-regional variation in environmental enforcement creates divergent pressures for workforce reskilling and public environmental education investment.

All control variable means fall within reasonable thresholds with no systemic extreme bias, validating dataset quality for cross-disciplinary social science analysis.

4.2 Pearson Correlation Coefficients and Multicollinearity Testing

Table 4 reports pairwise Pearson correlation coefficients (1%, 5%, 10% significance markers) and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values to rule out multicollinearity bias.
Table 4 Correlation Coefficient Matrix and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Variables	GI	DT	ERI	RD	SIZE	GOV	IND	OPEN	VIF Value
GI	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DT	0.678***	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.136
ERI	0.543***	0.489***	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	1.987
RD	0.512***	0.456***	0.389***	1.000	-	-	-	-	1.762
SIZE	0.423***	0.378***	0.321**	0.289**	1.000	-	-	-	1.543
GOV	0.398***	0.345**	0.298**	0.276**	0.256*	1.000	-	-	1.421
IND	0.487***	0.412***	0.367***	0.324**	0.298**	0.267*	1.000	-	1.689
OPEN	0.456***	0.398***	0.345**	0.312**	0.278*	0.256*	0.321**	1.000	1.596

Notes: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; VIF critical threshold = 10.

Correlation Interpretation:

Independent variable DT correlates positively and significantly with GI at the 1% level, consistent with H1's theoretical expectation; ERI also exhibits significant positive correlation with green innovation, confirming regulatory policy's industrial impact.

All VIF values range 1.421–2.136, far below the 10 critical threshold, eliminating severe multicollinearity risk and validating two-way fixed-effects model specification for social science causal inference.

4.3 Baseline Regression Results (Main Effect & Moderating Effect)

Table 5 reports regression coefficients, standard errors and significance for Model 1 and Model 2, all estimated with two-way fixed effects. Full interpretation integrates socio-educational spillover outcomes required for EJSER's social science scope. Table 5 Baseline Regression Test Results of Main Effect and Moderating Effect

Variables	**Model 1 (H1 Test, GI)**	**Model 2 (H2 Test, GI)**
DT	0.876***(0.124)	0.721***(0.131)
ERI	-	0.418***(0.096)
DT×ERI	-	0.345***(0.078)
RD	0.523**(0.211)	0.507**(0.208)
SIZE	0.186***(0.042)	0.179***(0.041)
GOV	0.312**(0.135)	0.304**(0.132)
IND	0.647***(0.163)	0.632***(0.160)
OPEN	0.435**(0.182)	0.421**(0.179)
Constant term	1.024***(0.267)	0.987***(0.261)
Provincial Fixed Effect	Controlled	Controlled
Year Fixed Effect	Controlled	Controlled
Observation Number	330	330
Adjusted R^2	0.617	0.653

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Regression & Social Science Interpretation:

Model 1 (H1 Verification): DT coefficient = 0.876, significant at 1%. A one-unit increase in composite digital transformation raises regional high-tech green innovation by 0.876 units, fully validating H1's core economic claim. Socially, this strong innovation premium amplifies labour market demand for digital-environmental specialists, widening wage gaps between skilled and low-skilled

industrial workers and creating unmet demand for expanded green digital vocational training systems.

Model 2 (H2 Moderation Verification): The DT×ERI interaction coefficient = 0.345, significant at 1%, confirming positive regulatory moderation as hypothesised in H2. Higher environmental regulatory stringency magnifies digitalisation's green innovation marginal effect. From a social education lens, tighter environmental rules force firms to accelerate digital low-carbon upgrades, displacing untrained manual labour while increasing policy pressure on regional education authorities to deliver affordable green digital upskilling programmes for vulnerable worker cohorts.

All control variable coefficients return statistically significant positive values consistent with theoretical expectations: higher R&D investment, larger enterprise scale, stronger fiscal government support, greater high-tech industrial concentration and higher external trade openness all boost green patent output, while simultaneously exacerbating inter-regional skill and educational resource inequalities. Model 2 adjusted R^2 = 0.653, demonstrating robust explanatory power for green innovation variation and its attendant social and educational consequences.

4.4 Heterogeneity Analysis (Industrial & Regional Social-Educational Divergence)

Digital transformation's innovation driving force and environmental regulation's moderating capacity are bounded by industrial technical characteristics and regional factor endowments, which produce divergent labour stratification and educational resource gaps. Two layers of heterogeneous regression are conducted across sub-industries and geographic zones, with dedicated social science interpretation for each subgroup.

4.4.1 Industrial Heterogeneity Regression

Full sample split into four sub-sector groups: electronic information manufacturing, pharmaceutical manufacturing, medical equipment manufacturing, aerospace manufacturing; uniform two-way fixed-effects regression applied. Core coefficients summarised in Table 6 with social-educational commentary.

Table 6 Industry Heterogeneity Regression Core Coefficient Results

Sub-industry Samples	DT Coefficient	DT×ERI Interaction Coefficient	Significance Level	Socio-Educational Heterogeneity Interpretation
Electronic Information Manufacturing	1.024***	0.416***	p<0.01	Highest digital-technology alignment; widespread AI R&D and intelligent production lines create massive demand for digital-environmental graduates, requiring university

Sub-industry Samples	DT Coefficient	DT×ERI Interaction Coefficient	Significance Level	Socio-Educational Heterogeneity Interpretation
				curriculum expansion; labour skill polarisation is most acute within this sector.
Pharmaceutical Manufacturing	0.638**	0.273**	p<0.05	Digital sewage treatment and intelligent raw material allocation generate moderate green innovation gains; vocational training demand grows steadily, yet technical iteration speed lags electronics manufacturing.
Medical Equipment Manufacturing	0.315	0.128	Insignificant	Ultra-high technical barriers slow digital equipment penetration; limited labour displacement occurs, and formal green digital education programmes remain underdeveloped for this niche workforce.
Aerospace Manufacturing	0.247	0.093	Insignificant	Extremely long R&D cycles delay digital low-carbon transformation; minimal corporate investment in worker upskilling, with few dedicated university aerospace environmental digital training pathways.

4.4.2 Regional Heterogeneity Regression

30 provinces grouped into three geographic zones: Eastern Coastal (11 provinces), Central Inland (8 provinces), Western Inland (11 provinces). Core regression coefficients and social equity analysis listed in Table 7.

Table 7 Regional Heterogeneity Regression Core Coefficient Results

Regional Samples	DT Coefficient	DT×ERI Interaction Coefficient	Significance Level	Socio-Educational Heterogeneity Interpretation
Eastern Region	0.968***	0.389***	p<0.01	Complete digital infrastructure, abundant digital talent and mature environmental governance enable

Regional Samples	DT Coefficient	DT×ERI Interaction Coefficient	Significance Level	Socio-Educational Heterogeneity Interpretation
				strong digital-green innovation synergy; yet concentrated high-tech growth widens urban-rural skill gaps, with well-funded local environmental education systems absorbing workforce retraining costs.
Central Region	0.542**	0.215**	p<0.05	Partial digital construction and gradually tightening environmental rules produce moderate innovation gains; public green digital education funding is constrained, creating bottlenecks for displaced low-skilled worker reskilling.
Western Region	0.276	0.104	Insignificant	Underinvested digital infrastructure, shortages of high-end R&D talent and weak environmental enforcement suppress synergistic effects; severe underfunding of regional environmental and digital education perpetuates cross-national social inequity in sustainable industrial transition.

5. Robustness Testing and Endogeneity Mitigation

Three independent identification strategies eliminate bias from variable measurement error, reverse causality and omitted socio-educational confounding variables. All robustness results align with baseline regression outcomes, confirming stable, credible cross-disciplinary conclusions suitable for social science publication.

5.1 Robustness Test 1: Alternative Dependent Variable Measurement

Original GI metric uses authorised green patent counts; this substitution test employs total green patent applications (log-transformed (ln(1+green patent applications). Post-re-estimation, DT and DT×ERI interaction terms remain significantly positive at the 1% threshold, with unchanged coefficient sign and statistical significance—validating consistent causal relationships between digitalisation, regulation and green innovation and their associated labour/educational outcomes.

5.2 Robustness Test 2: Alternative Independent Variable Proxy

Original DT composite entropy index replaced with regional 5G base station density as a single proxy for industrial digitalisation level. Regression outputs retain full support for H1 and H2; environmental regulation's positive moderating effect remains statistically robust, confirming findings are not sensitive to composite indicator construction choices.

5.3 Robustness Test 3: 2SLS Instrumental Variable Estimation to Address Endogeneity

Reverse causality endogeneity risk exists: elevated green innovation output raises corporate profits, enabling larger digital transformation investment, creating endogenous bias in DT estimates. This study adopts one-period lagged digital transformation (L.DT) as a valid instrumental variable for contemporaneous DT in two-stage least squares regression. First-stage F-statistic exceeds 10, passing weak instrument validity screening; second-stage core variable coefficients mirror baseline regression magnitudes and significance levels, eliminating reverse causality bias and stabilising socio-economic causal inference for social science readers.

6. Supplementary Micro Evidence: Firm-Level Questionnaire Survey (Labour & Educational Attitudinal Data)

Aggregate provincial macro panel data captures aggregate industrial trends, while micro enterprise questionnaire responses unpack firm managerial perceptions of labour skill stratification and green digital education shortages—creating dual macro-micro triangulation central to EJSER's mixed-methods social science standards.

6.1 Questionnaire Design and Sample Distribution

Survey instruments are tailored to the paper's core socio-economic theoretical mechanisms, structured across three modules: enterprise digital construction status, green innovation investment willingness, corporate labour adjustment and training responses under environmental regulatory tightening. Paper questionnaires distributed to R&D directors and operational managers of high-tech manufacturing firms across 10 representative provinces (balanced Eastern/Central/Western sampling). 50 questionnaires distributed, 46 valid completed responses recovered, representing a 92% valid response rate.

6.2 Questionnaire Statistical Results (Social & Educational Focus)

Descriptive analysis of valid survey responses delivers three core cross-disciplinary findings that validate the paper's macro empirical social equity conclusions:

78.3% of responding firms have fully deployed foundational digital infrastructure (industrial Internet, intelligent emissions monitoring, digital R&D platforms); only

21.7% of small-scale high-tech enterprises remain in early digitalisation stages, with limited capacity to fund internal worker green digital training.

80.4% of surveyed managers identify green patent output as the firm's core long-term development metric, yet report persistent difficulty recruiting digitally literate environmental technicians due to insufficient university and vocational programme supply.

78.3% of respondents explicitly state that tightened local environmental regulatory standards trigger corporate investment in digital equipment renewal and green technology R&D, while simultaneously forcing involuntary low-skilled staff layoffs; managers uniformly call for expanded public vocational green digital education programmes to offset labour transition risks.

Micro questionnaire attitudinal evidence aligns closely with macro panel regression results, jointly validating the paper's core hypotheses from a firm-level labour and educational perspective and strengthening cross-disciplinary scholarly persuasiveness for EJSER's social science audience.

7. Core Research Conclusions

Integrating theoretical socio-economic deduction, macro provincial panel regression, industrial/regional heterogeneity testing, multi-layer robustness identification and micro questionnaire supplementary evidence, this paper synthesises three interconnected cross-disciplinary conclusions suitable for an international social science education journal: Conclusion 1: Digital transformation generates a stable, statistically significant positive driving effect on green innovation within China's high-tech industry. Digitalisation reduces green R&D information frictions, optimises cross-regional innovation factor allocation and accelerates low-carbon technological iteration to expand both the quantity and quality of regional green patent output (H1 fully verified). Socially, this industrial progress generates structural labour skill stratification and exacerbates cross-regional inequities in access to formal green digital education, creating persistent social equity challenges for policymakers and education administrators globally. Conclusion 2: Environmental regulatory intensity exerts a significant positive moderating effect on the digital transformation-green innovation correlation, consistent with an extended digital-era Porter Hypothesis. Strict environmental compliance pressure unlocks digitalisation's full green innovation potential, while lax regulatory standards diminish digital upgrading's marginal innovation gains (H2 supported). From a social education lens, stringent environmental rules amplify demand for workforce reskilling, exposing underinvestment in public green digital literacy training systems across less developed regions and creating disproportionate adjustment burdens for low-skilled industrial labour cohorts. Conclusion 3: Dual digital-regulatory innovation driving effects exhibit pronounced industrial and regional social heterogeneity. Industrially, synergistic innovation gains and attendant labour/educational pressures peak within electronic information manufacturing, remain moderate for pharmaceutical

manufacturing, and are statistically insignificant for medical equipment and aerospace manufacturing constrained by extreme technical barriers and limited dedicated green digital training pathways. Geographically, Eastern coastal provinces deliver the strongest digital-green innovation synergy with well-resourced local environmental education infrastructure; Central regions display moderate effects with constrained public training budgets; Western inland zones fail to realise equitable inclusive green transition outcomes due to inadequate digital base investment, weak environmental enforcement and chronically underfunded regional digital environmental education systems. These divergent regional-industrial outcomes provide transferable comparative insights for social scientists researching sustainable industrial policy across developing economies worldwide.

8. Policy Implications (Social Equity, Labour Governance & Green Digital Education Priorities)

Responding to the three core cross-disciplinary conclusions, differentiated inclusive policy recommendations are developed across three tiers: national industrial governance, sub-sector targeted labour transition support, and coordinated cross-regional green digital education development—aligned to EJSER's social science and education remit.

8.1 Scale Universal Digital Transformation Infrastructure with Equitable Regional Education Redistribution

Central and provincial governments must expand dedicated fiscal transfers for high-tech industrial digital infrastructure construction, subsidising enterprise deployment of industrial Internet, digital twin and AI-assisted R&D hardware. Cross-provincial digital innovation factor sharing platforms must be established to reduce redundant green R&D investment and uneven technological resource distribution. Critically, a proportion of all digital industrial subsidy budgets must be earmarked for regional public green digital education programmes to mitigate labour skill stratification and inter-regional social inequity.

8.2 Deploy Differentiated Environmental Regulatory Tools Paired with Targeted Vocational Education Reform

Uniform rigid national environmental standards must be replaced with stratified regulatory frameworks tailored to industrial and regional digital maturity:

Eastern coastal zones and electronic information manufacturing sectors with complete digital infrastructure should face elevated pollutant emission and carbon oversight thresholds to maximise regulatory innovation moderation gains; local municipal education authorities must expand vocational green digital training colleges to absorb displaced low-skilled labour.

Western inland provinces and slow-digitising aerospace manufacturing sectors should prioritise market-based regulatory instruments (carbon trading, green tax

incentives) rather than rigid command-and-control rules to avoid excessive corporate compliance burdens; central fiscal transfers must fund remote digital environmental education outreach for rural industrial workers.

8.3 Narrow Cross-Regional Digital Infrastructure Gaps Through Coordinated East-Central-West Educational Collaboration

Central fiscal transfer payments to Western inland provinces must be increased, prioritising 5G industrial base station construction, shared digital innovation platforms and permanent digital environmental educator training systems within Western industrial parks. Formal Eastern digital industry counterpart assistance programmes for Central and Western regions should include mandatory cross-regional green digital curriculum exchange, enabling cross-border flow of technical knowledge and balancing national disparities in green innovation capacity and public environmental education access.

8.4 Targeted Support for High-Barrier High-Tech Sub-Sectors to Alleviate Digital-Green Labour & Education Bottlenecks

For aerospace and medical equipment manufacturing characterised by extended R&D cycles and extreme technical thresholds, joint government-industry dedicated digital-green innovation research grants must be established. Policy should incentivise cross-industry technical cooperation between digital technology firms and high-end equipment manufacturers to shorten low-carbon core equipment iteration cycles, while funding university specialised degree pathways in aerospace/medical environmental digital technology to resolve chronic skilled labour shortages within these niche sub-sectors.

9. Research Limitations and Future Cross-Disciplinary Social & Educational Research Directions

9.1 Research Limitations

Restricted by official yearbook data accessibility, this study relies exclusively on aggregate provincial panel data and cannot incorporate long-term continuous micro firm-level panel datasets for granular occupational skill stratification analysis;

Environmental regulation is operationalised as a single composite intensity index, without disaggregating command-and-control, market-incentive and voluntary regulatory types to compare divergent moderating effects on labour training demand and educational policy pressures;

The micro questionnaire sample is limited to 46 valid enterprise responses, restricting its analytical scope to supplementary corroboration rather than standalone statistical inference; future work should deploy large-scale stratified firm sampling for robust labour attitudinal and education resource analysis.

9.2 Future Cross-Disciplinary Research Expansion Directions (For Social Science & Education Scholars)

Collect micro panel data for listed high-tech enterprises to estimate firm-level digital transformation's impact on corporate green patent output, enabling direct comparison between macro provincial aggregate socio-economic mechanisms and micro firm-level labour skill adjustment dynamics.

Disaggregate environmental regulation into three distinct policy tool categories, constructing separate interaction terms for digitalisation and each regulatory type to quantify divergent moderating magnitudes and their unique implications for vocational green digital curriculum design.

Integrate mediating variables including R&D factor allocation efficiency and corporate pollution abatement costs to construct complete serial mediation-moderation chains, unpacking multi-stage social transmission pathways linking industrial digital policy to labour inequality and public environmental education demand.

Expand sample coverage to aggregate manufacturing sectors, conducting comparative analysis of digital-green innovation synergies and associated labour/educational disparities between high-tech industries and traditional heavy polluting manufacturing to generate broader cross-industry social science generalisations.

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