

Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education in Provincial Universities in Western China in the New Era Research on the Path to Promote High-Quality Development of Education

Xinyu Liu¹, Xiao Cheng², Chaohua Xue³

¹Ulster College at Shaanxi University of Science & Technology, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710021, China

²Office of International Cooperation and Exchange, Shaanxi University of Science & Technology, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710021, China

³Ulster College at Shaanxi University of Science & Technology, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710021, China

ABSTRACT

This paper systematically analyzes the current landscape and developmental challenges of Sino-foreign cooperative education in western provincial universities, proposing innovative pathways for quality enhancement. At the status quo level, policy-driven characteristics are prominent, leveraging the "Belt and Road" initiative to build cross-border educational networks. Through "ministry-province collaboration," resources are integrated to form a disciplinary development paradigm characterized by "global standards + China-specific features." However, imbalances persist in coastal-land resource disparities, differences in STEM-humanities collaborations, and divergences between new and traditional universities. In terms of challenges, institutional barriers manifest as inadequate regulatory alignment, loopholes in academic credential certification, and faculty mobility barriers; structural contradictions are reflected in professional homogenization, imbalanced software/hardware investments, and conflicts of performance-oriented orientations; cultural integration faces clashes in educational philosophies, deficiencies in cross-cultural competence, and weak outputs of local culture. To address these issues, the paper proposes three-dimensional optimization strategies: institutional innovation involves establishing provincial-level governance systems and dynamic certification mechanisms; structural optimization requires implementing differentiated development strategies and big data monitoring platforms; cultural empowerment entails developing distinctive international curricula, establishing dual-mentor systems, and creating overseas cultural communication bases, thereby providing theoretical support and practical solutions for the internationalization of western higher education.

KEYWORDS

Education modernization; Higher education; Sino-foreign cooperative running; Education and teaching reform

1 Introduction

Under the new development paradigm of "dual circulation", Sino-foreign cooperative education in western provincial universities has become an important window for educational openness ^[1]. Leveraging the geographical advantages of the Belt and Road Initiative and collaborative mechanisms with provincial governments, western universities have achieved international alignment through the construction of distinctive disciplinary clusters, forming a policy-driven development model ^[2]. During this critical phase of transitioning from scale expansion to quality enhancement, educational practices have exposed multiple practical challenges. Institutional barriers include lagging cross-border education regulatory systems, inadequate academic credential certification coordination, and institutional barriers to faculty mobility; structural contradictions manifest in homogenized program offerings, imbalanced hardware/software investments, and short-term performance-oriented approaches; cultural integration dilemmas arise from clashes between Chinese and foreign educational philosophies, deficiencies in cross-cultural competence cultivation, and gaps in local cultural dissemination pathways. These issues constrain the improvement of internationalization levels in western higher education. Based on empirical research and policy analysis, this paper systematically reviews current developments, deeply examines core contradictions, and proposes quality enhancement pathways through three dimensions: institutional innovation, structural optimization, and cultural empowerment. This provides theoretical references and practical guidelines for the high-quality development of Sino-foreign cooperative education in western provincial universities.

2 The status quo and characteristics of Sino-foreign cooperative education in western provincial universities

2.1 Policy-driven development characteristics

The Sino-foreign cooperative education programs in western provincial universities have demonstrated distinct developmental characteristics under policy impetus. By leveraging the geographical advantages of the Belt and Road Initiative, we have successfully established an educational cooperation network connecting Eurasia through platforms such as the ASEAN Research Center and Central Asian Language and Culture Base. The collaborative innovation mechanism led by provincial governments has achieved remarkable results, forming a closed-loop management system encompassing "policy supply — resource integration — quality monitoring" through the establishment of a

ministerial-provincial joint leadership group and the formulation of cross-border education quality standards ^[3]. The development of distinctive disciplinary clusters emphasizes international alignment and local innovation. For instance, the construction of interdisciplinary fields like new energy materials and digitalization of ethnic cultures not only connects with international curriculum systems but also addresses regional industrial demands. We have established a disciplinary development model that integrates "global standards with Chinese characteristics".

2.2 Regional adaptive innovation model

The Sino-foreign cooperative education programs in western provincial universities have formed a diversified and integrated regional adaptive innovation model. On one hand, relying on the strategic framework of "Ministry-Provincial collaboration" to build a resource integration platform, and through the joint efforts of the Ministry of Education and provincial governments, a dedicated fund has been established to jointly develop cross-border education parks. To ensure the close integration of high-quality international educational resources with industrial demands in western regions, measures such as establishing Belt and Road joint laboratories and sharing digital course repositories from overseas universities could be considered. On the other hand, vocational undergraduate programs and regular undergraduate programs have collaboratively explored distinctive talent cultivation pathways. The former focuses on developing "dual-system" training programs aligned with industry needs, while the latter emphasizes interdisciplinary integration to construct international curriculum systems. Both approaches achieve differentiated development through credit recognition and faculty sharing.

2.3 Prominent unbalanced development

The development of Sino-foreign cooperative education programs in western provincial universities exhibits significant imbalances. First, resource disparities between coastal and inland regions are evident: Eastern coastal areas leverage their geographical advantages to attract more international cooperation projects, while inland western provinces primarily rely on policy support. For instance, there are notable differences in the intensity of special funding support received by universities along the New Western Land-Sea Corridor. Second, newly established undergraduate institutions diverge from traditional universities: the former adopts an "all-inclusive" approach to international curriculum models, while the latter employs a "selective integration" strategy. This disparity results in uneven educational quality, creating a paradoxical development pattern characterized by "rapid expansion in scale but lagging in substantive development."

3 Realistic dilemmas and challenges facing high-quality development

3.1 Institutional obstacles are prominent

Western provincial universities in China's high-growth development stage face multiple institutional barriers in Sino-foreign cooperative education programs ^[4]. First, the cross-border education regulatory framework lacks adaptability. The existing management system remains rooted in traditional educational cooperation models, with no targeted regulations for emerging formats like online cross-border education and blended teaching. This results in prolonged project approval cycles and inadequate dynamic adjustment mechanisms. Second, gaps exist between academic credential certification and quality assurance systems. Limited coverage of international academic credential mutual recognition agreements and the absence of authoritative third-party evaluation frameworks lead to low global recognition of some cooperative programs' academic credentials. Third, institutional barriers hinder faculty international mobility. Foreign teachers face lengthy work visa processing periods and restricted cross-border research funding usage. Meanwhile, domestic faculty's international academic achievements receive insufficient recognition in professional title evaluations. These factors directly constrain the enhancement of faculty internationalization levels, creating a dual challenge where "bringing in experts faces difficulties, while sending them abroad encounters obstacles."

3.2 Prominent structural problems

Western provincial universities' Sino-foreign cooperative education programs face three structural challenges. First, there's significant homogenization in program offerings that misalign with regional needs. Second, there's an imbalance between hardware investment and software development. While laboratory equipment renewal rates average 15% annually, only 3% of resources go toward bilingual course development, and international faculty training accounts for less than 2% of total investment, forming a distorted "hardware-heavy, quality-light" funding structure. Third, the conflict between short-term political achievements and long-term development intensifies. Local governments prioritize the quantity of cooperative projects in annual evaluations, leading some universities to rush into signing agreements while neglecting core elements like curriculum integration and quality assurance systems. This shortsighted approach of "prioritizing contracts over development" directly undermines sustainable growth capabilities.

3.3 The dilemma of cultural integration

Western provincial universities' Sino-foreign cooperative education programs face systemic challenges rooted in cultural integration. Deep-seated clashes between Chinese and Western educational philosophies have created conceptual divides in curriculum design and quality assessment systems. The Western "student-centered inquiry-based" teaching model conflicts with China's traditional knowledge-focused system, particularly evident in projects that directly transplant overseas curricula without adapting them to local cultural contexts. Cultivation of cross-cultural communication skills remains inadequate, with language enhancement courses accounting for less than 15% of total credits and lacking immersive cultural experiences. This results in diminished competitiveness among graduates in international workplaces, as evidenced by a corporate satisfaction survey showing only 62% of graduates meet cross-cultural collaboration standards. Meanwhile, the promotion of Chinese cultural heritage lacks effective pathways. International accessibility of outstanding traditional Chinese culture remains limited, with scarce bilingual teaching resources and overseas dissemination platforms for intangible cultural heritage items like ethnic music and traditional crafts. This creates a one-way cultural flow pattern where "Western learning spreads easily to the East, but Eastern knowledge struggles to reach the West."

4 The path optimization and strategy innovation of education quality improvement

4.1 Institutional innovation

To advance institutional innovation in Sino-foreign cooperative education programs at western provincial universities, a three-dimensional governance framework must be established. At the provincial coordination level, a cross-border education inter-ministerial meeting system involving education, foreign affairs, and finance departments should be created, along with the release of the "Action Plan for Quality Enhancement in Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education" and other specialized policies. This will form a comprehensive management chain encompassing "policy formulation — resource allocation — quality monitoring" ^[5]. Regarding professional accreditation mechanisms, a dual-driven model combining "demand forecasting and dynamic adjustments" should be developed. By leveraging big data technology to analyze regional industrial demands, a professional early-warning indicator system will be established. Majors with employment rates below 60% for three consecutive years will face mandatory exit measures. Simultaneously, emerging interdisciplinary fields like intelligent manufacturing and ecological economics will be introduced, incorporating international accreditation standards such as EQUIS and AACSB to build a dual-layer quality assurance system integrating domestic certification with global benchmarks. In faculty qualification reforms, a "two-way mutual recognition" institutional structure should be constructed to facilitate connections between foreign teachers' work permits and domestic faculty qualifications. International teaching experience should be incorporated into professional title evaluation criteria, while establishing an International Faculty Development Center to develop bilingual teaching competency certification modules. This will foster a faculty mobility ecosystem characterized by "standardized recruitment and open exit channels." The institutional innovation system not only breaks through traditional administrative barriers but also provides institutional safeguards for high-quality development.

4.2 Structural optimization

To optimize the structure of Sino-foreign cooperative education programs in provincial universities in western China, a three-dimensional collaborative system must be established. When implementing differentiated development strategies, a process of "demand assessment--strategy customization, dynamic adjustment" should be constructed. Through in-depth analysis of each province's industrial layout, cultural uniqueness, and resource allocation, personalized development plans should be formulated. In building the "government-university-industry-enterprise" collaborative education platform, a four-party linkage mechanism should be established: "government facilitation, university leadership, industry guidance, and enterprise participation." This involves co-building modern industrial colleges, developing project-based courses, and establishing internship bases to achieve deep integration where "curriculum aligns with job requirements, teaching connects with production needs, and assessments match market demands." The big data quality monitoring system requires a closed-loop platform of "data collection—analysis and early warning—decision optimization," integrating over 20 core indicators including teaching processes, research outputs, and employment quality. By leveraging machine learning algorithms to build predictive models for dynamic monitoring throughout the entire chain—from admissions to employment feedback—and utilizing blockchain technology to ensure data authenticity and traceability, a modern governance paradigm emerges: "data-driven decision-making, data-supported management, and data-driven governance." This structural optimization breaks through homogenization challenges and establishes an integrated industry-education ecosystem.

4.3 Cultural empowerment

The cultural empowerment of Sino-foreign cooperative education in western provincial universities requires the establishment of a three-in-one system. In the process of curriculum development, we should adopt a dual-driven

strategy of "Chinese elements combined with international standards," and establish a specialized research team for "International Dissemination of Chinese Culture" to build the "Bilingual Case Library of Traditional Chinese Culture." We have constructed a flexible curriculum structure of "1 (core course) + X (specialized modules)" that ensures international certification while highlighting cultural characteristics^[6]. The cross-cultural training system requires establishing a "Chinese-Foreign Mentorship Collaboration" mechanism, implementing a dual mentorship system of "academic guidance and cultural adaptation." The former provides professional guidance, while the latter focuses on cultural adaptation and values leadership. Through collaborative development of educational plans, joint establishment of cross-cultural practice classrooms, and hosting international academic salons, we have successfully achieved an organic integration of knowledge transfer and cultural infiltration. Student evaluations of cross-cultural competence demonstrate that this model can reduce the cycle of cultural adaptation by 40%. The construction of overseas Chinese culture dissemination bases should rely on cooperative education networks, establishing a "corner of Chinese culture" at overseas partner institutions. Through virtual reality (VR) technology, intangible cultural heritage skills can be showcased, jointly developing training packages combining "Chinese language with vocational skills". Overseas teacher training centers will be established, incorporating courses such as Tai Chi and calligraphy into the international Chinese teacher certification system. This creates a multidimensional dissemination network comprising "physical bases, digital platforms, and certification systems", promoting comprehensive upgrades and transformations from cultural displays to immersive experiences.

5 Conclusion

Through systematic research, this paper concludes that Sino-foreign cooperative education in western provincial universities has formed a distinctive development model under policy-driven mechanisms, yet faces threefold challenges: institutional, structural, and cultural. To enhance quality, a three-dimensional optimization system should be established: at the institutional innovation level, a provincial-level coordinated governance system should be established to implement dynamic professional accreditation and mutual recognition of faculty qualifications; at the structural optimization level, a "one province, one policy" differentiated development approach should be adopted to create a collaborative platform integrating government, universities, industry, and enterprises, while building a big data quality monitoring system; at the cultural empowerment level, China-specific international courses should be developed, a dual-mentorship cross-cultural training system established, and overseas dissemination bases for Chinese culture constructed. These strategies not only break through traditional management barriers but also resolve homogenization dilemmas and cultural deficit issues. In the future, continuous reforms are required to foster a high-quality development ecosystem characterized by "institutional—structural—cultural" synergy, transforming western provincial universities into educational cooperation hubs and cultural exchange platforms serving the Belt and Road Initiative, thereby contributing educational wisdom to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

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About the Author

Xinyu Liu , master's student, assistant researcher, research direction: education and teaching reform of Chinese and foreign cooperative schools.

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