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СТРАТЕГИЯ РАЗВИТИЯ ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛИЗАЦИИ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В ПРОВИНЦИИ ЦЗИЛИНЬ : ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ И ПРАКТИЧЕСКИЕ ПОДХОДЫ*

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Аннотация. Интернационализация высшего образования имеет важное значение для содействия качественному развитию. Провинция Цзилинь, крупный регион на северо-востоке Китая, известный своим вкладом в науку и образование, уже давно осуществляет инициативы, направленные на усиление интернационализации своего сектора высшего образования, используя свои уникальные географические преимущества, культурные и академические ресурсы. В этом исследовании рассматривается прогресс в усилиях Цзилиня по интернационализации высшего образования и анализируются характеристики этих инициатив. Несмотря на значительные достижения в таких областях, как китайско-иностранные совместные программы, развитие профессорско-преподавательского состава, создание исследовательской инфраструктуры и студенческие обмены, проблемы сохраняются. Эти проблемы включают неравномерное развитие, ограниченное влияние бренда, недостаточную интернационализацию преподавательского состава, ограниченный объем и глубину обменов, а также неадекватные системы поддержки. В статье предлагаются стратегические меры по реализации, такие как укрепление рамок совместного развития, создание отличительных кооперативных брендов, формирование международных команд преподавателей, расширение гло-

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бальных обменов и совершенствование механизмов управления и поддержки, которые предлагают как теоретические рекомендации, так и практические рекомендации по продвижению интернационализации высшего образования в Цзилине.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование в провинции Цзилинь; стратегия интернационализации; иностранные студенты в Китае; китайско-иностранное совместное образовательные программы.

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HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALIZATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IN JILIN PROVINCE : EVOLUTION AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES*

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Abstract. The internationalization of higher education is essential for fostering high-quality development. Jilin Province, a prominent region in Northeast China known for its contributions to science and education, has long pursued initiatives aimed at enhancing the internationalization of its higher education sector by capitalizing on its unique geographical advantages and cultural and academic resources. This study examines the progress of Jilin's efforts in higher education internationalization and analyzes the characteristics of these initiatives. Although significant achievements have been realized in areas such as Sino-foreign cooperative programs, faculty development, the establishment of research infrastructure, and student exchanges, challenges persist. These challenges include uneven development, limited brand influence, insufficient internationalization of teaching staff, constrained scope and depth of exchanges, and inadequate support systems. The paper proposes strategic implementation measures such as fostering collaborative development frameworks, establishing distinctive cooperative brands, cultivating international faculty teams, expanding global exchanges, and enhancing governance and support mechanisms to offer both theoretical references and practical guidance for advancing the internationalization of higher education in Jilin.

Keywords: Higher Education in Jilin Province; Internationalization Strategy; International Students in China; Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education Programs.

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Introduction

The internationalization of higher education, a critical aspect of global education governance, has evolved beyond mere educational policy to become a national development strategy (Ren, 2016). Chinese scholars have performed a visual analysis of research advancements and trends in educational internationalization, utilizing WOS journal literature. They concluded that a prominent focus in global research on this topic is the internationalization of higher education (Ma, 2016). This process involves the incorporation of international, cross-cultural, and global dimensions into the objectives, functions, or delivery mechanisms of higher education at both institutional and national levels (Knight, 2004). Consequently, it has emerged as a central agenda item in educational strategies worldwide, garnering significant attention in both theoretical research and practical applications. The internationalization of higher education has become an essential metric for evaluating educational quality, with scholarly investigations on this subject displaying a trend toward diversification, ranging from foundational theoretical studies to practical implementations. Following the introduction of the concept of «limited globalization» (Zheng, 2021), scholars have begun to rigorously analyze how this structural transformation influences international exchange and cooperation. Enhancing domestic competitiveness in global markets, expanding international strategic partnerships in higher education, and exploring innovative digital models have become pivotal strategic priorities for leading educational nations globally (Liu, 2022).

As a leading province in education, Jilin Province places great emphasis on the internationalization of higher education, with its abundant educational resources providing solid support for implementing this strategic initiative. According to the Provincial Education Development Report (2024 edition), Jilin hosts 81 higher education institutions, including 38 undergraduate universities, 29 vocational colleges, and 14 adult education institutions. In this context, exploring issues related to higher education internationalization represents not only a new exploration within the broader framework of globalization but also a pioneering effort in this field. While existing research has yielded substantial findings, most focus on comparative studies of global higher education internationalization, specific aspects of its implementation, or development pathways. This study, focusing on Jilin Province, investigates key aspects of higher education internationalization, marking a significant advancement in this area and holding considerable importance for regional development.

I. The Process of Internationalization of Higher Education in Jilin Province

The year 2000 was selected as the research node mainly because there was a clear divergence in the development logic before and after. Before 2000, the international exchanges of higher education in Jilin Province mostly relied on sporadic inter-school connections for short-term academic exchanges. At the provincial level, a systematic internationalization development strategy for higher education had not yet been formed, and related measures for running schools were scattered and lacked top-level coordination. Entering the year 2000, driven by multiple factors such as the expansion of college enrollment, preparations for China's accession to the World Trade Organization, and the reform of the old industrial base in Northeast China, the province successively introduced supporting development measures. Substantive projects such as Sino-foreign cooperative ed-

ucation and joint degree cultivation gradually rolled out. The internationalization of higher education was officially elevated to the content of the special planning for regional education development, and the determination of development stages based on this is in line with the characteristics of historical evolution.

(1) Phase I: Rapid Development Period (2000–2012)

In the 21st century, the internationalization of higher education in Jilin Province entered a period of rapid development. Border trade between China and Russia experienced explosive growth, leading to a surge in demand for professionals specializing in Russian language and international economics and trade. Institutions such as Jilin Russian Language College took the lead in establishing cooperation with Russia by offering programs in Russian language and international trade to cultivate practical talent for border trade. Jilin University and Northeast Normal University began admitting small numbers of international students from Europe and America for academic exchanges, though their proportion remained relatively low.

Meanwhile, the principle of «expanding educational openness» outlined in the National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020) emphasizes strengthening international exchanges and cooperation while introducing high-quality educational resources, thereby laying a solid foundation for provincial universities to engage in international collaboration.

During this period, the internationalization of higher education in Jilin Province was characterized by cooperation primarily focused on language and cultural exchanges, with limited market orientation.

(2) Phase II: Diversified Open Development and System Construction (2013–2020)

In 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed and in 2015, the national «Double First-Class» construction program was launched, marking the entry of Jilin Province's higher education into a phase of system-building for internationalization, with its strategic focus shifting toward integration into national strategies, diversified openness, and the establishment of an internationalized framework. In 2017, the Implementation Plan for Coordinating the Construction of High-Level Universities and Disciplines in Jilin Province was issued, incorporating international exchange and cooperation into provincial strategy and explicitly calling for strengthening international collaboration and enhancing open educational practices, encouraging universities to establish joint programs and talent cultivation partnerships with leading foreign educational institutions and renowned enterprises, expanding the scale of international students enrolled at universities in Jilin and building the “Study in Jilin brand”. The scope of cooperation has expanded from Russia, the Republic of Korea (ROK) to Europe and America, with Jilin University establishing partnerships with multiple foreign institutions, while numerous universities have implemented higher education internationalization strategies, resulting in steady growth in the number of international students. Taking Jilin Foreign Studies University as an example, its international development strategy explicitly references some documents, reflecting its commitment to serving the national strategy for developing and opening up the Changji-Tu region (Zhao, 2021).

At this stage, the internationalization of higher education has shifted from service-oriented approaches to substantive development, establishing a unified strategic framework across the province.

(3) Phase III: High-Quality Internationalization Development Strategy (2021–present)

Since 2021, the Chinese government has supported Jilin Province in establishing itself as a key gateway for opening up to the north. Aligned with the national strategy to build China into an education powerhouse and the new requirements for comprehensive revitalization of Northeast China, higher education in Jilin has entered a phase of high-quality internationalization, shifting its strategic focus toward developing a hub for northern openness, deepening cooperation with North-east Asia, and building a high-standard international education system.

Historic breakthroughs have been achieved in Sino-foreign cooperative education programs, with the Ministry of Education announcing the approval results for institutions and projects in the second half of 2025. All five institutions and six projects submitted by Jilin Province were approved, achieving a 100 % approval rate. Both the total number of approvals and the number of approved institutions ranked first nationwide, marking a significant milestone in Jilin's efforts in Sino-foreign cooperative education. The institution jointly established by Northeast Normal University and Repin Academy of Fine Arts in Russia became the world's first educational entity to collaborate with the academy in training master's students in fine arts. Additionally, Northeast Normal University partnered with Bologna Conservatory of Music in Italy to systematically introduce its high-quality educational resources into China for the first time. Changchun University of Technology collaborated with Southern Cross University in Australia to establish the International Future Technology College, focusing on integrated undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral education in fields such as artificial intelligence and big data. The International Special Education College of Changchun University of Education partnered with Northeastern State University in the United States, representing a crucial exploration in cultivating high-level international faculty and talent in special education in China, thereby aligning the province's special education initiatives with global standards. The collaboration between International Sports and Health College of Jilin Sport University and Smolensk State University of Sports in Russia marked a «zero breakthrough» in international cooperative education programs for sports majors in Jilin Province (Jilin Provincial Department of Education, 2026).

II. The Characteristics of the Evolution of Jilin Province's Higher Education Internationalization Development Strategy

(1) Policy-driven

The internationalization of higher education in Jilin Province demonstrates a significant dependence on policy, with each strategic transformation closely aligned with national strategies and provincial directives. In 2017, internationalization was integrated into the provincial strategy, and since 2021, the emphasis has shifted toward engagement with northern regions. Policy initiatives have delineated the strategic objectives, tasks, and pathways, thereby ensuring consistent advancement in internationalization efforts.

(2) Dual drivers of geography and culture

Geographical proximity, cultural affinity, and complementary economic factors have established cooperation with Russia as the central pillar of Jilin Province's strategy for higher education

internationalization, sustaining its dominant position over the years. From cultivating border trade professionals in the 1990s, to fostering artistic and industrial collaboration in the 2010s, and further developing high-level Sino-foreign cooperative educational programs in the 2020s, cooperation with these countries has consistently been a top priority, with collaboration areas continuously expanding and levels steadily rising. Jilin's higher education internationalization efforts have consistently emphasized deep integration between globalization and disciplinary development, focusing on distinctive disciplines such as chemistry, archaeology, ethnology, winter sports, and agricultural science and technology. The province has pursued targeted international collaborations by establishing joint laboratories, joint training programs, and Sino-foreign cooperative educational institutions, thereby enhancing disciplinary excellence through internationalization and supporting global academic quality with disciplinary strengths.

(3) Concurrent advancement of study-abroad services and quality assurance

Jilin Province has consistently prioritized enhancing international students' learning experiences and educational quality as a cornerstone of its internationalization strategy. The province has evolved from admitting international students to optimizing their curriculum systems, providing dual mentors, improving living services, establishing a comprehensive quality assurance framework, strengthening the Jilin study abroad brand, focusing on off-campus experiences for international students, promoting university-industry collaborative internships and cultural exchange programs, thereby boosting their sense of belonging and overall satisfaction.

3. Current Status and Challenges of Internationalization Development in Universities in Jilin Province

This study compiled undergraduate teaching quality reports from 25 universities in Jilin Province for the years 2022, 2023, and 2024, providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of internationalization among provincial higher education institutions and systematically analyzing the major challenges they face.

(1) Current Status of International Development

① *Distribution of Sino-foreign cooperative education programs*

Sino-foreign cooperative education programs play a crucial role in the internationalization of higher education. Incomplete statistics indicate that at least 16 universities in the province have initiated approximately 45 such programs. These initiatives are widely distributed and primarily involve partnerships with institutions in the United States, Russia, the Republic of Korea, and the United Kingdom, while also extending to countries such as Australia, Japan, and Italy. Some programs have achieved significant scale, with collaborative models evolving toward more advanced levels. For instance, Changchun University of Science and Technology has established a joint college with Saint Petersburg State University in Russia, offering integrated undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs.

② *The degree of internationalization of the teaching staff*

The internationalization of faculty is a critical priority for universities universally. Institutions participating in the 985 and 211 programs demonstrate a greater proportion of international

faculty members, with certain universities employing a significant number of foreign educators. Additionally, universities facilitate overseas research and academic exchanges for faculty members through initiatives funded by the China Scholarship Council or through dedicated grants, thereby enhancing their global perspectives.

③ *International Scientific Research Cooperation and Platform Development*

International scientific research cooperation takes various forms, and platform development has yielded initial results. Numerous universities have established high-level international cooperation platforms.

④ *International Mobility and Exchange of Students*

Various universities promote international exchange programs for students through multiple channels, including exchange programs, joint training initiatives, short-term academic visits, and international competitions. For instance, Jilin University and Changchun University have dispatched numerous students abroad for exchanges, while institutions such as Northeast Normal University actively organize student participation in international academic conferences and competitions.

(2) Challenges

Despite some progress, the internationalization of universities in Jilin Province still faces a series of profound challenges that hinder further quality improvement.

① *Uneven international development*

The disparity in internationalization levels among provincial universities is notable. Leading institutions, such as Jilin University and Northeast Normal University, exhibit significant strengths, while other undergraduate universities and vocational colleges display a weak foundation in internationalization. Many of these institutions lack comprehensive internationalization strategies, and their collaborations are often marked by limited depth and scale, hindering the potential for synergistic effects.

② *The influence of Jilin Province's study-abroad brand is weak*

The demographic composition of international students in China is relatively homogeneous, predominantly originating from neighboring countries such as Russia and ROK, while students from Europe, America, and along the Belt and Road route account for a small proportion overall. The distribution of academic disciplines is concentrated in language-related fields, with majors in science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, and advantageous industries representing a low share of the total student body, indicating a poor alignment with Jilin Province's industrial development needs.

③ *The internationalization level of the teaching staff is relatively low*

First, there is a severe shortage of high-end talent, particularly national and provincial-level leading figures and discipline heads with international academic influence. Second, faculty members generally have limited global perspectives. They participate infrequently in international academic activities, collaborate insufficiently with top foreign universities, and lack initiative in broadening their international horizons. Third, attracting and retaining talent poses significant challenges

due to objective factors such as geography, climate, and compensation packages, making it difficult to recruit and retain overseas high-level professionals and outstanding foreign faculty.

④ *Insufficient breadth and depth of international exchanges*

First, participation rates remain low. Although various programs exist, the proportion of students actually participating in overseas academic exchanges or joint training initiatives remains limited. Second, project quality requires improvement. Substantive degree collaboration programs and in-depth research partnerships with world-leading universities are relatively scarce. Third, there is an imbalance between attracting international talent and expanding global engagement. The scale and caliber of international students, particularly degree-seeking students, need enhancement. Fourth, a deeply integrated campus culture linking domestic and international students remains incompletely developed. For example, inadequate English-language website development. Many institutions lack comprehensive English-language websites at both primary and secondary levels. As university websites serve as gateways for global visibility. Insufficient international elements on campuses. Most institutions lack English-language signage and directional markers reflecting inadequate emphasis on globalization integration.

⑤ *The support and guarantee system for international development is inadequate*

First, the management mechanisms exhibit inefficiencies. There is a lack of coordination among departments, including academic affairs, international affairs, and student affairs, in certain universities. Second, the incentive and evaluation mechanisms are insufficient. Existing systems designed to motivate faculty in the development of international courses and the attainment of international teaching outcomes, as well as the supportive measures for credit recognition and quality assessment of students' overseas exchanges, require further enhancement. Third, funding remains constrained. Due to limitations arising from regional economic conditions and institutional financial capabilities, funding for international academic mobility and the aggregation of inbound resources is generally inadequate.

4. Implementation of Jilin Province's Internationalization Development Strategy for Higher Education

Considering the international characteristics and diverse challenges facing higher education in Jilin Province, the future trajectory of internationalization must shift from an emphasis on scale expansion to a focus on quality enhancement. By addressing significant national and regional needs and prioritizing substantive, high-quality development, it is essential to deepen international cooperation, optimize the allocation of international resources, and cultivate elite innovative talents. These individuals should possess a global perspective, a strong understanding of international regulations, and the ability to engage effectively in international affairs and competition. Such efforts will significantly bolster the international influence, competitiveness, and contributions of Jilin's higher education sector to local open development.

(1) Establishing a framework for coordinated development

Enhance the provincial-level cooperation mechanism by establishing a Leading Group for Higher Education Internationalization, which will be chaired by the provincial government and in-

clude representatives from the education, foreign affairs, finance, and science and technology departments. This group will collaboratively formulate internationalization development plans, address critical issues such as cross-border education programs and talent recruitment, and implement tailored strategies. It will support Jilin University in its pursuit of becoming a world-class institution, promote Northeast Normal University and Yanbian University in their efforts to advance «Double First-Class» initiatives, and serve as a model for educational cooperation in Northeast Asia. Additionally, the group will guide local universities in developing distinctive disciplines and engaging in differentiated international collaborations. Furthermore, it will facilitate vocational colleges' partnerships aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative in capacity-building areas to cultivate internationally competent professionals with technical skills.

(2) *Building high-level, distinctive cooperative brands*

Enhance the level and structure of cooperation by building on existing undergraduate joint programs and actively pursuing the expansion of joint training initiatives at the master's and doctoral levels, as well as within Sino-foreign cooperative education institutions. Drawing from the experiences of the joint colleges established by Changchun University of Science and Technology and Saint Petersburg State University of Mechanical Engineering in Russia, investigate integrated cultivation mechanisms that encompass bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Concentrate efforts on attracting partners from both general universities and world-class institutions, particularly in leading disciplines. This is especially pertinent in Jilin Province's competitive fields, including optoelectronics, chemistry, geology, agriculture, traditional Chinese medicine, power engineering, automotive technology, and rail transit, to foster robust collaboration.

(3) *Building a high-caliber, internationally-oriented faculty team*

We will launch targeted initiatives to attract high-caliber international talents, establishing provincial or university-level «Special Programs for High-Level International Talent Recruitment.» Focusing on key disciplines and innovation platforms, these programs aim to precisely recruit leading academic figures, discipline leaders, and promising young overseas PhDs globally. We will optimize talent recruitment policies by providing regionally competitive support in areas such as compensation packages, research startup funding, team composition, and living conditions. A comprehensive overseas faculty development system will be established, with increased financial investment and systematic design of overseas training models. Key faculty members and young researchers will be selected for long-term academic visits, collaborative research, or professional development at partner institutions, with mechanisms established to facilitate the application and sharing of research outcomes upon return. We advocate creating academic departments with a high proportion of internationally experienced faculty members and refining incentive and evaluation mechanisms. The purpose of incentives and evaluations is to enhance academic quality, as internationalization capabilities are fundamentally tied to educational excellence. Within evaluation frameworks, incentives play a crucial role in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of universities' international engagement. In developing these systems, evaluations should not only focus on outcomes but also encompass process-based assessments, with continuously improved methodologies to strengthen faculty and students' motivation for participating in global initiatives.

(4) Enhance the breadth and depth of international exchanges

First, we have proactively initiated the strategic layout for scientific research cooperation along the Belt and Road, fully leveraging Jilin Province's technological advantages in agriculture, infrastructure, traditional Chinese medicine, and other fields. By collaborating with overseas educational institutions, we have expanded scientific research cooperation to countries along the Belt and Road, addressing practical challenges in local development and achieving dual benefits in both technological empowerment and cultural exchange.

Second, foster a strong ecosystem for international academic exchange by supporting faculty and students in organizing, hosting, or participating in high-level international conferences. Continuously develop academic brands with regional influence such as the Changbai Mountain Forum. Establish dedicated funding to assist researchers in publishing collaborative findings in top-tier international journals and securing positions in international academic organizations. Thereby enhancing the influence of Jilin Province's universities within the global academic community.

Thirdly, creating a supportive international environment is crucial. This environment allows local students to engage with a multicultural and globally diverse setting while enabling international students to recognize the institution's commitment to integrating foreign cultures, a central theme in internationalization research. Specific initiatives include the installation of English-language signage and road signs, the incorporation of cultural elements from partner countries into campus design, the enhancement of English-language website development, the organization of international cultural festivals, and the hosting or participation in international conferences.

(5) Improving the Governance and Support System

To enhance resource integration and expand investment scale, universities should actively pursue financial support from national and provincial governments while also diversifying funding sources. This can be achieved by establishing dedicated funds for the development of institutional internationalization and improving the efficiency of fund utilization. Priority should be given to key areas, including faculty training, curriculum development, support for student overseas exchanges, and recruitment of high-caliber talent. Additionally, a comprehensive service support system must be established to enhance the entire international exchange service chain for students. This system should encompass project information disclosure, application guidance, pre-departure training, overseas assistance, return credit recognition, and academic continuity. Furthermore, the approval processes for official overseas trips by faculty should be streamlined, accompanied by convenient services. Upgrading campus infrastructure is also essential to create more international learning, activity, and living spaces.

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