



---

## **Internationalization of Higher Education in Shaanxi Province, China: Status Quo and Development Trends**

Meng Lin WANG<sup>a\*</sup>, Tong Wooi CHOW (Jerry)<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a,b</sup>*Malaysia University of Science and Technology (MUST), Block B, Encorp Strand Garden Office, No. 12,  
Jalan PJU 5/5, Kota Damansara, 47810 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia*

<sup>a</sup>*Northwest University of Political Science and Law (NWUPL)*

<sup>a</sup>*Email: wang.menglin@phd.must.edu.my, <sup>b</sup>Email: jerrychow@must.edu.my*

### **Abstract**

This study focuses on the status quo of internationalization of higher education in China, and explores the current situation and development of higher education internationalization in Shaanxi Province. As one of the important cradles of Chinese civilization, Shaanxi, as the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, has embraced a new opportunity for international exchanges and cooperation in the field of education. The level of internationalization is increasing, universities in Shaanxi actively build platforms for international exchanges and cooperation, open various communication channels, and create opportunities for cooperation. However, the platform and system for communication, as well as ideas, policies and measures, need to be further improved. Based on the research content of higher education internationalization, this essay clarifies the specific forms, summarizes the development trends, and puts forward targeted countermeasures according to the actual situation.

**Keywords:** Internationalization strategies; Cross-cultural communication; Educational policies; Silk Road; International Cooperation in Education.

---

*Received: 4/1/2023*

*Accepted: 4/30/2023*

*Published: 5/17/2023*

---

\* Corresponding author.

## **1. Introduction**

Internationalization in higher education has become increasingly important, as reflected in the growing number of research studies and publications on the topic [1]. Reference [2] asserts that internationalization is one of the most significant trends in higher education worldwide, and its importance will continue to increase over the next decade. This trend is also reflected in China, where internationalization has been included as a key priority in its national education development plan [3].

Universities in Shaanxi Province have recognized the unique advantage of the province as a significant cultural hub and a starting point of the ancient Silk Road and have been actively promoting internationalization to enhance their global competitiveness and attract international students [1]. Reference [4] further emphasize the importance of internationalization in China and the need for universities to have internationalization strategies that include attracting and retaining international students, faculty, and staff, as well as developing global partnerships and collaborations.

The close relationship between politics, economics, and social cultures of countries around the world necessitates the internationalization of education. Reference [5] argues that the internationalization of education is not only an increasingly urgent demand, but also an inevitable trend. Higher education is an important part of the education system and plays a crucial role in international talent development. Through cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication, students and teachers from different regions can enhance their professional knowledge, shape cultural integration and interpersonal relationships, and ultimately achieve an international phenomenon that is both competitive and collaborative [6].

However, the lack of internationalization of higher education is one of the main problems in higher education system, especially in the field of international exchange and cooperation [7]. There are several important problems related to the internationalization of higher education, such as the low foreign language proficiency of students, the inadequate foreign language environment in universities [8], and the limited scope of international academic exchanges between universities and foreign higher education institutions [4].

One of the problems related to internationalization is the insufficient foreign language skills of college students, especially their inadequate English proficiency, which affects their ability to absorb new foreign knowledge directly and weakens national competitiveness. In addition, most international academic exchange programs between universities and foreign higher education institutions are limited to signing contracts and exchanging students and faculty, lack of substantial research cooperation and research mechanisms on any scale.

However, despite the progress made, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. The lack of effective communication platforms and policies, as well as the shortage of international faculty and staff members, are some of the challenges that need to be addressed to promote the internationalization of higher education in the province. This research article aims to provide a detailed analysis of the current status and development of internationalization in higher education in Shaanxi Province, and to suggest targeted measures to address the challenges faced by universities in the province. Therefore, in order to address the problem of

internationalization of higher education in Shaanxi Province, it is necessary to take targeted measures to improve the foreign language skills of college students, create a foreign language environment that supports internationalization, and deepen research cooperation between universities and foreign higher education institutions to a certain extent. In summary, internationalization in higher education is a significant trend that will continue to grow in importance in the coming decade. China has recognized the importance of internationalization in higher education and has included it as a key priority in its national education development plan. Shaanxi Province has a unique advantage in promoting international exchanges and cooperation in the field of education and has been actively promoting internationalization in fields of student, faculty members, scientific research and international cooperation.

## **2. Research Objectives and Research Questions**

Based on the research background presented above, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate and analyze the current status of internationalization of higher education in Shaanxi Province, China.
2. To provide recommendations for action for higher education institutions in Shaanxi to improve and facilitate the internationalization of higher education based on the research findings.

The research objectives of this study include the following questions to be investigated:

1. What is the current development status of internationalization of higher education in Shaanxi Province, China?
2. What measures can be taken to promote the internationalization of higher education in universities in Shaanxi?

## **3. Related Literatures**

### ***3.1. Challenge of Higher Education Internationalization***

Since the 1980s, many European and American countries have introduced market logic into their higher education systems, leaving it to free competition and price mechanisms to guide the development of higher education to meet the financial constraints of governments and the increasing demand for higher education [9]. Private universities have also become increasingly competitive in the international education market. In recent years, the international talent development program has become a learning goal for other universities, including teaching-oriented universities with the feature of internationalization [10]. The trend of market orientation has affected higher education system in China, with policies shifting toward openness and diversification in response to globalization.

Over the past few decades, China has emerged as a major player in the global higher education sector, has made significant investments and implemented policies and initiatives to promote internationalization in its universities. However, despite these efforts, there are still challenges that hinder the internationalization of higher education in China.

Despite some successes, the development of internationalization of higher education in Shaanxi lags behind some other provinces in southeastern China. The analysis of the problems in the development of internationalization of higher education in Shaanxi includes several factors. First, universities in Shaanxi need to pay more attention to internationalization of teaching methods, curriculum design and international students. Second, the external environment of higher education institutions in Shaanxi is challenging because it is inland, resulting in fewer opportunities for international communications. Finally, some students themselves have insufficient understanding of the internationalization of education and often choose to expand their horizons through travel and other means rather than fully engage in international education programs.

Besides that, there are some other challenges identified:

#### 1. The Language Barrier

The language barrier is one of the significant challenges faced by universities in promoting internationalization [11]. Due to the majority of courses taught in Chinese, the number of international students participating is limited. As a solution to this challenge, some Chinese universities, such as Tsinghua University in Beijing, have established courses and programs in English [11].

#### 2. The Necessity of Diversity

Some universities have traditionally focused on recruiting domestic students and faculty, leading to a lack of diversity and international perspectives in academic programs. To address this challenge, Chinese universities are taking steps to increase their diversity and attract more international students and faculty. For instance, the University of Hong Kong has established a scholarship program to attract international students to its campus [12], and Peking University has established an International Student Center to provide a range of services to international students [13]. Additionally, some Chinese universities are partnering with foreign institutions to promote internationalization and diversify their faculty and student body. For example, Tsinghua University has established partnerships with numerous foreign universities, such as MIT, to promote student and faculty exchange programs and joint research projects [14].

### **3.2. Higher Education Internationalization**

Reference [15] identified several activities that are generally considered internationalization in higher education. These include cross-national communication among faculty members and students, internationalization of college courses, international research connections and open learning plans, and mutual recognition of college degrees.

In this paper, internationalization of higher education is defined as the integration of international resources, activities, and personnel into the teaching, research, and public service functions of higher education institutions through integrated strategic plans. The goal is to educate students and faculty members to become global citizens with an international perspective and global competitiveness. Integration includes international faculty and student exchanges, international curriculum design, collaborative partnerships, internationalization issues,

and international organizations.

Reference [16] suggests that higher education appears in three dimensions: global, national, and local. Its role goes beyond promoting opportunities for individuals to support national economic development. It also promotes and coordinates culture, political democracy, and diversity of economic trade.

Reference [17] identify the following factors affecting the internationalization of higher education: transformation or consolidation of market mechanisms, admission of foreign students to promote internationalization, competition for knowledge generation and output in the global village, insufficient international competitiveness of higher education institutions, large gap between talent supply and demand, optimal scale of higher education, and cost and financing issues affecting the management of higher education.

Reference [18] argues that the essence of universities is to improve human knowledge, strengthen international cooperation, and seek common happiness. Universities are themselves international institutions and need to focus on international communication and cooperation so as not to be limited to academic research in the sense of regionalism.

The trend of the times is another main reason for the internationalization of higher education. The purpose of higher education has expanded and transformed into potential tools for international economic trade, knowledge research and development, and improving the quality of education and research. The globally open education market will lead to more intense competition in international higher education, and only diversified and internationalized education policies can turn this crisis into a turning point.

Finally, Reference [19] emphasizes that the internationalization of higher education is closely linked to economic needs. The ability of the international workforce and talent, as well as international economic competition, make the internationalization of higher education even more urgent. Countries use the internationalization of higher education to promote mutual exchanges, maintain international friendly relations, achieve integrated development in different regions, and ultimately ensure global stability and peaceful coexistence.

## **4. Findings & Results**

### ***4.1. Status Quo of Internationalization of Shaanxi Provincial Universities***

Shaanxi Province is located in the central part of China and has a rich cultural heritage. It is home to several universities, including Xi'an Jiaotong University, Northwestern Polytechnical University and Shaanxi Normal University. These universities have actively promoted internationalization in recent years.

First, universities in Shaanxi Province have made progress in attracting international students. According to the China Scholarship Council, the number of international students in Shaanxi Province has increased from 2,035 in 2012 to 4,436 in 2019 [20]. Xi'an Jiaotong University has the most international students, with over 4,000 students from 120 countries.

Second, universities in Shaanxi Province have established partnerships with universities in other countries. For example, Xi'an Jiaotong University has signed agreements with over 200 universities in 40 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. These partnerships have led to joint research projects, student exchanges and faculty collaboration.

Third, universities in Shaanxi Province have actively participated in international scientific conferences and exhibitions. For example, Northwestern Polytechnical University has organized the International Conference on Aerospace Science and Technology every year since 2007. These events provide a platform for scientists and researchers from around the world to exchange ideas and promote academic cooperation.

#### ***4.2. Specific Forms and Development Trends of Internationalization in Higher Education in Shaanxi***

According to [15], the internationalization of higher education includes cross-national communication between faculty members and students, internationalization of higher education courses, international research connections and open learning plans, and mutual recognition of higher education qualifications of bilateral, regional, and international. Based on this definition, the internationalization of higher education in Shaanxi includes the integration of various international resources, activities, and personnel into the teaching, research, and public service functions of higher education through integrated strategic plans, and the continuous improvement and promotion through evaluation mechanisms to cultivate students and faculty members to become world citizens with an international perspective and global competitiveness. In addition, [17] proposed that the competitiveness of universities is reflected in the transformation or consolidation of market mechanisms, absorbing overseas students not only solves the current shortage of students, but also enhances the internationalization of higher education, competition for the generation and output of knowledge in the global village, the international competitiveness of universities is insufficient, and the gap between talent supply and demand is severe, considering the optimal scale of higher education to respond to the trend of fewer children and achieve the improvement of university education quality, and the cost and funding issues have impacted the management of higher education.

#### ***4.3. Targeted Measures to Improve the Situation***

To address the challenges of internationalizing higher education in Shaanxi Province, several targeted measures have been proposed in the literature. One important measure is to improve the English proficiency of both students and faculty members. This is critical for effective communication and collaboration with international partners. To achieve this, higher education institutions in Shaanxi can offer language courses, encourage international students to participate in language exchanges with Chinese students, and encourage Chinese students to study abroad. Another measure is to attract more international faculty and staff to universities in Shaanxi. This can be achieved through attractive compensation packages, work visas, and opportunities for academic and personal development. It is important to note that international faculty and staff can make an important contribution to the internationalization of higher education by bringing their diverse perspectives, knowledge, and experience to the institutions they work for.

Finally, more resources should be allocated to support internationalization projects in higher education institutions in Shaanxi. This can be achieved by collaborating with international organizations and building partnerships with foreign universities and companies. Funds can also be raised through grants, scholarships, and other sources. It is important to note that investing in internationalization projects can bring many benefits to universities, including increased academic prestige, improved research capacity, and better preparation of students for a globalized world.

In summary, several targeted measures can be taken to promote the development of internationalization in higher education in Shaanxi Province. Improving English proficiency, attracting more international faculty and staff, and providing more funding to support internationalization projects are some of the key measures that can be implemented to address the challenges and promote the development of internationalization in higher education in Shaanxi.

#### ***4.4. The Cultivation of International Teaching Staff***

Hiring foreign faculty is an important aspect of the internationalization of higher education because it reflects a college's ability to engage in international exchange and collaboration. Research on the internationalization of college teaching staff in Shaanxi Province has found that although most universities are able to hire foreign faculty, the situation is not optimistic.

Some universities, such as Northwest University and Xi'an International Studies University, have hired a large number of foreign faculty, which is due to the disciplinary nature of jointly established and language universities. However, there are significant differences between provincial and jointly established universities in terms of international faculty [21]. This suggests that more efforts need to be made to attract and retain international faculty in Shaanxi provincial universities to enhance their internationalization efforts. Universities can offer attractive compensation packages, work visas, and opportunities for academic and personal development to attract and retain international faculty.

#### ***4.5. Joint Training Project Construction***

This section discusses the efforts of Shaanxi provincial universities in China to expand the scope of international exchange and cooperation by establishing partnerships with multiple overseas universities and offering various talent joint training programs. These programs include degree and credit programs, dual degree programs, semester-based joint training programs, and other forms of study abroad, exchange student, and short-term training programs. The partnerships allow students from Shaanxi provincial universities to gain exposure to different cultures and educational systems, and acquire knowledge and skills that can be applied in various professional settings. Moreover, such collaborations can promote research collaboration and knowledge transfer between different institutions, leading to new discoveries and innovations. However, to ensure the success of these joint training programs, it is essential to have a clear scope of work (SoW) that outlines the tasks, responsibilities, and timelines of all parties involved. The SoW should be broken down into smaller chunks and each subcontractor should sign off on it every time a milestone or objective is reached.

#### ***4.6. Education and Management of International Student***

International education has become an important aspect of higher education in recent years, with the number of international students studying abroad increasing significantly [22]. Shaanxi province, in China, has seen a steady increase in the number of international students, with 6 provincial universities accepting more than 500 international students, such as Northwest University and Xi'an International Studies University, which account for 22% of the total number of provincial universities that accept international students [23]. The increase in the number of international students reflects the level of internationalization of universities and shows the level of international exchange and cooperation among universities [22].

However, it is important to note that international students face academic challenges and cultural adjustment issues, and universities should provide support and resources to help them overcome these difficulties [24]. As the world becomes more interconnected, it is critical to focus on strengthening the global education system in order to achieve positive outcomes and increased intercultural skills [24].

Furthermore, the development and growth of national education systems has been a significant phenomenon of the 20th century. The number of schools and students attending them has increased, as has the number of subjects taught in schools [25]. Internationalization in European higher education has developed significantly over the last 20 years, from a marginal point of interest to a central factor [26]. Internationalization as a concept and strategic agenda is a relatively new, broad, and varied phenomenon in tertiary education, which has evolved from a marginal activity to a key aspect of the reform agenda [27].

### **5. Suggestions on Developing Internationalization in Shaanxi Provincial Universities**

#### ***5.1. Conceptual integration with international standards, sharing of high-quality resources***

The prerequisite for promoting the modernization of education is to update educational concepts and promote international exchange and cooperation among universities.

It is necessary to integrate the cutting-edge educational concepts of internationalization into all aspects of educational work from top to bottom, scientifically and reasonably introduce high-quality international educational resources, strengthen the construction of an international curriculum system, enhance the internationalization background of our teaching staff, and improve the current training goals with the goal of cultivating international talents.

#### ***5.2. Scientification of Cooperative Education and Systematization of Joint Training***

The development of cooperative education and talent joint training needs to be guided by a scientific and systematic approach. It is necessary to adhere to the correct educational philosophy and training objectives, and establish a strong regulatory system to improve the quality of international education and talent training with an international perspective.



### ***5.3. Realizing the Connotative Development of International Student Education***

The development of studying abroad can improve the quality of education, while also enhancing international status, enabling people from other countries to better understand China, familiarize themselves with its culture. The study abroad industry has also cultivated a large number of outstanding talents for the development of other countries. The Ministry of Education clearly states that for international students studying in China, it is necessary to adhere to the quality first. In the daily teaching process, strict standards and systems should be established for all students, and their management and education should be strengthened to ensure the improvement of teaching quality and the cultivation of excellent talents.

### ***5.4. Enhance Academic Exchange and Promote Mutual Visits***

Academic exchange and mutual visits are the most direct channels for promoting international exchange and cooperation. By taking effective measures such as increasing the frequency of international academic exchanges, enriching exchange forms, and increasing opportunities for mutual visits, it is possible to promote the effectiveness of international exchange and cooperation among universities and enhance the quality of international exchange and cooperation.

## **6. Conclusion**

International exchange and cooperation among universities have been gaining increasing attention in recent years, and have been recognized as a key factor in promoting higher education reform and regional economic development. Such cooperation has been established as one of the five major functions of universities, and the level of exchange and cooperation has been included in the evaluation index system of a university's educational strength.

The idea of internationalization of higher education has been supported by several organizations, including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). According to a report by the OECD, internationalization of higher education can bring a range of benefits, such as enhancing the quality of teaching and research, promoting cultural understanding and tolerance, fostering the development of international networks and partnerships, and enhancing the employability of graduates in a globalized job market.

Studies have shown that international exchange programs can have positive effects on students' academic performance, personal growth, and intercultural communication. It has also been observed that students who participate in international exchange programs tend to develop a better understanding of global issues and become more culturally aware.

In summary, international exchange and cooperation among universities can bring numerous benefits to students, universities. These benefits include enhancing the quality of teaching and research, promoting cultural understanding and tolerance, fostering the development of international networks and partnerships, and enhancing the employability of graduates in a globalized job market.

## References

- [1] Hans de Wit & Philip G. Altbach (2021) Internationalization in higher education: global trends and recommendations for its future, *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, 5:1, 28-46, DOI: 10.1080/23322969.2020.1820898
- [2] Lin, Phylis. (2019). Internationalization of Higher Education in China: Challenges and Opportunities. *US-China Education Review B*. 9. 10.17265/2161-6248/2019.01.001.
- [3] Yun Ge (Rochelle) (葛贇) (2022) Internationalisation of higher education: new players in a changing scene, *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 27:3-4, 229-238, DOI: 10.1080/13803611.2022.2041850
- [4] Frezghi, Tesfaldet & Tsegay, Samson. (2019). Internationalisation of Higher Education in China: A Critical Analysis. *Social Change*. 49. 643-658. 10.1177/0049085719886693.
- [5] Li, Z. Q. (2018). The consensus and strategy of promoting internationalization and competitiveness of education. *Journal of Industrial Engineering & Management Research*, 633, 2-11.
- [6] Solodka, A., Filatova, O., Hinkevych, O., & Spanatiy, O. (2021). Cross-cultural Language Learning: Interpretative Engagement . *Arab World English Journal*, 12 (3) 82- 96. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol12no3.6>
- [7] Guo, Y., Guo, S., Yochim, L., & Liu, X. (2022). Internationalization of Chinese Higher Education: Is It Westernization? *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 26(4), 436–453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315321990745>
- [8] Wright, Sue & Zheng, Lin. (2016). English in Chinese higher education: past difficulties, current initiatives and future challenges. *Journal of World Languages*. 3. 167-183. 10.1080/21698252.2017.1292989.
- [9] Dai, X. X. (2016). Excellence and innovation in world-class universities. Higher Education Press.
- [10] Nkuyubwatsi, B. (2016). A critical look at the policy environment for opening up public higher education in Rwanda. *Journal of Learning for Development*, 3(2), 47-61.
- [11] Guo, Y., Guo, S., Yochim, L., & Liu, X. (2022). Internationalization of Chinese Higher Education: Is It Westernization? *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 26(4), 436–453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315321990745>
- [12] University of Hong Kong. (n.d.). Scholarships & financial aid. <https://www.hku.hk/scholarships/>
- [13] Peking University. (n.d.). International Student Center. <https://www.isd.pku.edu.cn/en/>

- [14] Tsinghua University. (n.d.). Global initiative. <https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/en/global/initiative/DOI:10.1080/07908318.2020.1871002>
- [15] Harman, G. (2004). New directions in internationalizing higher education: Australia's development as an exporter of higher education services. *Higher Education Policy*, 17, 101-120.
- [16] Marginson, S. (2007). *Higher Education in the Global Knowledge Economy. Selected Papers of Beijing Forum 2007.*
- [17] Weng, F. Y., & Liao, C. J. (2015). Comparison of Higher Education Reform. *New horizons of higher education: comparison and foresight.*
- [18] Yang, Q. L. (2004). The significance and controversy of internationalization of higher education. *Education Policy Forum*, 7 (1), 101-110.
- [19] Schoorman, D. (2018). The erosion of faculty governance. *Counterpoints*, 517, 237-251.
- [20] Yang, Z., & de Wit, H. (2019). International Students in China: Facts, Paths, and Challenges. *International Higher Education*, (97), 18-20. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2019.97.10945>
- [21] Wang, W. K., & Wang, Z. H. (2015). *Methods of Educational Research.* Taipei; Five south.
- [22] Wang, X., Wang, Q., & Zhang, L. (2017). The development status and suggestions of education internationalization in Shaanxi province. *Journal of Higher Education Research and Evaluation.*
- [23] Zhang, J., & Liu, Y. (2017). International student mobility and support services in higher education institutions: A review of literature. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 12(6), 363-373.
- [24] de Wit, H. (2011). Internationalization of higher education: Definition, approaches, and rationales. *International Higher Education*, 163.
- [25] Hanes, R. M., & Hanes, S. M. (2001). *Education: Historical statistics.* U.S. Census Bureau.
- [26] Hunter, F., & Chartier, A. M. (2005). European policies for the internationalisation of higher education: Towards a European higher education area? *European Journal of Education*, 40(3), 291-308.
- [27] Liu Yin. (2022, August 11). The blue book on the development of an international metropolis in Xi'an is released. *Shaanxi Daily.* [http://www.shaanxi.gov.cn/xw/ldx/ds/202208/t20220811\\_2243820.html](http://www.shaanxi.gov.cn/xw/ldx/ds/202208/t20220811_2243820.html)