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Fostering Global Collaboration and Networking in Private Higher Education Institutions within Jiangsu Province, China

Cheng Hongyun¹, Ali Khatibi², Jacquline Tham³, S. M. Ferdous Azam⁴

Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the progression of global collaboration and exchange within private colleges and universities located in Jiangsu Province, China. During the 1990s, the international landscape experienced a surge in development driven by the forces of economic globalization. This phenomenon emerged as a essential trend in the education sector of the global economy, attracting widespread attention. China's higher education system mirrored this international development trend by actively incorporating fresh perspectives from around the world while refining existing ones. The realization of China's higher education and economic potential hinges on a strategic commitment to internationalization. In this context, private colleges and universities in Jiangsu Province play a crucial role as subsystems within the broader educational framework. A subsystem, characterized by numerous internal components and external influences, serves as a microcosm reflecting the overall strength of educational institutions. The quality of school operations in these private establishments manifests on two levels: the extension level, encompassing tangible factors such as student enrollment, graduate numbers, and teaching infrastructure; and the connotative level, which directly influences the overall educational quality. The findings of this study indicate a heightened interest among professionals and researchers in the field of higher education regarding the internationalization efforts of private colleges and universities. Recent years have witnessed a notable surge in attention towards this aspect, underlining its significance in the broader discourse on global education. A striking contemporary example of internationalization in education is the rapid expansion of education services across multiple countries, showcasing the global interconnectedness of higher education institutions. This research underscores the essential role played by private colleges and universities in Jiangsu Province in fostering international collaboration and exchange, contributing to the overall discourse on the globalization of higher education.

Keywords: Global, Collaboration, Networking, Colleges, Universities, Jiangsu, China

Introduction

Global collaboration in higher education is of utmost importance in today's interconnected world. As educational institutions strive to provide students with a well-rounded and internationally-oriented education, fostering collaboration with institutions from around the world becomes essential. By engaging in global collaboration, private higher education institutions in Jiangsu province can benefit in numerous ways. Firstly, it allows for the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and best practices between institutions. This exchange not only enriches

¹ Nanjing University of Finance and Economics Hongshan College, Xiashu Town, Jurong, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, China

² Post Graduate Centre, Management and Science University, University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, Section 13, 40100, Selangor, Malaysia

³ Post Graduate Centre, Management and Science University, University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, Section 13, 40100, Selangor, Malaysia

⁴ Post Graduate Centre, Management and Science University, University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, Section 13, 40100, Selangor, Malaysia

the educational experience for students, but also enables faculty members to stay abreast of the latest developments in their respective fields. Additionally, global collaboration opens up opportunities for joint research projects, academic partnerships, and student exchanges. These collaborations can enhance the reputation and visibility of private higher education institutions in Jiangsu province, attract a diverse pool of talented students and faculty from different countries.

Historically, in the 1990s, the international industry witnessed a strengthening of its development trend due to the promotion of economic globalization. This trend emerged as a prominent feature in the global education landscape, capturing the attention of the world (Zhao, 2020). China's higher education system aligned itself with this international development trend, actively assimilating new ideas from around the globe while enhancing existing ones. The expansion of China's higher education and economic potential is seen as contingent upon a robust commitment to internationalization, as highlighted by scholars such as Li (2016), Tham et al. (2017), and Udriyah et al. (2019).

Private colleges and universities, despite their aspirations to operate as application-oriented and skill-focused institutions, find themselves constrained during this challenging period. The governance struggles faced by these institutions have implications not only for their internal functioning but also for the broader societal need for well-prepared and capable professionals. The discrepancy between the desire to produce high-caliber individuals and the current limitations in governing these institutions underscores the complexities facing China's private higher education landscape.

The evolving landscape of private colleges, coupled with the imperatives of national economic and social development, necessitates a shift in their operational mindset. Scholars such as Xue (2018), Rachmawati et al. (2019), and Azam et al. (2021) advocate for a transformative approach, emphasizing the need for private colleges and universities to reassess their operational strategies and embrace a more expansive educational trajectory.

The role of internationalization emerges as a crucial factor in overcoming challenges and fostering evolution within private colleges (Haur et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Wei, 2020). Against the backdrop of China's national medium and long-term education reform and development plan (2010-2020), as well as its commitment to education openness, there is a clear directive towards opening up and welcoming international cooperation. This national context provides a foundation for exploring the factors influencing international cooperation and exchange among private colleges and universities in Jiangsu Province.

The study aims to analyze the challenges that private colleges and universities face in the development of internationalization within the broader framework of the national education reform plan. By delving into the factors affecting international cooperation and exchange in Jiangsu Province, the research seeks to unravel the typical trajectory of internationalization development among private institutions. This analysis not only contributes to the academic discourse on global education trends but also offers valuable insights to assist private colleges and universities in effectively navigating the complexities of international cooperation and exchange. Through a comprehensive understanding of these factors and challenges, the research aims to provide a roadmap for private institutions in Jiangsu Province to enhance their international engagement and contribute meaningfully to the global educational landscape.

Over the past seven decades, developed nations like the United Kingdom and the United States have been essential in actively promoting the internationalization of higher education. Clark

(1980) laid the foundation by advocating for the international nature of higher education, emphasizing criteria such as "universality, communication, and openness." Subsequently, Kitamura (1986) evaluated the progress of internationalization, setting standards for its development.

In the domestic context, China's research on the internationalization of education gained momentum in the 1980s. Chen (1997) outlined the concept and arguments supporting the internationalization of higher education, while Zhou (2014) analyzed changes in China's higher education internationalization policy, stressing the importance of institutions making decisions based on accurate self-positioning.

Private higher education globally has played a crucial role in shaping the internationalization of higher education. Wang et al. (2017) emphasized that private higher education institutions are undergoing a critical period of comprehensive transformation and development. Actively promoting internationalization is seen as an inevitable choice for their transformation and for enhancing the overall quality of private higher education. Wang (2021) argued that the internationalization of higher education should encompass service orientation, policy support, innovative models, multi-level collaboration, talent introduction, and awareness training.

In the post-pandemic era, Liu and Lin (2021) highlighted the need for China to strengthen the quality management of international students, viewing them as strategic human resources. Zheng et al. (2021) pointed out that the post-pandemic era presents challenges for the internationalization of higher education, urging colleges and universities to innovate their approach to international exchange and cooperation.

The General Office of the Jiangsu Provincial Government (2021) emphasized the significance of private colleges and universities collaborating with high-quality overseas educational resources and foreign-level scientific research institutions. Southwest Jiaotong University has been at the forefront of evaluating and ranking domestic universities in terms of internationalization through its University Internationalization Ranking (URI). The study at hand focuses on four core indicators—Internationalization of Students, Internationalization of Teachers, Internationalization of Scientific Research, and Internationalization of Courses. These indicators are chosen based on their relevance to the actual situation and key modules of internationalization development in private colleges and universities in Jiangsu Province.

Over the past four decades of reform and opening up, China's private higher education has made remarkable strides. The structural system has undergone historic changes, marked by significant increases in scale and volume, a diversification of forms and types, and a gradual upward shift in hierarchical structure. The autonomy of private colleges and universities in school operations has expanded, accompanied by growing financial support from the government. However, these positive developments coexist with challenges, urging the need for private higher education to accelerate its mode of development, enhance educational quality, and increase efficiency in response to the changing times. Studies consistently highlight internationalization, particularly through international exchanges and cooperation, as a crucial and desirable path for private institutions to achieve breakthroughs in school administration and foster transformation and development. From an economic perspective, Wang (2020) examined the international development of private universities and colleges, highlighting two critical issues. Addressing these challenges is crucial for private higher education institutions to navigate the complexities of internationalization and ensure sustainable development.

Review of the Literature

The literature review explores into three crucial facets: the evolution and challenges of private higher education in China, the current state of private higher education, and the global collaborative initiatives and exchanges within private higher education. Through an internationalization lens, private colleges and universities can augment their global impact and play a significant role in the worldwide educational panorama. This study furnishes an in-depth context for comprehending the developmental path of private higher education in China, presenting insightful observations to guide subsequent research endeavors and strategic decision-making processes.

The curriculum of private colleges and universities operates within the broader context of a vast social system, according to Harman and Rosenberg, who emphasize that educational challenges cannot be addressed solely through the tactics of the education system. In understanding the school-running quality of private institutions, it is crucial to consider both extensional and connotative levels. The former encompasses explicit elements like the number of graduates, students, and teaching conditions, while the latter explores into the qualitative aspects determining the overall quality of school administration (Wang, 2012).

However, comprehensive studies on the "running level" of private colleges and universities are lacking, with existing research often focusing on specific evaluation indicators. The state's monitoring of educational quality primarily occurs at the educational level, reflecting an evolution in private institutions' perception of "school-running level" from legislative requirements to internal development needs.

The concept of "school-running level" is subject to diverse interpretations within academic circles, leading to ongoing debates. The lack of a definitive explanation stems from varying grading criteria across contexts. Analyzing assessment indicators in Jiangsu Province's colleges and universities aims to unveil the key factors influencing the development of international exchanges and cooperation in private higher education. This exploration sheds light on the multifaceted nature of the "school-running level" concept and its important role in shaping the trajectory of private institutions.

The internationalization of education in private Chinese colleges and universities is a central focus for scholars and professionals in higher education. Shen (2011) identifies it as a strategic decision within Chinese higher education, aiming to optimize resource allocation, leverage global markets, and cultivate individuals with international perspectives (Sun, 2020). Many prominent private institutions collaborate with international universities in the United States, Australia, South Korea, emphasizing teaching quality and fostering diverse initiatives (Shen, 2011). Xi'an Institute of International Affairs, for instance, actively engages in international cooperative education, establishing agreements with foreign universities to enhance mutual recognition of credits and teacher quality (Shen, 2011).

The national "One Belt, One Road" initiative has further propelled internationalization, contributing to global higher education dimensions. Private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, following this initiative, explore international teaching, cross-cultural subject courses, and student exchanges, showcasing commitment to global education (Chen, 2021). However, challenges persist. Zhang (2021) points out issues in the internationalization process, including low internationalization of teaching staff, talent training, education, teaching, and academic cooperation. Private institutions like Shenyang Institute of Technology face challenges such as

a weak foundation, late initiation, and unclear distinguishing features (Wang, 2018). In Guangxi, issues include a lack of institutional guarantees, a closed school operating model, and limited international flexibility in curriculum and faculty development (Zhao, 2022). In Jiangsu Province, private institutions attempt internationalization through Sino-foreign cooperation and inter-school exchanges but face challenges such as organizational internationalization and the absence of internationalization in teacher organizations (Zhai, 2022). Ma (2016) notes that in Shaanxi, challenges include a weak internationalization concept, insufficient organizational support, a scarcity of teachers with international backgrounds, low international mobility of students, limited internationalization of courses, and a low degree of internationalization in scientific research. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the global competitiveness of private higher education institutions in China (Ma, 2016). The internationalization journey is complex, requiring strategic efforts to navigate the evolving landscape and ensure sustainable development (Zheng et al., 2021).

Findings and Discussion

Private colleges and universities in China face challenges in social impact, prestige, and international recognition, impeding effective international cooperation (Wang et al., 2018; Wei, 2020; Zhai, 2022). These institutions encounter difficulties in garnering global acknowledgment, hindering their ability to establish fruitful international collaborations. Research within this context often centers on traditional Chinese-foreign exchanges, student exchange programs, and initiatives like "2+2" or "1+3" collaborations. Chen (2021) underscores a critical issue of homogeneity in the models of internationalized undergraduate education. This lack of diversity hampers the attainment of varied talent training goals, attributed to the absence of clear policy directives for internationalization. The dearth of specific guidelines restricts institutions from fully realizing their distinct characteristics and limits the diversification of their educational offerings.

A significant factor contributing to this challenge is the absence of clear policies on internationalization, impacting talent training and curriculum development. This hampers institutions from fully realizing distinctive features and limits the diversity of their international education offerings. Addressing this policy gap is crucial for effective internationalization strategies and enhancing private higher education's global recognition.

Private institutions grapple with faculty lacking international experience, administrators with limited global perspectives, and a scarcity of foreign teachers. Zhao (2022) notes a deficiency in international exposure, hindering the adoption of international teaching methods. Zhai (2022) observes variations in foreign instructors, often language majors, with limited percentages among professors. Recruiting foreign professors faces challenges, exacerbating the scarcity of international perspectives in private institutions.

Dai (2020) highlights the anti-globalization trend's intensification amid the pandemic, posing challenges for cultivating students' internationalization abilities. Internationalization programs are limited, hindering sustainable development. Peng (2018) notes low student exchange rates due to faculty shortages, limited exchange mechanisms, and deficiencies in the education system. Liu (2013) emphasizes constraints in curriculum internationalization, lacking guarantees and financial support, hindering students' understanding of global issues.

In contrast, public institutions actively absorb foreign student experiences and promote balanced approaches in curriculum construction. Private institutions should extend curriculum

internationalization beyond projects to foster an inclusive international campus culture, meeting diverse student needs in a changing global landscape. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing private higher education's global engagement and opportunities for students.

Private colleges and universities in Jiangsu Province face notable challenges in the internationalization of scientific research. With a relatively short duration of school-running, a delayed entry into the aspect of scientific universities, and limited experience in academic pursuits, these institutions encounter hurdles in advancing their scientific research endeavors (Zhai, 2022). Li (2014) identifies key challenges within this context, including a lack of correlation between scientific research and educational modules. Private institutions, prioritizing the improvement of teaching abilities during their development, often grapple with a divergence between teaching and scientific research objectives. Additionally, there exists a significant gap in the managerial emphasis on scientific research internationalization compared to public colleges, necessitating a strengthening of conceptual awareness, operational mechanisms, and underlying circumstances. Collaboration on international scientific research projects with overseas entities remains limited in scope and duration, impeding further internationalization efforts. Moreover, the burden of teaching responsibilities and the inherent challenges of scientific research work during faculty development objectively hinder the internationalization of scientific research in these colleges and universities (Li, 2014; Zhai, 2022). Addressing these challenges is crucial to enhance their contributions to global scientific knowledge and foster effective collaboration in international research endeavors.

The intensification of economic globalization has propelled a significant trend of internationalization in the education sector, shaping the world's economic sphere. This development has attracted substantial global attention, prompting organizations like UNESCO, the World Bank, and OECD to convene conferences and formulate specific policies to address the implications of education internationalization. A prominent manifestation of this trend is the widespread proliferation of education services across nations, with China notably influenced by this expansion (Wen, 2010).

Examining China's history of education exchanges reveals early instances, such as the Tang Dynasty's envoy dispatch, reflecting the ancient roots of Chinese and foreign education exchange activities. However, it was the establishment of New China and the 1978 reform and opening-up policy that gave contemporary relevance to the notion of the internationalization of education, free from ideological biases (Zha Yuanli, 2012).

In 1983, Deng Xiaoping's proposal of the "Three Orientations" marked a essential moment, officially proclaiming the slogan of the internationalization of education. The subsequent approval of the Resolution on the Reform of the Education System in 1985 by the CPC Central Committee emphasized drawing on both positive and negative aspects of foreign education development.

The 1990s ushered in a new stage in the internationalization of Chinese education, highlighted by the 1993 Outline of China's Education Reform and Development, emphasizing the expansion of education's opening to the outside world, strengthening international exchange and cooperation, and learning from successful global experiences. The issuance of the Provisional Rules on Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education in 1995 recognized it as a major form of international exchange and cooperation in Chinese education.

China's formal accession to the WTO in 2001 marked a crucial moment, obliging conformity to WTO rules in trading education services and integrating the local education sector into the global

education industry (Zhou Mansheng, 2006). In 2016, new guidelines on the opening-up of education were announced, focusing on accelerating development, improving study abroad quality, enhancing institutional mechanisms, strengthening high-level leadership, promoting cultural exchanges, fostering win-win cooperation, and implementing the Belt and Road Initiative.

Despite these efforts, the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on international cooperation and exchange, exacerbating geopolitical disputes. The resulting stress from these conflicts poses challenges to the global order and the ongoing process of internationalization in higher education.

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