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Higher education integrating into the “Belt and Road” economic development and its path selection, taking Kyrgyzstan as an example

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Abstract: Since its inception in 2013, “The Belt and Road Initiative” has become an important engine driving global economic growth. The initiative has not only promoted infrastructure construction in countries along the Belt and Road but also strengthened financial integration, unimpeded trade, people-to-people exchanges, and policy communication. In this context, higher education, as an important avenue for talent training and scientific and technological innovation, is of great significance to promoting the economic and social development of countries along the Belt and Road. By strengthening academic cooperation with Chinese universities, Kyrgyzstan can enhance its curriculum, adopt advanced teaching methods, and integrate cutting-edge research to foster more skilled labor. In addition, innovation and technology transfer through higher education partnerships can drive sustainable economic growth and diversification. This paper explores the strategic path of integrating higher education into the Belt and Road Initiative, focusing on academic collaboration, enhancing R&D capabilities, and fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Keywords: higher education; the Belt and Road; Kyrgyzstan

1. The role of higher education in the economic development of the Belt and Road

Knowledge transfer and capacity building. Higher education plays a key role in imparting knowledge and building capabilities in Kyrgyzstan (Chen and Wang, 2019). Through cooperation with Chinese universities, institutions in Kyrgyzstan can strengthen their curriculum, adopt advanced teaching methods, and integrate cutting-edge research. Such cooperation typically involves teacher exchanges, joint research projects, and the establishment of Confucius Institutes to promote cultural and educational exchange. By doing so, Kyrgyzstan can cultivate a more skilled labor force that can contribute to the country’s economic growth and address local challenges.

Innovation and technology transfer. Innovation is the cornerstone of sustainable economic development, and higher education is a key driver of technological progress. Higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan can benefit from the influx of innovative practices and technology through cooperation with the Belt and Road. Joint research programs with Chinese universities can achieve breakthroughs in various fields such as agriculture, renewable energy, and information technology. These advancements not only promote economic development but also help Kyrgyzstan achieve economic diversification and reduce reliance on traditional sectors. What’s more, technology transfer facilitated by higher education partnerships can enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of local industries in the global market.

Human capital development. The development of human capital is crucial for the

economic development of any country (Zhang, 2023). Higher education in Kyrgyzstan can make a significant contribution by cultivating graduates with the skills and knowledge required for the modern economy. The Belt and Road Initiative provides scholarships, training programs, and internship opportunities for students from Kyrgyzstan, enabling them to study in China and other countries along the Belt and Road. These opportunities enable students to gain international perspectives, learn the best practices, and bring valuable professional knowledge back to their home countries. In addition, the presence of international teachers and students in Kyrgyzstan has created a multicultural academic environment, enhanced the overall educational experience and prepared students to enter the global labor market.

2. The current situation and challenges of education in Kyrgyzstan

Current status of education: Since independence in 1991, the higher education system in Kyrgyzstan has continued the former Soviet education model, and the PhD education model was introduced in recent years. Its government attaches great importance to the development of higher education, establishes relevant laws, provides the guarantee for the development of quality education, and strengthens international exchanges. The ruling authorities have carried out a large-scale reform of higher education, and all kinds of colleges and universities have achieved remarkable development. However, compared with other fields, the country has made relatively little investment in teaching and scientific research funds, and problems such as poor management of scientific research and education institutions have gradually emerged. Nevertheless, the authorities lead the higher education through its introduction and implementation. In the direction of the reform of policies and regulations, in the management, funds, quality and other problems gradually solved (Zhang, 2023). In Kyrgyzstan, higher education includes two types of bachelor's programs: standard undergraduate programs and five-year programs. According to the requirements of the higher education syllabus, the training period of professionals with certificates is not less than 5 years (such as the length of medicine and architecture for 6 years). Master's degree is the continued study according to the master's training program after 4 years of graduation, the period is not more than 2 years, and another kind is the master's degree. "After the Central Asia Summit, Kyrgyzstan actively integrated into the international education cooperation framework. Universities took the initiative to participate in the "Belt and Road" education cooperation, focusing not only on the scale and speed of cooperation but also on quality and efficiency. This involved addressing both supply and demand aspects. In addition, the education cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and China is also deepening, and the two sides have conducted extensive exchanges in digital education cooperation.

- 1) Higher education in Kyrgyzstan should strengthen exchanges and cooperation with other countries in the process of globalization, learn and integrate the world's advanced educational concepts, and enhance the degree of education modernization. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan should continue to promote the internationalization of higher education, actively participate in international education cooperation under the Belt and Road "initiative, and improve the quality of education and international competitiveness.

- 2) Face the challenge Bilingual education (Li, 2015): Kyrgyzstan practiced the bilingual system of the former Soviet Union, where the Kyrgyzstan language and Russian language were used in parallel. Although the government tried to balance the system by modifying language policy, the effect is not obvious. In Bishkek, as the most Russian-speaking city, the use of Russian is gradually decreasing, while the quality of Kyrgyzstan teaching is still worrying.
- 3) Weak teaching staff: Whether in primary and secondary schools or higher education institutions, there is a problem of insufficient qualified teachers. Especially in the field of Chinese language education, there is a lack of professional teachers and training system, and the classroom efficiency is not high. Teaching materials and methods (Xiang, 2020): Textbook compilation does not match actual teaching needs, and teaching methods are outdated, failing to effectively stimulate students' interest in learning and improve learning efficiency. This is particularly prominent in bilingual education and Chinese language education (Li, 2015). The lagging construction of infrastructure: especially in remote areas, the uneven distribution of educational resources, and the backward infrastructure construction, which affect the improvement of education quality.
- 4) The contradiction between the protection and promotion of ethnic languages (CCTV network, 2013): Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic country or region with diverse languages. How to promote the national common language (such as auspicious language) while protecting various national cultures is a complex problem. In Osh city, although the government is gradually excluding the Ukrainian language from the teaching field, the quality of teaching remains concerning due to a serious shortage of teachers.
- 5) Development of Chinese as a Foreign Language education (Xiang, 2020): With the promotion of the "Belt and Road" initiative, Chinese language education has gradually received attention in Kyrgyzstan. However, the development of Chinese language education also faces challenges from teachers, teaching materials and teaching methods. Kyrgyzstan's educational challenges involve language policy, faculty strength, teaching materials and teaching methods, infrastructure construction, and the protection of ethnic culture.

3. International exchanges and cooperation

3.1. Cooperation in education

Kyrgyzstan's international cooperation projects under the Belt and Road initiative cover a number of areas, especially in the field of education.

3.1.1. Offline: Ensure sentences are complete and properly structured

First of all, Central Asian Research Network (n.d.), the cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and China in the field of education mainly focuses on Chinese language learning, personnel exchanges, and educational assistance. Since independence, the two countries have made rapid progress in Chinese education (Chen and Wang, 2019). China has established four Confucius Institutes and 21 Confucius classrooms in Kyrgyzstan. These Confucius Institutes and classrooms provide opportunities for local

students to learn Chinese and promote cultural exchanges and cultural relations between China and Kyrgyzstan. In addition, Kyrgyzstan has also held several international education forums, aiming to promote education with countries along the Belt and Road and cooperation in the field of science. For example, 2019 “Belt and Road Forum: The Integration of the 21st Century and Education and Science” at the Humanities University of Bishkek, attracted representatives from China, Russia, Singapore and other countries to discuss how to build a high-quality education system (Du, 2016). At the same time, the teachers and students of the School of Future Design of Beijing Normal University also went to Kyrgyzstan to carry out cultural exchange activities and visited three local universities, further strengthening the exchanges and cooperation between the two countries in the field of education.

3.1.2. Online: Kyrgyzstan has promoted official and private cooperation and exchanges with various countries through digital education in various ways

First, digital education provides a platform for Kyrgyzstan to work more closely with academic institutions in Europe, Central Asia and other countries along the Belt and Road (Liudmila, 2023). For example, research and scientific communication can be facilitated by establishing internet-based communication networks, as demonstrated in the CAREN project. Digital education has enhanced its educational cooperation with other countries by improving the quality and efficiency of education. As described in the literature (Kenzhebaeva et al., 2021). Digital education not only changes teaching methods but also improves teachers’ professional skills and student participation. In addition, the application of digital technology can also help to solve the problems of uneven resource distribution and geographical constraints in traditional education, thus making educational resources more fairly distributed to all students. Third, digital education promotes intercultural communication and understanding (Yelubayeva and Mustafina, 2020). By using collaborative technologies and online learning platforms, students and teachers can work and study in different cultural contexts, which helps to enhance the understanding and respect for each other’s cultures. For example, Kazakh students improve their intercultural knowledge and communication skills by using collaborative techniques. These skills are particularly important for promoting cultural exchanges between Kyrgyzstan and other countries. Digital education also helps Kyrgyzstan become more competitive in the global economy. With the development of the digital economy, mastering the necessary digital skills is increasingly important (Agafonova et al., 2022). Through digital education, Kyrgyzstan can cultivate more individuals with these key skills to secure a better position in the global market.

3.1.3. The following is the above specific model and success case analysis

International exchanges and cooperation: What are the specific operation modes and successful cases of the Silk Road University Alliance (UASR). Specific Operation Modes” and “Successful Cases Jiang and Carpenter (2014). The Silk Road University Alliance (UASR) was initiated and established by Xi’an Jiaotong University in 2015 to promote higher education cooperation under the “Belt and Road” initiative (Du et al, 2019). The alliance is a non-governmental, open and international platform for higher education cooperation, and has received positive responses from five Central Asian countries and many other countries. Specific mode of operation.

Interschool communication (Jiang and Carpenter, 2013): Members of the Alliance can promote mutual understanding and cooperation through frequent visits and communication activities.

Talent training: Relying on the characteristic training mode, promote the cooperation. Promote cooperation between universities by relying on characteristic training modes.

Scientific research cooperation: The member universities in the alliance shall cooperate in scientific research projects and research fields, and share resources and achievements.

Cultural communication: Enhance the friendship and understanding between the national people through multiple cultural exchanges and interactions.

Medical services: The alliance universities also attach importance to the cooperation in the medical field, improve the quality of related services, and promote the local medical and health construction.

Policy research and social services: Member universities also cooperate in policy research and social services to jointly solve social problems.

3.2. Successful cases: Educational exchanges promote people-to-people connectivity

For example (Jiang and Carpenter, 2014), at the China-Central Asia Summit, China reached a series of cooperation consensus with the five Central Asian countries, which further promoted educational exchanges among members of the Alliance. Tourism sub-project: Alliance members share the innovation and practice in hotel tourism education (Li, 2015), such as integrating into the practice cases of Hotel ICON and SHTM + ICON consultant service, leading the big alliance members to appreciate. International talent training (Li et al., 2020): Alliance has 128 universities from more than 30 countries or regions and regions, and more than 10 colleges and universities actively participate in various activities, promoting the training of international talents.

3.2.1. Promotion and cultural teaching of Confucius institutes (Zhu, 2019)

The Confucius Institute of the Kyrgyz National University for Nationalities is an important platform for cultural exchanges between China and Kyrgyzstan. The college not only promotes Chinese culture, but also strengthens the understanding and friendship between the two peoples through Chinese language teaching. The teaching activities of the Confucius Institute include Chinese language courses and Chinese cultural experience activities, which effectively enhance the Kyrgyz students' interest in and understanding of the Chinese language and Chinese culture.

3.2.2. Cooperation among higher education institutions (Yin, 2014)

Bishkek Humanities University has established cooperative relations with many universities in China, such as Minzu University of China, Xinjiang University and Gansu University of Political Science and Law. These collaborations involve not only academic exchanges, but also teacher training and student exchange programs. This cross-border cooperation helps to improve the quality of education and promotes the internationalization of academic research.

3.2.3. Silk road education initiative (Du and Guo, 2019)

The cooperation between the UNESCO Association of Gansu Province and the National Ministry of Education and Science of Kyrgyzstan is part of the Silk Road Education Initiative. This cooperation aims to deepen the mutual understanding between the two peoples and promote the common cultural and economic development through educational exchanges.

3.2.4. Promotion of international Chinese education (Du, 2016)

Analysis of the status of Chinese teaching in four universities in Kyrgyzstan shows that with the promotion of Chinese teaching, more and more Kyrgyz students begin to learn Chinese. This not only improves their language skills, but also provides talent support for the economic and cultural exchanges between China and Kyrgyzstan.

3.3. Obstacles and solutions in higher education internationalization

The main obstacles encountered in the process of higher education internationalization include resource allocation, communication (Ren, 2019), operational process, cooperation and coordination, organizational culture, change resistance, student support and external environment. In addition, Jiang and Carpenter (2013) also has the brain drain, serious cultural colonial tendency and commercialization tendency, the conflict between internationalization and localization, as well as (Li et al., 2020) financial constraints risk, cultural colonial risk, business operation risk, quality cost risk, academic immigration risk, legal dispute risk, etc.

In terms of solutions, we first need to strengthen (Yang and Liu, 2014) integration and coordination to encourage internal cohesion between different key sectors. Secondly, in order to deal with the problems of brain drain and cultural conflict, strategies such as increasing revenue and reducing expenditure, critical absorption, institutional norms and entrustment evaluation can be adopted. In addition, it is also necessary to optimize the talent use mechanism, safeguard national educational sovereignty, and adhere to the independent development of higher education model. In terms of international cooperation in running schools, the (Jiang and Carpenter, 2014) government leading and university participation should not only guide and regulate the government departments through laws and policies, but also need institutions of higher learning to improve the “global ability” of students Force as the core of the systematic reform to promote the level of internationalization.

4. The path selection of the integration of higher education into the Belt and Road in Kyrgyzstan

4.1. Strengthen academic cooperation and partnerships

One of the most effective ways to integrate higher education into the Belt and Road Initiative is to strengthen academic cooperation and partnerships. Kyrgyzstan can leverage its strategic position and historical connections with China to establish a strong educational alliance. This can be achieved through the following measures:

4.1.1. Bilateral agreements and joint projects (Yuan and Fu, 2012)

By signing bilateral agreements with Chinese universities, Kyrgyzstan can launch joint degree projects, teacher exchange projects, and student mobility plans. These measures have not only improved the academic standards, but also promoted opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and exchange between students and teachers.

4.1.2. Confucius Institute and cultural centers

Confucius Institutes and other cultural centers established in Kyrgyzstan can serve as centers for the study of the Chinese language and cultural exchange. These institutions can also promote collaborative research projects and conferences, further integrating Kyrgyzstan into the education network of the Belt and Road.

4.1.3. Collaborative research funding

Obtaining joint research funding from Chinese funding agencies can enable researchers in Kyrgyzstan to engage in cutting-edge research in mutually interesting areas, such as sustainable development, renewable energy, and agricultural technology. These collaborative projects can bring innovation that drives economic growth and development.

4.2. Strengthen research and development capabilities

Kyrgyzstan must improve its research and development capabilities in order to fully benefit from the Belt and Road Initiative. This can be achieved through the following strategic actions:

4.2.1. Investment in research infrastructure

Kyrgyzstan needs to invest in the most advanced research facilities and laboratories. They include upgrading existing infrastructure and establishing new research centers, focusing on key areas such as biotechnology, information technology, and environmental science.

4.2.2. Capacity-building programs

Training programs and seminars that aim at improving the research skills of teachers and students are essential. These projects can be carried out in collaboration with Chinese universities and research institutions to provide advanced methods and technologies for researchers in Kyrgyzstan.

4.2.3. International cooperation and conferences

Hosting international conferences and special seminars can make Kyrgyzstan a key participant in the global research community. These activities can attract top researchers from around the world and foster a collaborative and innovative environment.

4.2.4. Visiting digital libraries and databases

Providing convenient access to international digital libraries and databases can significantly enhance the research capabilities of scholars in Kyrgyzstan. This kind of access enables researchers to stay updated on the latest developments in their field and engage in high-quality research at any time.

4.3. Cultivating an entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem

To ensure that higher education promotes economic development, it is crucial to cultivate an entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem within universities in Kyrgyzstan. This involves several strategic measures:

4.3.1. Entrepreneurship programs and incubators

Universities should establish entrepreneurship programs and business incubators to support students and teachers in transforming innovative ideas into feasible businesses. These programs can provide guidance, funding, and resources for up-and-coming entrepreneurs and cultivate an innovative culture.

4.3.2. Industry-university cooperation

It is crucial for the practical application of research and innovation to strengthen the connection between the academic and industrial communities. Universities should collaborate with local and international companies to develop industry-relevant courses, internships, and joint research projects. It ensures that graduates possess the skills needed in the job market and that research results are commercially viable.

4.3.3. Innovation centers and science parks

Establishing innovation centers and science parks can provide a favorable environment for startups and innovative projects. These centers can provide shared facilities, exchange opportunities, and access to venture capital, enabling startups to grow and succeed.

4.3.4. Policy support and incentive measures

The government of Kyrgyzstan should implement policies that encourage the internal innovation and entrepreneurship of higher education institutions. It includes tax preference for research and development, grants for entrepreneurial projects, and a legal framework for protecting intellectual property rights.

5. Countermeasures and suggestions

- 1) We will strengthen mechanisms for educational exchanges and cooperation. Establish an intergovernmental framework for higher education cooperation, clarify the objectives, tasks and responsibilities of cooperation, and provide policy guarantee for the integration of higher education into “Belt and Road”. We will encourage the signing of cooperation agreements among universities, carry out student exchanges, exchange of teachers, and joint research projects to form a regular cooperation mechanism.
- 2) We will optimize the higher education curriculum system. According to the needs of “Belt and Road” economic development, relevant professional courses are offered, such as international trade, logistics management, cross-cultural exchange, etc. Introduce international advanced educational concepts and teaching methods, pay attention to cultivate students’ practical ability and innovative thinking.
- 3) Enhance the internationalization level of the teaching staff. Teachers are encouraged to participate in international academic conferences, training and exchange activities to broaden their international horizons. Introduce teachers

- with international educational background and experience in “Belt and Road” to enrich the faculty.
- 4) We will strengthen the development of the education quality assurance system and establish sound standards for assessing the quality of higher education in line with international standards and ensure the quality of education. We will strengthen the quality supervision of cooperative school programs and protect students’ rights and interests.
 - 5) We will increase policy support. The government has introduced preferential policies to encourage the integration of higher education into the “Belt and Road” policy, such as fiscal subsidies and tax breaks. Special funds will be set up to support universities in carrying out education and teaching reform and research projects related to Belt and Road.
 - 6) We will promote industry-university-research cooperation. Encourage colleges and universities to cooperate with enterprises, establish practice and training bases, provide students with practical opportunities, and cultivate talents to meet the market needs. Promote the transformation of scientific research achievements in universities, and promote the technological innovation and development of “Belt and Road” related industries.
 - 7) To strengthen cultural exchanges and integration. Colorful cultural exchange activities will be carried out to enhance students’ understanding and recognition of the culture of countries along the Belt and Road Belt and Road. Cultivate students’ cross-cultural communication skills, and lay the foundation for them to play a bridge role in the “Belt and Road” economic cooperation.
 - 8) Establish an information-sharing platform. Integrate the information resources related to higher education and “Belt and Road” to provide decision-making basis for universities, enterprises and governments. Timely release of cooperation projects, talent needs and other information, to promote the effective allocation and docking of resources.

6. Conclusion

This academic paper focuses on the important topic of integrating higher education into Belt and Road economic development, and carries out an in-depth and comprehensive analysis with Kyrgyzstan as the specific research object. The paper begins by discussing the important role of higher education in the Belt and Road Initiative and its far-reaching impact on the economic development of countries along the Belt and Road. It emphasizes the irreplaceable role of higher education in promoting economic growth, regional cooperation, and enhancing national competitiveness. Taking Kyrgyzstan as an example, it details its unique position and potential opportunities in this process. Regarding the current situation of higher education in Kyrgyzstan, the country’s higher education system has achieved certain results in some fields, such as some disciplines with certain teaching and research strength. However, there are also many challenges faced. The unbalanced distribution of educational resources leads to significant differences in education levels among regions, and there is still considerable room for overall improvement in education quality. The disconnect between curriculum setting and market demand makes

graduates less competitive in the job market.

In view of the above problems, the paper puts forward a series of higher education into the Belt and Road economic development path choice. First, strengthen international exchanges and cooperation in higher education. By establishing cooperative relations with universities in countries along the Belt and Road, it is possible to share and complement educational resources, introduce advanced educational concepts and teaching methods, and enhance the internationalization level of domestic higher education. Second, to promote the deep integration of higher education and industry. Encourage universities and enterprises to carry out joint research and development projects, adjust the professional setting and course content according to the market demand, and cultivate high-quality talents with practical ability and innovative spirit to meet the Belt and Road construction demand for various professionals. In addition, the investment in higher education should be increased to improve teaching facilities, improve the treatment of teachers and attract excellent talent, so as to provide a solid material guarantee for the development of higher education. At the same time, the paper also emphasizes the importance of policy-level support and guidance. The government should formulate and improve relevant policies and regulations to create a favorable policy environment for integrating higher education into the Belt and Road economic development. Establish and improve the quality assurance system, strengthen the quality control and evaluation of higher education, to ensure the steady improvement of educational quality.

The economic development of the integration of higher education into the Belt and Road Initiative has provided Kyrgyzstan with a path to transformation. By enhancing academic cooperation and partnerships, enhancing research and development capabilities, and nurturing an entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem, Kyrgyzstan can leverage the opportunities provided by the Belt and Road Initiative to drive sustainable economic growth. These strategic measures not only improve the quality of education, but also ensure that higher education institutions play a crucial role in the national economic development. As Kyrgyzstan continues to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative, it is crucial for achieving long-term prosperity and development to incorporate higher education into this framework. To sum up, using Kyrgyzstan as an example, this paper systematically discusses the importance, current situation, and feasible path of higher education into the economic development of the Belt and Road, which provides useful reference for the reform and development of higher education in this country and other countries along the Belt and Road, and has important theoretical value and practical significance.

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