

# Internationalization of Higher Education in Shandong in the New Era: Challenges and Countermeasures

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**Abstract:** Under the background of the deepening reform in the new era, promoting the internationalization and construction of higher education is the fundamental path of transforming Chinese universities into world-class universities. This paper mainly studies the challenges faced by the internationalization of higher education in Shandong in the new era and the countermeasures for them. Among them, the predicament is expounded from several aspects, including the international school-running structure, the foreign high-quality educational resources, the international teachers, and the international exchanges and cooperation. Shandong's higher education is faced with problems in its internationalized school-running structure; hence, corresponding countermeasures are proposed. Shandong Province must adhere to the principle of "adapting measures to local conditions" in order to formulate medium and long-term development plans and pay attention to the construction of international teachers.

**Keywords:** New era; Higher education; Internationalization; Challenges; Coping strategies

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## 1. Introduction

Since the launch and implementation of the "Double First-Class Initiative," great achievements have been made. At a press conference on June 14, 2022, the Ministry of Education emphasized that the construction of "double first-class" colleges and universities is crucial, along with the correct orientation. Schools should not be run around various popular rankings; instead, contributions, innovation, quality, and effectiveness should be emphasized <sup>[1]</sup>. It is necessary to focus on developing basic research in colleges and universities as well as achieving major scientific and technological breakthroughs, while designing an independent knowledge system. In the new round of college and discipline construction, Shandong University's Chinese language and literature, mathematics, chemistry, clinical medicine, and other majors have been added. The increase in volatility of the global situation affects the path of internationalization of higher education to a certain extent <sup>[2]</sup>. In addition, with the support of modern science and technology, China's social environment has undergone tremendous changes, the structure of education construction has been upgraded, and the teaching environment has been further optimized. Under this comprehensive background, the challenges faced by the internationalization of higher education are more diversified. Taking higher education in Shandong Province as the main research subject, this paper investigates the challenges faced by the internationalization of higher education in the new era and the countermeasures for them <sup>[3]</sup>.

## **2. Challenges faced by the internationalization of higher education in Shandong in the new era**

### **2.1. Structural problems of internationalized school running**

In the early days, in order to introduce foreign educational resources and attract students, colleges and universities will expand their scale of running schools to gain more opportunities. As far as the overall layout of higher education in Shandong Province is concerned, if colleges and universities are to move toward a nationalized development path, the first consideration is the implementation of Sino-foreign cooperative education, in which many colleges and universities have already achieved favorable results. However, structural problems within the institution will gradually surface after operating this model over a period of time <sup>[4]</sup>. The main reason for the structural problems of higher education institutions in Shandong with regard to internationalization is their excessive emphasis on running schools on a large scale and the failure to upgrade and optimize their internal structures in a timely manner. The structural problems are mainly reflected in the following aspects: scattered school-running areas and unsuccessful cooperation and exchanges between colleges and universities; the sole focus on European and American countries with developed foreign-related schools, neglecting the resources of unique developing countries; the agglomeration and distribution of disciplines and majors; the centralized cooperation of management, economics, and other majors; the lack of diversified majors and the weak radiation effect of the internationalization of higher education <sup>[5]</sup>.

### **2.2. Limited introduction of high-quality educational resources abroad**

Foreign high-quality educational resources, which are the core requirements of higher education, are of great significance for promoting the internationalization of higher education in Shandong. Only an effective introduction of foreign high-quality education can ensure the innovation of higher education <sup>[6]</sup>. Moreover, both teachers and students are directly affected by foreign high-quality educational resources. These resources are also closely tied to the quality of personnel training. However, considering the internationalization of higher education in Shandong, the proportion of resources that are actually introduced, developed, and utilized is relatively small. With regard to the introduction of foreign educational resources, such as foreign courses and professional core courses, Shandong's higher education only demands the basic requirements on quantitative standards. The substantive standards of high-quality educational resources have not been clearly defined <sup>[7]</sup>. Moreover, most of the time, priority is given to domestic first-class universities for joint cooperation. As a result, most of Shandong's higher education institutions are forced into a passive position, and they are unable to have a good grasp of foreign educational resources, thus affecting the stability of education and teaching cooperation in the early stage.

### **2.3. Obstacle in introducing and cultivating international teachers**

First of all, from the perspective of cultivating international teachers, this is not an easy task in itself. Internationalized teachers must not only achieve a high level of personal-professional quality and professional ethics, in addition to high standards of education and teaching, but also control the students' ideological dynamics. It is also necessary to have a certain understanding of foreign education and teaching work, models, and methods as well as the ability to connect the professional knowledge structure system to ensure an efficient classroom teaching <sup>[8]</sup>. In addition, the number of public teachers sent abroad is relatively small in China, and considering certain foreign factors, it is impossible to achieve large-scale expansion within a specific period of time. From the perspective of introducing internationalized teachers, China aims to cultivate ideal and firm socialist successors and builders. The selection of nationalized teachers requires consideration from multiple levels, including preventing the import of radical cultures from abroad. Therefore, it remains a challenge to introduce international teachers to Shandong's higher education in practice <sup>[9]</sup>.

## **2.4. Lack of opportunities for international exchanges and cooperation**

Although many colleges and universities in Shandong have set up special offices or institutions for international exchange and cooperation to promote internationalization, linking resources between colleges remain a challenge, with a lack of inherent resource advantages. Additionally, they tend to be bias towards the development of a field or discipline. Compared with some key first-class institutions in China, local colleges and universities remain in a relatively weak position considering their ability to absorb international resources<sup>[10]</sup>. It is difficult for local colleges and universities to compete with key first-class institutions in terms of experience, overall strengthen, communication and cooperation channels, the proportion of teachers and students participating in international conferences, and the qualifications to host international conferences<sup>[11]</sup>. In addition, the majority of internationalized colleges and universities in Shandong tend to carry out Sino-foreign cooperation with undergraduate programs; there are very few graduate programs. This makes it difficult for some students to communicate with each other during their stay in school.

## **3. Practical strategies for the internationalization of Shandong's higher education in the new era**

### **3.1. Formulate a strategic internationalization plan**

Shandong Province has adjusted the indicators of the internationalization level of higher education and integrated Chinese-foreign cooperative education projects at different levels into the system for overall planning<sup>[12]</sup>. However, the system's development strategy has not been introduced formally. Therefore, it is recommended that Shandong formulate a medium and long-term development plan in line with the principle of "adapting to local conditions." Planning for the construction of high-level demonstration school-running units is an essential effort. On the one hand, the internationalization of higher education in Shandong should be based on the actual situation. Identifying the development situation of running schools in the region would be beneficial. Prior to inviting Chinese and foreign education experts and scholars to participate in the analysis and discussion of the school-running situation, collecting and improving information and data resources are necessary steps, which allow the identification of the level of internationalization of Shandong's higher education and the design of a general development route and practical framework<sup>[13]</sup>. At the same time, it is necessary to conduct a detailed analysis of the existing problems to ensure the effective role of information resources. On the other hand, the school-running goal should be established based on building a high-level demonstrative internationalized college in Shandong Province. The overall and specific goals of internationalization of demonstrative colleges and universities should be clarified; the school-running situation of key first-class colleges should be compared with their own actual situation to identify gaps; and scientific methods should be used to supplement their shortcomings<sup>[14]</sup>.

### **3.2. Create local characteristics to attract high-quality educational resources**

In the new era, the internationalization of higher education in Shandong should combine the characteristics of regional economic and social development, open up to a large number of cooperation partners, and set up industry benchmarks by setting up local schools to attract more foreign high-quality educational resources. Shandong should adjust the professional settings for the internationalization of higher education according to the economic circle of the provincial capital city group and the western economic uplift belt, promote the exchange of education that has regional characteristics and advantages, as well as open up education to other institutions with rich experience in Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools<sup>[15]</sup> and model colleges that have long been supported by foreign high-quality educational resources or have successively launched characteristic school-running projects to meet local diversified educational needs and economic development. Shandong should make full use of its geographical advantage to carry out

educational cooperation and exchanges with Russia and other Nordic countries that have unique elite educational resources and focus on specialized courses with unique advantages <sup>[16]</sup>.

### **3.3. Adhere to the “double first-class” standards to strengthen the construction of teachers**

First, it is necessary to create a team of mentors serving the internationalization of higher education in accordance with the standards of key “first-class” institutions. Higher education institutions in Shandong Province should provide systematic education and training for teachers according to their academic ability, ideological and moral cultivation, international scientific research participation experience, and international education background <sup>[17]</sup>. Improving the comprehensive quality and professional quality of the team will lay a good foundation for later-stage colleges and universities to carry out international teaching and research activities. Second, based on the actual situation of higher education in Shandong Province and the needs of its internationalization, it is necessary to innovate the operation of study-abroad programs. Qualified colleges and universities should consider encouraging both teachers and students to go abroad <sup>[18]</sup>. Through this effort, colleges and universities would then collect international education and teaching information from different perspectives and dimensions as well as construct their own international talent pool and gain more experience in foreign exchanges and cooperation. Third, the internal faculty structure of higher education institutions should be upgraded. On this basis, colleges and universities must continue to train academic leaders, subject leaders, teachers, and even managers of international affairs to improve their overall quality and ability. Moreover, it would be beneficial to introduce international indicators into educator recruitment, assessment, promotion, and other links.

### **3.4. Broaden international communication and cooperation channels**

Higher education institutions in Shandong should expand the channels for international exchanges and cooperation by establishing long-term strategic cooperative relations with foreign institutions. For example, the close ties between local and foreign institutions can be strengthened through joint school-running and cooperative research projects. The educational and teaching effect of both internal and external linkages would be formed, and the common talent training goals and development progress of both parties can be achieved. For the exchange student mechanism, colleges and universities must seek cooperation with foreign colleges and universities, especially for graduate students <sup>[19]</sup>. By integrating the school-running advantages of local and foreign institutions, postgraduate exchanges can be organized in the same academic year. For example, in the first half of the academic year and semester, the student will be in China, but in the second half of the academic year and semester, the student will continue his or her studies in a foreign institution. Regularly organizing professional academic seminars and social research activities between the two parties would promote information resource sharing. In addition, Shandong Province should also ensure that the direction and mode of running schools is in accordance with the national strategy and make full use of the various resources on the Silk Road Economic Belt to broaden cooperation channels and content <sup>[20]</sup>.

## **4. Conclusion**

The challenges faced by the internationalization of higher education in Shandong in the new era are primarily related to foreign high-quality educational resources and the construction of international teachers. With regard to this, relevant departments and higher education institutions in Shandong should thoroughly analyze the causes of these problems and scientifically adjust the direction and mode of running schools. The most important thing is to focus on building a high-level international team of teachers. This would further promote the internationalization of higher education in Shandong Province and ensure the cultivation of international talents.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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