

SWOT Analysis of the Internationalization of Private Colleges and Universities in Shaanxi of Northwest China in the New Era

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Abstract:

Private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province of China are facing the challenges and opportunities of globalized education in the new era. The purpose of this paper is to explore the strategy and path of their internationalization in order to enhance the competitiveness of higher education. Taking SWOT analysis, this paper systematically evaluates the internal and external environments faced by these colleges and universities in the process of internationalization, and clarifies their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Based on the analysis, this paper further puts forward suggestions for the internationalization of private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province of China in the new period. This paper provides theoretical support and practical reference for the internationalization of private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China, and also has certain reference significance for the internationalization process of similar colleges and universities.

Keywords:

Shaanxi Province in China, Private Colleges and Universities, Internationalization

1. Introduction

A number of well-known private universities in China have actively taken the road of internationalization and laid a good foundation for internationalization [1]. At the same time, with the in-depth promotion of the “Belt and Road” (hereafter “B&R”) initiative, the internationalization of Chinese higher education has been further enhanced. At this stage, private colleges and universities have realized the development, integration and trans-nationalization of educational forms during the development of internationalized education [2]. Internationalized education in private colleges and universities is not only a way to enhance the competitiveness of schools, but also a key factor in promoting the development of regional economy and society [3]. Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi Province, is the historical capital of China's 13 Dynasties and the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, and Shaanxi Province itself is a major province of higher education in China in the new era as well as an important node of the “B&R” Initiative. According to the data from the Department of

Education of Shaanxi Province in China, as of December 2024, there were 272 colleges and universities in Northwest China (111 in Shaanxi Province), including 50 private colleges and universities (33 in Shaanxi Province). Therefore, it is of practical significance to promote the internationalization of China's regional education and even to improve the quality of China's higher education by studying the current situation and strategy of the internationalization of private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province as an example. This study applies SWOT analysis to assess the internal and external environments with a view to identifying its strengths and room for improvement, and on this basis proposes forward-looking and practical strategies and paths for internationalization.

2. SWOT Analysis of Internationalization of Private Colleges and Universities in Shaanxi Province, China

As shown in Table 1, this paper analyzes and presents the four aspects of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the internationalization of private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province in the new era from the internal and external dimensions.

Table 1. SWOT analysis model of internationalization of private universities in Shaanxi Province, China.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
	• Autonomy and flexibility • Geographical advantages • Rich educational resources	• Single source of funding and complexity of funders • Inadequate internationalized faculty development • Biased understanding and positioning of internationalized education
	Opportunities	Threats
	• Government policy support • The stage provided by the “B&R” initiative • Diversified demands of international education market • Digital transformation of education offers opportunities	• Fierce competition with public universities • Threats of access to and utilization of new educational resources • Challenges posed by technological advances

2.1. Analysis of Strengths

The decision-making autonomy and flexibility of private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China [4] enable them to quickly adapt to the changes in the international education market, innovate their development model, and provide students with diversified learning pathways. In particular, compared with public universities, the autonomy and flexibility of private universities are more advantageous, especially in the allocation of educational resources and the innovation of cooperation models, which is conducive to their exploration of cooperation models adapted to the needs of the international education market.

Shaanxi's geographical advantages and the promotion of the “B&R” initiative have created unique opportunities. Located in the core area of the Silk Road Economic Belt, private universities in Shaanxi Province have the opportunity to serve as a bridge connecting China and the countries along the route in terms of educational exchanges, cultivating talents with regional characteristics, and meeting the demand for diversified talents under the “B&R” Initiative.

As mentioned in the introduction, according to the Department of Education of Shaanxi Province of China, as of December 2024, there were 111 higher education institutions in Shaanxi Province, of which 33 were private higher education institutions, accounting for about 30% of the total number of higher education institutions in the province. The province is rich in private higher education resources, which is conducive to mutual reference and common development.

2.2. Analysis of Weaknesses

In the process of internationalization of private higher education institutions in Shaanxi Province of China, they inevitably have weaknesses, which, if not improved, will hinder their further development. The first and foremost is the singularity and insufficiency of funding sources. Private colleges and universities mainly rely on tuition income to run their schools, especially some private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province are actually funded by listed companies, and even their subordinate operating segments are complicated and economically ineffective, which leads to the benign development of the education industry being hindered. In addition, some independent colleges have to face the developmental “pain period” of rebranding and “re-starting” after they have been completely transformed into private ordinary colleges and universities. All of the above situations have put private universities in Shaanxi Province into financial constraints in the process of internationalization, thus affecting the organization of international exchange activities, the improvement of teaching facilities, and the development of scientific research projects.

The teaching staff of private universities in Shaanxi Province, China, often suffers from instability and lack of internationalization training, which to a certain extent limits the quality of teaching and the depth of international education cooperation. The weak scientific research ability of teachers and the inconspicuous internationalized educational attitude are factors that together lead to the inadequacy of the faculty in the internationalization process. At the same time, the insufficiency of internal benign feedback mechanisms also affects the fair distribution of educational resources and the implementation of internationalization strategies.

There are deviations in the understanding and positioning of internationalization in Chinese private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province. At present, the vast majority of private universities in China are for-profit in nature, and they generally draw on the corporate governance structure of enterprises-i.e., the presidential responsibility system under the leadership of the board of directors. Under this governance structure, the board of directors’ evaluation of the work of the senior management team focuses more on quantifiable and highly visible tasks such as the economic situation, the achievement of enrollment targets, and the employment rate of graduates. However, there is often a bias in the understanding and positioning of the internationalization of the university, which is a long-term and long-term endeavor that requires passion. Most of the international cooperation programs of private universities have a strong profit-making purpose, and the overall operation of the programs is unstable, with uneven quality. Such programs are essentially the secondary development of the school’s student resources, which deviates from the original purpose of internationalization.

2.3. Analysis of Opportunities

Since the 1990s, the Malaysian government has introduced a series of laws and regulations to regulate and guide the internationalization of private higher education institutions. With the support of the government, Malaysian private higher education institutions have gradually embarked on the path of internationalization and achieved remarkable results [5]. This shows that the government's policy of supporting the internationalization of education can bring internationalization opportunities for local private higher education institutions. *The Outline of the Strategic Plan for Expanding Domestic Demand (2022-2035)* proposes to "encourage social forces to provide diversified education services, support and regulate the development of private education, promote the reform of private education classification and management, and carry out high-level Chinese-foreign cooperative education." *The 2024-2035 Master Plan on Building China into a Leading Country in Education* states that it is necessary to "appropriately tilt new higher education resources toward the central and western regions and ethnic areas." "Encourage high-level foreign universities of science and technology to come to China to run schools cooperatively." All these provide directional guidance and policy guarantee for international cooperation of universities. By actively utilizing these policies, private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China, can seek government support for more financial allocations and project grants to alleviate the pressure of funding and safeguard the development process of internationalized education.

The "B&R" initiative provides unprecedented opportunities for private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China. The economic cooperation and cultural exchange needs of the countries along the route provide a broad international cooperation stage for colleges and universities. It not only helps to enhance the international reputation of the university, but also attracts international students from more regions, such as Central Asia, and is even more conducive to the development of overseas education.

The diversified needs of the international education market provide a broader development space for private colleges and universities. Private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province can give full play to their regional characteristics and cultivate professionals with backgrounds in countries along the "B&R", such as linguists, lawyers, infrastructures and information technology professionals, in order to satisfy the market's demand for diversified talents and enhance their competitiveness.

The digital transformation of education has provided a new platform and means for internationalized education. Through online education, distance learning and other modes, private colleges and universities in China's Shaanxi Province can break through geographical limitations and attract students from all over the world, and at the same time share educational resources with internationally renowned colleges and universities to realize the deepening of the sharing of teaching resources and academic exchanges, and to further enhance their international reputation.

2.4. Analysis of Threats

With the intensification of competition in the education market, especially the fierce competition with public universities. For example, in the cultivation of international students in private colleges and universities, the government has not introduced corresponding supportive policies, which makes their enthusiasm low and makes it difficult for them to truly take advantage of the internationalization of private colleges

and universities [6]. This competition may also affect the stability of the school's source of students and funding for school operation.

The acquisition and utilization of educational resources is also one of the threatening factors. Although private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province have made some achievements in introducing international educational resources, they are still far from the top international non-public college and university educational resources, which leads to a weakness in their international academic competition. At the same time, the high cost of introducing educational resources and implementing cooperative programs may put pressure on the financial situation of the university.

The challenges posed by technological advances should not be underestimated. Although Internet technologies offer new possibilities for the internationalization of education, the progress of private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China, in utilizing these technologies to improve the quality of teaching and expand their international influence may lag behind that of public colleges and universities, which may affect their competitiveness in the international education market. Private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China, need to make improvements in curriculum, enrollment channels, and internationalized faculty stability to meet the challenges posed by technological advances [7].

3. Suggestions for Internationalization of Private Universities in Shaanxi Province, China in the New Era

3.1. Building Scientific Internationalization Management Mechanism

Building a scientific internationalization management mechanism is the key to promote the internationalization process of private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China. According to their own characteristics, they should establish a top-down hierarchical management mode to ensure the coordination and promotion of international affairs. This includes setting up a special internationalization management department, clarifying the responsibilities and authority of each department, and establishing a regular evaluation and feedback mechanism, as well as correlating the effectiveness of the school's internationalization with the evaluation indexes of the positions of the teaching staff to a certain extent, in order to ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of the strategy. Innovations in management mechanisms should also include enrollment policies to attract international students and teachers, institutional support for teachers' overseas training, and communication and coordination mechanisms with international partners.

3.2. Optimizing the Internationalized Curriculum System

Optimizing the curriculum system is the core of improving the quality of international education. Private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China should take into account the "B&R" initiative and the rapid development of the artificial intelligence era to develop special courses with countries and regions along the route, such as increasing the number of courses on the cultures, languages, economies and laws of Central Asia and the BRICS countries, so as to enhance the attractiveness and practicability of the courses. In addition, revise the talent cultivation program and adjust the course content modules to meet the needs of diversified talent cultivation.

3.3. Strengthening the Internationalization of the Faculty

The internationalization of the faculty is a key factor in realizing the internationalization of education. Teachers with international background and experience should be introduced, and opportunities for overseas training and academic exchanges should be provided to improve the international academic level and cross-cultural teaching ability of existing teachers. Colleges and universities can also cooperate with colleges and universities in countries along the “B&R” to implement mutual teacher assignment programs to improve the international perspective of teachers.

3.4. Promoting International Two-way Student Mobility

Student mobility is an important part of internationalized education. For example, in the index system of “ShanghaiRanking’s Academic Ranking of Non-public Universities in China”, the “undergraduates’ further study rate” accounts for 20% of the total number of students, including those who go abroad to study or work, so doing a good job in this area will help to improve the international mobility of students. Therefore, doing a good job in this area will be conducive to the improvement of university rankings and the effectiveness of internationalized talent cultivation. It is meaningful to provide students with abundant overseas internships and short-term study tours, so that they can experience different cultures and develop their global vision and cross-cultural communication skills. At the same time, by optimizing the scholarship policy, more international students should be attracted to study in the university, and the government brand of “Study in Shaanxi” should be improved.

3.5. Enhancing International Academic Influence

Enhancing international academic influence is an important goal of the internationalization strategy. For example, in the index system of “ShanghaiRanking’s Academic Ranking of Non-public Universities in China”, “International Journal Papers” accounts for 5%. Therefore, universities should encourage teachers to participate in international academic conferences, publish high-quality papers in international journals, establish academic contacts with international counterparts, and strive for international research projects. At the same time, the university should set up a special international academic exchange fund to support teachers’ international cooperative research, in order to enhance the school’s presence in the international academic arena.

3.6. Seeking Internal and External Financial Security

In the process of realizing these paths, financial security is the key link. Colleges and universities should actively seek financial support from the government, especially for the “B&R” construction of special allocations. At the same time, they should broaden the sources of funds, such as obtaining funds through university-enterprise cooperation, social donations and international cooperation programs. In addition, universities should optimize the use of funds to ensure the efficient implementation of international cooperation programs.

4. Conclusions

Private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China, are facing the challenges and opportunities of globalized education in the new era, and the development trend of internationalization is remarkable, but at the same time, there are also many problems and challenges. By evaluating their internal and external environments using SWOT analysis, this paper reveals the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of such colleges and universities in the process of internationalization, thus providing certain reflections for the internationalization of private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China. Future research can utilize more quantitative tools and methods for practical demonstration.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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