

The Strategies of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education-A Case Study from the Western Region of China

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Abstract

Internationalization of higher education has been a hot topic in the higher education sector. In China's higher education system, Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education has emerged as an important form of internationalization, and experiencing rapid growth in mainland China in recent years. However, the growth of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education in western China has proven especially difficult because of China's unequal regional development. This study employs qualitative research methods, including case studies and semi-structured interviews, to conduct an in-depth interview with a Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education institution from a western region of China. The objective of the study is to explore the current state of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education development in western regions and explore the strategies to address development challenges. In this study, we found that due to the risks associated with cooperative education and the relatively underdeveloped state of the cooperative education in western regions, these areas should establish a disciplinary system and talent pool tailored to their regional characteristics, actively pursue disciplinary transformation and upgrading, and leverage foreign higher education resources to address their own shortcomings in higher education, thereby achieving better development of regional higher education.

Keywords: Internationalization of Higher Education, Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education, Regional Development Imbalance, Western Region, Strategies

Introduction

The internationalization of higher education has been a hot topic in the higher education sector in recent years. Many countries around the world have leveraged the internationalization of higher education to develop and enhance their own higher education systems. For instance, Malaysia has attracted a large number of international students through reasonable planning and design, thereby developing and improving its own higher education system while also establishing a vast international education network, positioning itself as a hub for higher education internationalization (Sulong, 2022; Vuong et al., 2021).

China's process of internationalizing higher education has been relatively lengthy, evolving from a nearly completely closed system to one that is gradually opening up (Zheng, 2016). Currently, China's higher education internationalization is primarily carried out through exchange programs, sending students abroad, attracting international students to China, and establishing overseas branches (Li, 2021). Unlike Malaysia, China maintains a more centralized management of its higher education system, emphasizing the state's leading role in the process. Therefore, regarding the establishment of higher education institutions by foreign entities in China, Malaysia adopts a more open and flexible approach, while China enforces strict review and establishment procedures (Vuong et al., 2021). China permits foreign higher education institutions to operate within its borders through a model known as Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education (CFCE).

After more than 20 years of development, CFCE institutions and programs are now widespread across China. Following a period of rapid development and transformation, CFCE has become more mature, though it also faces significant challenges. Because of China's vast territory and significant development disparities between regions, the level of higher education development varies greatly across different areas. This study takes a Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education institution (CFCEI) in China's western region as its research object, conducting an in-depth analysis of the development strategies adopted during its growth process to explore the development strategies of CFCE institutions in China's western region.

Therefore, the primary research objectives of this study are as follows: 1. What is the current state of CFCE development in China's western region? 2. What strategies have CFCE in the western region adopted to address these development challenges?

Background

Due to unique historical circumstances, China's higher education system has not developed in tandem with global higher education standards. Following a prolonged period of isolation and warfare, modern higher education in China began to take shape only after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 (Li & Xue, 2023). In the early years of the nation's founding, constrained by ideological limitations, China's higher education system initially emulated the Soviet Union's model, restructuring university disciplines and prioritizing the development of industrial and teacher training institutions (Kang, 2004; Zheng & Kapoor, 2021). In 1977, China officially reinstated the college entrance examination system, marking the gradual normalization of higher education. In 1999, Chinese universities began to expand enrollment, ushering in the massification and popularization phase of higher education (Bie & Yi, 2014). To build high-quality universities, the State Council proposed the "211 Project" in 1995—a project to build approximately 100 universities and a number of key disciplines in the 21st century. In 1998, the "985 Project" was proposed to build world-class universities with advanced standards, followed by the "Double First-Class Project" in 2015, which focused on building world-class universities and disciplines, driving the leapfrog development of China's higher education (Jiang, 2017; Lin & Wang, 2022).

Since China implemented its reform and opening-up policy in 1978, its higher education system has gradually become more open, evolving from initial bilateral exchanges with the Soviet Union only to gradually sending students abroad for exchange and study in Western

countries. Especially after China joined the WTO in 2001, educational openness expanded further and became more in-depth. An increasing number of Chinese citizens are studying abroad, and China has now become the world's largest sender of international students, with over 8 million Chinese students studying abroad as of 2022 (Yangcheng Faction, 2024). Among the various ways of studying abroad, one important form of internationalization in Chinese higher education is through Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education programs.

Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education is a way for China to utilize high-quality foreign resources to optimize its domestic higher education resources. Chinese law does not permit foreign universities or educational institutions to operate independently within China. High-quality foreign universities or educational institutions may establish cooperative educational institutions or programs within China by partnering with Chinese universities or institutions, and recruit students within mainland China (Iftekhhar & Kayombo, 2015; Zheng & Kapoor, 2021). This is typically done through programs such as 2+2 or 3+1, where 2+2 refers to two years of study in China followed by two years abroad, and 3+1 follows a similar structure. Under such cooperative education arrangements, students who meet the requirements can obtain graduation certificates from both China and the foreign institution. Through Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education, China leverages high-quality overseas educational resources to enhance its own higher education standards and supplement domestic educational resources (Dai, 2023; Li & Xue, 2023).

Research on CFCE has gradually increased in recent years, with studies conducting in-depth explorations of CFCE from various perspectives. From a macro level, some scholars have examined the policy development of CFCE from the angle of the development of the higher education internationalization (Han, 2024; Iftekhhar & Kayombo, 2015), detailing its developmental trajectory. Others have examined the functions and significance from the perspective of enhancing soft power of the nation (Han & Tong, 2021; Li & Xue, 2023; Perez-Garcia & Nierga, 2021). At the micro level, scholars have primarily examined the organizational management mechanisms of CFCE (Chi, 2020; Feng & Shi, 2017; Fu, 2023), while someone have conducted comparative studies of management mechanisms between CFCE partners (Gao, 2024). Some scholars have focused on English instruction within CFCE (Feng & Wang, 2023; Han, 2023), while others have examined CFCE students' cultural adaptation (Gong et al., 2021; Ying & Xingshan, 2025; Zhang, 2025). Some scholars have investigated CFCE quality assurance (Al-Shikaili, 2019; Huang et al., 2023; Liu & Dai, 2024). However, few scholars have examined CFCE from a regional perspective. Given the vast geographical expanse of mainland China and the distinct developmental characteristics and pathways shaped by varying developmental conditions and historical factors, conducting personalized research on CFCE across different regions is essential for its effective implementation.

The western regions of China are located in the inland areas of the country. Due to geographical constraints, weak economic foundations, and a single-industry structure, the social and economic development of these regions has lagged behind (Deng et al., 2022; Y. Han et al., 2023). Additionally, the western regions are areas where higher education is relatively scarce in China (Xunwei et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2023). Therefore, conducting Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education in these regions holds significant importance. Such programs can effectively address the shortage of high-quality education in the western

regions while also exposing these areas to more innovative educational concepts and models, thereby elevating the overall level of higher education in the western regions. In recent years, the western region has actively promoted Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education, with the number of such programs steadily increasing. As a region with more scarce higher education resources, the western region should actively strengthen the development of CFCE to address the shortage of higher education resources through the introduction of foreign resources. For the sake of both the development of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education programs and the general advancement of higher education in the western area, it is crucial to investigate how the western region may enhance its Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education initiatives.

Research Design

This study uses a CFCE institution in western region as a case study, conducting semi-structured interviews with stakeholders at various levels of the institution to gain a deeper understanding of the current state of CFCE institutions, the new challenges they face in their development, and the measures they have taken to address these challenges. The study employed purposeful sampling, selecting managers, teachers, and students from the educational institution as sample subjects. This approach allowed for an examination of the current state of development of CFCE institutions in western China from the perspectives of different stakeholders, enabling cross-validation of these perspectives among stakeholders and achieving triangulation in the research, thereby ensuring the reliability of the findings.

We selected 5 senior managers, 5 lecturers, and 5 students, totaling 15 stakeholders, from the cooperative educational institutions for semi-structured interviews. We developed a semi-structured interview guide (Alhabsyi, 2022; Kotronoulas et al., 2023) and invited two experts to review it. We incorporated the experts' suggestions and used the final guide to conduct in-depth interviews lasting at least 60 minutes per person. We used NVivo15 to code and analyze the interview data, and after multiple rounds of coding, we reached our research conclusions.

Results

Current Situation

The Unstable International Situation Poses Uncertain Risks to CFCE

Although globalization has become an irreversible trend, it has encountered many twists and turns in recent years. It is obvious that the world is now more closely connected than ever before, and events occurring anywhere in the world affect the changes and development of the entire world. In recent years, anti-globalization nationalist forces have shown a strong upward trend (Cao et al., 2024; Si & Lim, 2023). Some countries, under the guise of protecting their own national interests, have disrupted the order of globalization. The trade war between China and the United States is a particularly obvious example. Such trade wars not only affect trade between nations but also impact other domain, such as higher education (Chowdhury, 2022; Hou et al., 2021). In 2025, the CFCE institution between Shanghai Jiao Tong University and the University of Michigan, which had been in operation for over 20 years, ceased operations. This illustrates the significant impact of international geopolitical instability on the internationalization of higher education and the development of CFCE.

"We have also been affected by the US-China relationship." A senior manager interviewee, PT6, mentioned that "our CFCE institution was originally a collaboration with a US university.

Due to the US-China relationship, the US university has explicitly stated that it will no longer continue the collaboration. Therefore, we are actively seeking new partners. Although our CFCE institution has been in operation for over 20 years, we are still unable to avoid the impact of international relations. We must seek new partners and reapply for the qualifications of cooperative education institutions. This is a major change for us and has caused significant difficulties in our educational operations."

The approval process for CFCE is inherently time-consuming, with complex procedures and formalities. Reapplying for approval of a CFCE institution undoubtedly requires a significant amount of work, and finding new partners is also a huge task. Establishing a partnership requires extensive consideration and negotiation. Both parties involved in the cooperation agreement must undergo extensive coordination and consultation. During the process of reaching the cooperation agreement, both parties must comply with the legal and regulatory requirements of their respective countries while also aligning with the educational objectives of their institutions. The establishment of academic scheme, the allocation of faculty resources, and the development of curriculum plans all require prolonged negotiation and deliberation. After reaching a basic agreement, the parties must submit an application to the Chinese Ministry of Education and await its approval. As the number of CFCE projects has grown in recent years, the Ministry of Education has tightened its clearance standards. The approval requirements not only involve reviewing whether the qualifications and agreements of both parties comply with national laws and regulations but also whether they meet China's strategic needs regarding the establishment of cooperative education programs and regional distribution. Only by meeting these requirements can approval be obtained.

Senior manager PT10 told us, "in an interview that we have reached a basic agreement with a French university, and the negotiation process was extremely arduous. We conducted six rounds of online negotiations and two rounds of face-to-face negotiations. Through countless online communications and negotiations, we are very pleased that we ultimately reached an agreement. This was a very difficult hurdle, but we finally overcame it. Just when we thought the most challenging part was over, However, during the application process, we encountered an even bigger problem: the Ministry of Education did not approve the application. The reason for the rejection was that the program we applied for had too many domestic cooperation projects and did not align with the national demand for scarce talent and specialized fields. This was undoubtedly a huge blow to us."

The Western Region is Constrained by Regional Development Limitations, Resulting in a Relatively Low Overall Level of Higher Education

While China's higher education system has developed rapidly in recent years, the issue of regional development imbalance persists. The western regions possess abundant natural resources and unique geographical characteristic, but due to historical, geographical, and economic factors, their social and economic development has lagged behind, with significant disparities in residents' income levels (Huang et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023). Higher education, as the final stage of the entire education system, has a close and direct connection with economic development. Higher education is a product of social and economic development and reflects society's evolving demand for talent. Conversely, the development of higher education has become the strongest driving force for economic growth.

Currently, the advantageous disciplinary structures of western universities have low adaptability to the characteristic advantageous industrial structures of their respective provinces. On one hand, the "Double First-Class" construction disciplines provide limited support for western economic growth, and western regions lack sufficient high-quality higher education resources. The number and quality of disciplines selected for the "Double First-Class" construction initiative are inherently lower compared to eastern and central regions, placing western regions at a disadvantage overall (Gao & Li, 2022; Han et al., 2023). On the other hand, the hierarchical structure of the faculty is not high. The educational background of full-time faculty members reflects the overall quality of the university's faculty, and the proportion of faculty members with doctoral degrees can to some extent measure the strength of the university's faculty. The proportion of faculty members with doctoral degrees and professorships in western universities is lower than that in central and eastern regions, and their long-term development potential is also significantly insufficient.

In terms of hardware facilities, the eastern regions have strong economic strength, numerous "Double First-Class" universities, and substantial fiscal investments, resulting in more advanced hardware facilities, including well-equipped laboratories and advanced facilities (Lin & Wang, 2022). Considering the clear economic advantages of the eastern regions, their salary levels and development opportunities are significantly higher than those of the western regions. This allows the eastern regions to draw in more exceptional talent, which in turn receives more support for teaching and research, thereby strengthening the university as a whole.

Respondent P3, a department head, mentioned that "three core faculty members from our department have resigned this year to take positions in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. The salary packages, research funding, and educational benefits for their children offered by these institutions far exceed what we can provide, and no local university can match such salary. Therefore, we can only watch helplessly as teachers we have nurtured for nearly seven or eight years, who possess rich CFCE teaching experience, are poached by newly established CFCE institution in eastern regions. We feel utterly powerless about this. This phenomenon is by no means isolated; as far as I know, some other teachers are also considering similar moves."

The Development of CFCE in Western Regions Lags Behind, with a Significant Gap Compared to Eastern Regions

According to data from the Ministry of Education, in terms of CFCE programs nationwide, institutions of higher education in eastern regions account for over 50% of such programs, while those in western regions account for only around 10%, reflecting a significant disparity (Ming, 2021).

Respondent P7 pointed that "in recent years, the number of CFCE programs has been steadily increasing, and as an institution with a longer history in this field, we have also felt significant competitive pressure. Especially when compared to the eastern regions, the competitive disadvantages of CFCE programs in the western regions are very evident. Whether in terms of faculty or external environment, there are significant gaps compared to the eastern regions. We frequently organize our teams to visit CFCE institutions in eastern regions for exchange and learning, and we can still clearly feel the significant gaps."

Additionally, based on literature and data regarding CFCE institutions in eastern regions, we found that the foreign partner universities in eastern CFCE institutions or programs are not necessarily those with very high global rankings. Instead, the focus is on whether the cooperative programs align closely with the urgent talent needs of the region or country. Many CFCE partners of eastern region universities are applied universities from Germany and France(MOE of China, 2025). These universities may not have high international rankings, and some may not even have international rankings at all. However, the collaborative programs are highly aligned with local industrial development needs and are well-recognized within the industry.

Strategy

Actively Address Risks and Strengthen Risk Management Awareness

As CFCE is an international collaboration, it inevitably faces the influence of international relations and global trends, which is an unavoidable issue in its operations(Hou et al., 2021). Therefore, as CFCE institution, it is essential to have a strong risk management mindset, maintain a high level of sensitivity to changes in the international landscape, and be able to promptly implement proactive and effective response measures. Establish an effective emergency risk management mechanism. When faced with unavoidable international risks, there should be a set of procedures and corresponding teams in place to promptly address and handle risks, enabling the swift implementation of effective response measures. Second, CFCE institution can learn from some CFCE programs in eastern regions, where the cooperative entities are not single partner institutions but rather multiple institutions, sometimes even ten or more. For example, the Chinese-British College of Shanghai University of Technology is a “one-to-many” cooperative education model established by Shanghai University of Technology and eight British universities(The Sino-British College,USST, 2025).

Interviewee PT1 indicated that “our previous cooperation with France was very good. We had been collaborating with four French universities on joint education programs. However, one year, because of internal leadership changes at one of the universities, they suddenly withdrew their support for the program and demanded its termination. At the time, our students had already been admitted and were about to begin their studies at the partner university, which caused us significant difficulties. Fortunately, the other French universities we were collaborating with were willing to accept more students into their institutions. We successfully transferred the students from the university that had requested to terminate the agreement to two other French universities.”

A multi-party cooperation model can provide a backup in case of unforeseeable changes at a partner institution. Transitioning from a single-party to a multi-party model effectively disperses cooperation risks and leverages the complementary advantages of direct collaboration between different institutions. With multiple cooperation entities, this forms a systematic, scalable, and intensive international cooperation model for introducing high-quality educational resources from top-tier overseas universities. This represents an effective exploration of cooperation strategies by CFCEI in its joint education initiatives.

Leveraging Regional Characteristics to Optimize Cooperative Education Programs

The CFCE in western China cannot compete with its counterparts in eastern China in many aspects. However, western China has its own unique characteristics, so the development of

the CFCE in western China should also be based on its own characteristics and regional features to set development goals and pathways.

While western regions may not have the same vibrant market environment as eastern regions, they are the primary hub for China's heavy industry, boasting a robust industrial foundation and actively expanding into high-tech industries (Yang et al., 2023). As a result, heavy industry has a high need for technical ability. Therefore, CFCE institutions in western regions can align with regional needs to cultivate urgently required talent for both the region and the nation, establish reasonable talent development objectives and training plans, and seek suitable partners for cooperative education initiatives. Some institutions in the western region have launched distinctive cooperative education programs and achieved remarkable results. The Northwest University of Science and Technology's London Queen Mary University of Engineering College and the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China's Glasgow College are examples of cooperative education institutions that combine local industrial development with the strengths of the institutions. These two cooperating educational institutions have produced highly sought-after engineering talent that is comparable to that of colleges in the eastern region.

Interviewee PT4 told that, "our institution is also gradually undergoing a transformation in its program offerings. In our application for new cooperative education programs, we have applied for an Artificial Intelligence Business program, utilizing our university's business expertise to meet the pressing local need for digital and AI talent. This new program aligns with current development trends and market needs, and the talent we cultivate will contribute to the development of the region and society."

Shift Development Strategies, Align with the Belt and Road Initiative, and Actively Expand Markets Along the Route

CFCE in western regions should leverage the advantages of the Belt and Road Initiative to actively expand into markets along the Belt and Road route. Although western regions are inland and lack the natural advantages of coastal areas, most of them are located along the Belt and Road route as proposed by the state (Bi et al., 2023; Ge & Ho, 2022). They can utilize the state's Belt and Road route advantages to actively develop markets along the route. This process can involve both "bringing in" and "going out" to expand CFCE's educational approach. On one hand, building on the existing "bringing in" approach, the western regions, being located along the Belt and Road route, can leverage their geographical advantages to actively establish connections with countries and regions along the route, seeking partners from Belt and Road countries.

Respondent PT7 mentioned that "we are currently shifting our approach, leveraging the national Belt and Road policy advantages to successfully establish connections with the University of Serbia, a Belt and Road country, Serbia is a European country with relatively developed higher education. We have successfully introduced the doctoral program from the University of Serbia, not only achieving the successful introduction of a Belt and Road Initiative country but also elevating our institution's educational standards to the doctoral level. This is undoubtedly a new endeavor and a significant breakthrough for our institution's development." On the other hand, by shifting our approach from a one-way "bringing in" to a "going out" strategy, promoting China's higher education resources to countries along the "Belt and Road"

route is also an educational model that aligns with national development needs. Countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, mostly Asian nations including ASEAN, West Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia, often exhibit moderate development levels, with educational standards that remain inferior to those of China. Therefore, exporting China's higher education resources to these countries can achieve resource complementarity and mutual benefit.

Interviewee PT2 indicated that, "I am an economics teacher and am currently teaching in the 'Thailand-China 2+2' program, a collaboration between our institution and a Thai university. The students in this program are from Thailand; they spend the first two years studying Chinese and foundational knowledge in Thailand, then come to our school for the final two years of their studies. During their time in Thailand, I also visited to provide short-term instruction to help them better adapt to and prepare for the subsequent two years of courses at our institution. We leverage our institution's strengths to offer business-related programs of interest to Thai students, enrolling over 40 Thai students to complete their final two years of study in China. If they pass all their courses and complete their graduation defense, they will receive a diploma and degree certificate from our university. This is a new initiative and one of our new development strategies following a shift in our approach."

Discussion

Although the western regions face significant challenges in education, they can still actively explore alternative approaches to developing CFCE. Drawing on existing strategies from certain regions and schools, the western regions can consider the following development strategies for CFCE:

First, universities in the western region should vigorously develop disciplines related to key industries. The disciplines of western universities should follow the model of "core discipline + regional characteristics + contemporary growth points," meaning that traditional disciplines serve as the foundation, regional characteristics and advantages are added, and contemporary trends such as new technologies are integrated to enhance compatibility with advantageous industries (Ying & Xingshan, 2025). The cooperative education institution we visited adopted this approach and successfully transformed itself. The college focuses on business as its disciplinary strength and basic academic base. With AI+digitalization emerging as the main path for future regional development, the city where it is located in a western region, is currently evolving into a digital city. Additionally, the rapid growth of the AI industry aligns well with contemporary societal needs and market demands. If the institution was to abandon its core disciplines to pursue more popular engineering-related cooperative education programs, it would face significant challenges in meeting the required standards for faculty and facilities, making it difficult to achieve high-quality cooperative education. Furthermore, disciplines that are no longer aligned with the high-quality development of the western region should be gradually phased out. Based on the quantity and quality of graduate employment, disciplines that fail to meet the needs of the market, region, and nation should be eliminated to alleviate the structural mismatch between higher education talent cultivation and societal demands. New disciplines should be established to meet the evolving needs of industrial development, fully leveraging the western region's demand for the development of emerging industries and the upgrading of traditional industries. This will provide direction for new disciplines and enhance the alignment between disciplinary

development and regional development. Building on its strengths and actively exploring new development opportunities is one of the strategies for CFCE in the western region to achieve better development.

Secondly, universities in western regions should focus on discipline development and planning, courageously phasing out disciplines that no longer align with societal needs, and instead develop plans based on the specific requirements of their regional development. Currently, the disciplinary structure and quality of higher education in western regions do not accord with the primary characteristic and advantageous industrial structures of each province. This mismatch is not only evident in CFCE but also has significant implications for the overall development of higher education in western regions. At present, CFCE institutions and programs in western regions predominantly focus on business-related disciplines, while collaborative education projects in industries such as manufacturing and agriculture that match with the region's own industrial structure are relatively scarce (Xunwei et al. 2025). This is related to the timing of CFCE establishment. A significant number of current CFCE institutions and programs were established in the years following the promulgation of the "Regulations on Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education" in 2003. At that time, the nation was prioritizing economic development, and there was a shortage of business talent, particularly those proficient in foreign languages and international trade. However, China has now entered a new development stage, shifting from pursuing rapid economic growth to focusing on high-quality, high-level development. Regions are now seeking their own development opportunities and paths based on their specific circumstances. Therefore, CFCE institutions and programs in western regions must avoid complacency and shift their focus from cultivating generalist talent to cultivating specialized talent. They must develop disciplinary development plans in advance based on the specific circumstances of western regions to adapt to and drive the development of the region's advantageous and distinctive industries.

Thirdly, universities in western regions should establish diversified talent recruitment measures to build momentum for the development of higher education in the region. On account of relatively lagging economic development, western regions find it difficult to compete with eastern regions in attracting talent, and it should actively implement multi-faceted talent recruitment measures. Although western regions lag behind in economic development, many areas are highly livable, and offering the housing facilities can address a significant aspect of talent recruitment. Housing prices in western regions are relatively lower than in eastern regions, which can serve as an important means of attracting talent. Additionally, while it may be difficult to compete with eastern regions in terms of research funding, western regions can reduce competitive pressure by adopting more flexible policies compared to the rigid "promotion or departure" policies of eastern regions. This can provide new talent with a more relaxed research environment and time, thereby successfully retaining talent dedicated to research. Furthermore, efforts can be made in areas such as arranging employment for spouses and school enrollment for children. Attracting talent is not solely dependent on salary and benefits; the overall cost-effectiveness of supporting measures is also a key consideration for talent. Providing urgently needed talent with a more comprehensive and reassuring work environment is an important foundation for attracting and retaining talent. Additionally, prioritizing the cultivation of local mid-career and young scholars' disciplinary capabilities is the foundation for the western regions to enhance disciplinary quality and serve regional development in the long term. Western region universities should organize and host academic conferences on disciplines closely related to

western development, inviting leading scholars or experts from eastern, central, and northeastern region universities to participate. Through discussions, they can gradually clarify the specific directions for improving western academic quality, with each university then implementing expert recommendations based on their own circumstances. Another approach is to hire discipline leaders on a part-time basis, leveraging their expertise to mentor and cultivate local scholars, thereby fostering the development of discipline leaders within the region.

Conclusion

Although the western region is located in an economically underdeveloped area, it can still address development challenges by exploring a development path suited to its own circumstances. Through the development of CFCE, the western region can effectively enhance the quality of local higher education institutions, address the imbalance in higher education resources, and thereby facilitate its development. Therefore, the western region should strengthen research on CFCE and forge a unique development path distinct from the eastern region's approach, in order to achieve successful development.

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