

Internationalization of China's Applied Undergraduate Institutions: Core Characteristics, Practical Predicaments and Developmental Aspirations

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the pervasive popularization of contemporary higher education and the accelerating globalization of worldwide educational undertakings, the internationalized advancement of China's application-oriented undergraduate institutions has accomplished a pivotal developmental transition from the previous extensive development predicated on enrollment expansion and scale proliferation toward connotative endogenous upgrading centering on the improvement of educational quality. Rooted in the institutional schooling tenet of applied undergraduate universities, namely servicing local socioeconomic progression and facilitating in-depth integration between industrial production and disciplinary education, this dissertation launches an in-depth dissecting analysis targeting the intrinsic core attributes, prevailing realistic bottlenecks, as well as prospective developmental demands concerning their internationalized progression. The core research objective lies in probing into a distinctive, differentiated, and high-standard internationalization pathway tailored to the localized developmental realities of China's applied undergraduate colleges and universities, furnishing referential paradigms for the construction of a characteristic international higher education system nationwide, and ultimately elevating the comprehensive international competitive edge of China's application-oriented undergraduate tertiary establishments.

Keywords: Application-oriented undergraduate institutions; Institutional internationalization; Core attributes; Practical predicaments; Developmental aspirations

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1. Introduction

Fueled by the persistent progressive implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative alongside the all-round strategic propulsion of China's Double First-Class higher education construction blueprint, the internationalization construction of application-oriented undergraduate institutions has evolved into an

indispensable benchmark to quantify institutional running caliber and core comprehensive competitiveness within the modern tertiary education ecosystem. Occupying a considerable proportion of China's domestic higher education layout, application-oriented undergraduate colleges and universities regard internationalized development as an inevitable pathway to upgrade institutional schooling hierarchy, a pivotal strategic vehicle to incubate high-caliber versatile technical practitioners endowed with global cognitive horizons, as well as an indispensable prerequisite to underpin the high-quality iterative development of the regional economy and social undertakings. Nevertheless, when juxtaposed against comprehensive research-centric universities, application-oriented undergraduate tertiary establishments are plagued by manifold restrictive obstacles throughout their internationalized pioneering journey, exemplified by an ambiguous developmental roadmap and inadequate international linkage amid industry-education amalgamation. Accordingly, the proactive exploration of a customized international development framework conforming to the operational characteristics of domestic applied undergraduate institutions stands atop the priority agenda of institutional administrative work.

2. Core characteristics embodied in the internationalization of China's applied undergraduate institutions

2.1. Vocational-oriented talent cultivation plus glocalized domestic internationalization

2.1.1. Introduction of internationally acknowledged vocational qualification accreditation benchmarks

Distinguished from research-intensive universities, which prioritize the infusion of universal general education ideologies, application-oriented undergraduate tertiary institutions predominantly concentrate on two pivotal dimensions: the transplantation of globally prevalent industrial normative criteria and the systematic formulation of localized vocational credential certification frameworks ^[1]. The internationalized curriculum system devised by such institutions maintains direct docking with post-competency requirements stipulated by transnational conglomerates, with the ultimate instructional objective of nurturing competent graduates capable of adapting to multifarious occupational scenarios within global employment marketplaces.

2.1.2. Dual-disciplinary theory plus dual-scenario practical training educational paradigm

This innovative instructional framework breaks free from the shackles of conventional single classroom indoctrination pedagogy, aiming to construct a dual-layered instructional architecture incorporating domestic and overseas theoretical teaching classrooms as well as dual domestic and offshore practical internship bases. Diverse collaborative modalities, including bilateral Sino-foreign joint classroom instruction, mutual academic credit accreditation, and the importation of authentic industrial project cases sourced from overseas enterprises, can effectively facilitate seamless alignment between curriculum content design and standardized vocational competency requirements ^[2].

2.1.3. Synchronized progressive cultivation of linguistic proficiency and specialized vocational competencies

It adopts an integrated compound cultivation mechanism, which takes professional disciplinary learning as the core carrier and foreign language proficiency as an indispensable instrumental skill. On the one hand, institutional educators commit to elevating students' daily oral interactive capabilities; on the other hand,

concentrated efforts are devoted to fostering learners' cross-cultural occupational communication literacy, enabling undergraduates to seamlessly accommodate employment posts within foreign-invested enterprises or participate in the construction of transnational offshore engineering ventures ^[3-4].

2.2. Transboundary nature and pragmatic attribute embedded within industry-education integration pathways

2.2.1. Substantialized physical development of cross-border school-enterprise collaborative partnerships

Essentially, the developmental logic has undergone a fundamental shift from the rudimentary mode of dispatching outbound student trainees toward two alternative developmental orientations: introducing overseas enterprises to establish on-campus cooperative platforms or jointly launching cross-border cooperative projects via institutional and corporate outbound layout. For instance, application-oriented undergraduate establishments can forge stable cooperative bonds with domestic Chinese multinational corporations expanding overseas businesses in high-speed rail infrastructure, civil engineering construction, and advanced manufacturing sectors, extend practical training internship bases to overseas territories, and extensively roll out tailor-made order-form talent incubation schemes ^[5]. In addition, tertiary institutions can cooperate with multinational-funded enterprises to build on-campus industrial colleges within domestic territory, so as to accomplish precise docking between whole-chain talent cultivation planning and upstream-downstream industrial layout demands.

2.2.2. Internationalized structural reconstruction of dual-qualified teaching faculty cohort

The faculty development blueprint of China's applied undergraduate colleges ought to refrain from overemphasizing the exclusive recruitment of overseas doctoral graduates with superior academic credentials. Instead, administrative departments should proactively introduce seasoned technical artisans and enterprise industrial specialists boasting abundant overseas vocational working experience. Furthermore, institutional authorities are required to regularly assign in-service professional instructors to embark on no less than six months of on-site post attachment or practical internships within overseas cooperating enterprises, rather than merely arranging superficial short-term academic exchange visits, with the purpose of consolidating educators' hands-on engineering practical expertise and broadening their global strategic vision ^[6-7].

3. Realistic predicaments confronting the internationalization progression of China's applied undergraduate institutions

3.1. Structural deficiency of the teaching workforce and pervasive bilingual instructional bottlenecks

Professional teaching faculty constitutes the core strategic resource underpinning internationalized institutional operation, yet domestic applied undergraduate colleges suffer conspicuous structural drawbacks in this critical domain. Although an overwhelming majority of disciplinary teachers possess solid theoretical specialized knowledge reserves, their practical foreign language application proficiency remains comparatively deficient, and qualified instructors competent for delivering full-English or bilingual specialized core courses and practical training tutorials are in extremely scarce supply. Even if certain tertiary institutions introduce premium overseas curriculum resources, the practical landing of relevant instructional

arrangements is severely impeded, occasionally spawning problematic phenomena whereby domestic teachers deliver lectures in native Chinese while students resort to post-class self-study and textbook translation independently ^[8]. Moreover, numerous instructors lack long-duration overseas visiting experience and frontline industrial working background, failing to acquire comprehensive and in-depth cognition of cutting-edge international technical specifications, cross-border industrial engineering cultures, and advanced overseas educational philosophies. Such a deficiency restricts educators from engaging in in-depth academic dialogues and substantive bilateral project cooperation under cross-cultural contexts, thereby confining institutional international exchanges to superficial reciprocal institutional visits only.

3.2. Localization maladaptation of imported curriculum resources alongside prevalent homogenization tendency in disciplinary construction

In terms of curriculum compilation and major setting optimization, a great many applied undergraduate tertiary institutions are trapped in two prominent developmental drawbacks: substandard quality of externally-introduced educational resources and insufficient distinctive characteristics manifested in outbound educational layout. Despite the fact that numerous cooperative projects claim the introduction of high-quality overseas educational resources, core proprietary technologies, and characteristic core disciplinary curricula embodying foreign institutional educational advantages are barely imported. The introduced original textbooks are incompatible with China's domestic national conditions and decoupled from prevailing industrial normative benchmarks; coupled with insufficient localized secondary development and curriculum fusion renovation, students are unable to flexibly apply acquired theoretical knowledge into practical occupational scenarios after finishing studies. Additionally, blind pursuit of emerging industry hotspots such as Internet Plus strategy and intelligent manufacturing prompts partial colleges to launch identical international-oriented majors recklessly, completely ignoring self-owned faculty resource endowments and the actual developmental requirements of the surrounding regional economy without rigorous feasibility demonstration ^[9]. Homogenized disciplinary setup results in the absence of featured differentiated competitive advantages grounded on localized industrial foundations, eventually leading to a disconnection between cultivated graduate competency and real market talent demands.

3.3. Superficial international literacy of enrolled students plus utilitarian deviation of institutional schooling philosophy

As core participants of internationalized tertiary education delivery, most undergraduates studying in application-oriented universities are hampered by inadequate comprehensive international accomplishment, manifested as prominent drawbacks, including high written exam scores yet deficient practical application capabilities and constrained global cognitive horizons. Meanwhile, partial institutional administrative implementation reveals an obvious utilitarian inclination reflected in two concrete dimensions. For one thing, notwithstanding passing national CET-4 and CET-6 language assessments, a large proportion of students remain incapable of conducting fluent specialized technical communication in foreign languages under practical professional contexts with deficient listening, speaking, reading, and writing capabilities, especially in terms of proficient employment of disciplinary terminologies for technical discussion. Restricted by personal economic constraints and limited outbound exchange opportunities, the bulk of undergraduates never obtain authentic overseas studying experience and acquire multicultural knowledge merely from

printed textbooks, lacking the competence to tackle intricate practical issues amid diversified cross-cultural surroundings ^[10–11]. For another, several Sino-foreign joint education programs operate under impure developmental motives, either serving as institutional profit-generating channels or alternative admission shortcuts for candidates with subpar college entrance examination scores. Individual colleges impose exorbitant tuition fees upon enrolled students yet fail to furnish equivalent high-standard educational services, triggering diploma-mill-style irregular schooling behaviors and exerting irreversible adverse repercussions on institutional social reputation.

4. Developmental aspirations for boosting the internationalization construction of China's applied undergraduate institutions

4.1. Reconstruct the internationalized faculty ecosystem to surmount competency barriers restricting bilingual teaching and dual-qualified teacher cultivation

To begin with, domestic applied undergraduate establishments need to abandon conventional monolithic academic evaluation criteria and formulate classified hierarchical incentive frameworks targeting internationalized teaching staff in accordance with teachers' practical developmental status. Institutional administrative authorities ought to substantially raise the weighting coefficient of international teaching devotion within professional title appraisal and performance-based salary assessment mechanisms, fully acknowledge teachers' labor inputs in bilingual curriculum development, all-English course delivery, and undergraduate tutoring for international disciplinary competitions, and quantify corresponding instructional workloads authentically, enabling educators dedicated to internationalized teaching initiatives to reap tangible occupational developmental dividends ^[12]. In addition, colleges are supposed to roll out special financial subsidy funds to underpin teachers' outbound overseas exchanges, shifting traditional superficial academic sightseeing visits toward targeted overseas learning of advanced instructional methodologies in partner foreign universities or on-site post attachment within transnational enterprises. Such supportive policies create precious access for domestic instructors to keep abreast of cutting-edge global industrial specifications and advanced international engineering cultures, so as to feed newly acquired insights back into daily domestic instructional practice.

Secondly, implement the compound talent introduction strategy combining rigid recruitment standards and flexible intellectual import approaches. On the one hand, enforce strict qualification verification for inbound foreign teachers to eliminate unqualified language tutors recruited merely to fill required teaching hours, prioritizing the recruitment of seasoned industrial practitioners with abundant overseas vocational backgrounds capable of remedying existing shortcomings within the core specialized course teaching system. On the other hand, flexibly introduce top-tier overseas application-oriented academic elites via diversified modes, including short-term guest lectures, bilateral joint scientific research projects, and offline instructional workshops, to drive the overall competency upgrade of the existing domestic teaching cohort.

Finally, establish a normalized long-term training mechanism to enhance teachers' comprehensive international capabilities. Application-oriented colleges should construct bilateral Sino-foreign teacher instructional communities and implement paired tutoring mechanisms, collective lesson preparation seminars, and mutual classroom observation activities, assisting indigenous domestic instructors in breaking through linguistic shackles and advancing cross-cultural communication literacy as well as all-English instructional proficiency. These systematic measures guarantee the effective practical implementation of imported

overseas curricula, consolidate overall instructional efficiency, and facilitate the cultivation of a professional dual-qualified teaching cohort proficient in international industrial standards while well-acquainted with domestic localized developmental realities^[13].

4.2. Deepen intrinsic curriculum construction to shift from blind hotspot chasing toward featured customized development and substantial curriculum integration

Instead of pursuing popular trending majors blindly regardless of self-developmental endowments, application-oriented undergraduate institutions shall anchor their developmental footing on servicing surrounding regional socioeconomic advancement, rely on self-established preponderant disciplinary clusters, and realize seamless docking with advanced international industrial accreditation benchmarks such as engineering education certification criteria and global vocational qualification authentication norms. More importantly, tertiary authorities need to amplify investment into secondary localized development and adaptive renovation of imported high-quality curriculum resources. Specifically, institutional curriculum construction should transcend the rudimentary level of introducing scattered original textbooks and general elective courses, focusing concentrated resources on the digestion and absorption of foreign core specialized curricula, practical training modules and standardized achievement assessment systems, raise the practical credit proportion occupied by imported courses within total disciplinary credits and accomplish in-depth organic integration between introduced overseas resources and indigenous domestic curricula to avoid the split dual-track disjointed phenomenon. Meanwhile, persistently propel the in-depth reform integrating specialized disciplinary learning with foreign language literacy cultivation. Colleges are required to embed internationally prevalent industrial terminologies, standardized technical specifications, and authentic cross-cultural communication case studies into every single instructional segment of major courses, alongside developing matching digital teaching repositories and bilingual case resource banks, allowing undergraduates to naturally accumulate international workplace linguistic competencies while systematically absorbing professional disciplinary expertise^[14]. To curb vicious homogenized disciplinary competition, tertiary institutions should embark on differentiated developmental routes by leveraging distinctive local industrial features, cooperating with regional flagship enterprises and multinational corporations to co-design customized international talent incubation programs, co-build shared practical training bases and integrate high-quality cross-border teaching resources, so as to highlight the competitive advantages of characteristic international disciplinary clusters, cultivate market-adaptive internationalized application-oriented talents and strengthen graduates' global employability competitiveness.

4.3. A perfect comprehensive quality assurance framework, eradicate utilitarian schooling malpractices, and construct a full-cycle closed-loop talent cultivation system

First and foremost, completely root out problematic diploma-mill operational tendencies and refine comprehensive institutional quality monitoring regulations. Relevant application-oriented colleges should introduce independent third-party evaluation agencies to execute full-process supervision over multiple core dimensions of Sino-foreign cooperative education projects, covering incoming student quality, allocated teaching resources, on-site curriculum implementation effectiveness, and learner satisfaction index, alongside establishing a periodic project exit mechanism to timely eliminate inefficient underperforming cooperative programs.

Secondly, construct an immersive, localized international educational ambiance to broaden undergraduates' global cognitive horizons. Apart from launching cost-effective short-term outbound exchange programs and overseas internship opportunities for enrolled students, institutional administrative departments need to prioritize the construction of a glocalized international campus cultural atmosphere. Concrete initiatives include regular organization of international cultural festivals, invitation of overseas prestigious scholars for on-campus academic lectures, and sponsoring student participation in high-standard international disciplinary contests, as well as innovation and entrepreneurship competitions, enabling undergraduates to experience diversified multicultural integration without stepping out of campus boundaries.

Thirdly, boost students' practical foreign language application capacity and cross-cultural environmental adaptability. Beyond conventional systematic foreign language curriculum setup, application-oriented colleges ought to add multiple internationalized elective courses such as workplace-oriented business English and practical cross-cultural communication tutorials, alongside organizing abundant extracurricular cross-cultural practice events, including Model United Nations simulation conferences and international volunteer service activities, with the goal of enhancing students' practical communication competence and complex-problem resolving capabilities under diversified international operational contexts ^[15].

5. Conclusion

Based upon the foregoing comprehensive research and systematic analytical elaboration, the internationalization advancement of China's application-oriented undergraduate tertiary establishments is never equivalent to superficial educational resource splicing or blind-scale enrollment expansion; instead, it constitutes a sophisticated, systematic engineering project covering multiple core elements, including faculty structural optimization, curriculum system renovation, and all-around educational environment refinement. Looking ahead, the internationalized developmental layout of domestic applied undergraduate institutions must abandon an impetuous, short-sighted utilitarian mindset and revert to fundamental educational essence by organically combining localized domestic developmental demands with internationally recognized advanced industrial benchmarks. Only by adhering to such developmental logic can tertiary establishments nurture abundant, high-caliber, application-oriented talents equipped with global core competencies and enable China's indigenous application-oriented undergraduate education to manifest outstanding, distinctive advantages amid fierce global higher education competition.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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