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# Exploration of the Path of Private Colleges' Specialization and Internationalization under the Guidance of Industrial Demand in Hainan Free Trade Port

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**Abstract:** The development of Hainan Free Trade Port has driven key industries such as tourism, modern services, and high-tech sectors toward internationalization, premiumization, and agglomeration, creating a demand for specialized, internationally-oriented technical professionals with precise and distinctive characteristics. As a vital component of Hainan's higher education system, private universities have become the core platform for aligning with the Free Trade Port's industrial needs and cultivating specialized international talents, leveraging their flexible operational mechanisms and strong market adaptability. However, current internationalization efforts in Hainan's private universities face challenges including disconnection from industrial demands, ambiguous institutional positioning, and insufficient resource integration capabilities, making it difficult to meet the differentiated talent requirements of the Free Trade Port. Guided by the industrial needs of Hainan Free Trade Port and considering the actual positioning and development realities of private universities, this paper defines the core connotations and adaptive features of specialized international education. It analyzes the intrinsic alignment between industrial demands and university operations, explores pathways for specialized international education through four dimensions—institutional positioning, talent cultivation, resource integration, and university-local collaboration—and proposes supporting strategies. The study aims to provide theoretical references and practical models for Hainan's private universities to establish specialized international education models aligned with Free Trade Port development, thereby enhancing the alignment between talent cultivation and industrial needs.

**Keywords:** Hainan Free Trade Port; industrial demand; private universities; specialization and internationalization; educational development path

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## 1. Introduction

The development of Hainan Free Trade Port represents a pivotal national strategic initiative. The “Master Plan for Hainan Free Trade Port Development” explicitly outlines the need to vigorously promote key industries such as tourism, modern services, and high-tech sectors, aligning industrial growth with international standards to foster globally competitive industrial clusters. The internationalization of industries will inevitably drive demand for international talent. The port's

core industries require not only application-oriented professionals with practical expertise but also specialized, cross-cultural talents equipped with global perspectives, communication skills, and deep understanding of free trade port operations. Moreover, different industries exhibit differentiated and precise competency requirements. For instance, the cross-border e-commerce sector demands professionals skilled in international business regulations and cross-border operations; the tourism and wellness industry requires multilingual service providers familiar with international health and wellness standards; while the digital economy sector needs experts proficient in global digital technology standards and cross-border data management<sup>[1-2]</sup>.

Private universities in Hainan serve as a vital force in cultivating applied and technical professionals. Their flexible operational mechanisms, market-aligned academic programs, and close industry-academia partnerships align perfectly with the precision-driven and distinctive industrial demands of the Free Trade Port. However, most private institutions in Hainan currently adopt a “homogenized” approach to internationalization, often prioritizing superficial formalities over substantive content, international exchanges over industrial alignment, and generic competencies over specialized training. This disconnect between institutional characteristics and the Free Trade Port’s industrial needs leaves graduates ill-equipped to meet the differentiated demands of global industrial development. In this context, exploring distinctive internationalization strategies for private universities guided by Free Trade Port industrial needs not only addresses their inherent need to break through developmental bottlenecks and achieve competitive differentiation, but also represents an essential choice for serving Hainan Free Trade Port construction and fulfilling their talent cultivation mission<sup>[3]</sup>. This initiative carries significant practical implications for advancing the coordinated development of higher education and Free Trade Port industries in Hainan.

## **2. The core connotation and convergence point of private universities’ specialized and internationalized education under the guidance of industrial demand in hainan free trade port**

### **2.1. Core connotation**

Guided by industrial demands in Hainan Free Trade Port, private universities are pursuing distinctive and internationalized education. This approach centers on the differentiated talent needs for the port’s key industries’ global expansion, leveraging the autonomy and flexibility of private institutions. By integrating their professional strengths, faculty resources, and industry partnerships, they deeply embed the port’s industrial features into international education. The system establishes a framework where “industry needs define direction, program development shapes uniqueness, global resources enhance capabilities, and industry-academia collaboration cultivates talent.” Its core objectives are “precise alignment with industrial demands, distinct program characteristics, and targeted international literacy development.” This model diverges from conventional universities’ theory-heavy internationalization and traditional private institutions’ ‘homogeneous approaches, ultimately producing versatile technical professionals who meet the port’s specific industrial needs while combining specialized expertise with global competencies<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **2.2. The intrinsic convergence between industry demand and private higher education**

The alignment of educational positioning: Hainan’s private universities primarily focus on cultivating applied and technical professionals, which perfectly matches the Free Trade Port’s demand for hands-on and interdisciplinary talents, establishing a solid foundation for distinctive and internationalized education. The alignment of program offerings: These institutions design curricula closely aligned with market needs, offering specialized programs such as tourism management, cross-border e-commerce, digital media technology, and health care nursing—fields strongly related to the Free Trade Port’s key industries. This approach provides a robust professional foundation for delivering industry-aligned, distinctive, and globally competitive education<sup>[5]</sup>.

Synergistic Mechanism Advantages: Private universities enjoy substantial autonomy and efficient decision-making

capabilities, enabling them to swiftly adapt to industrial policy adjustments and evolving talent demands in the free trade zone. They can promptly optimize academic programs and talent development strategies to meet the dynamic and differentiated needs of industries. University-Enterprise Synergy: Private universities maintain close collaboration with local enterprises, possessing inherent advantages in integrating industrial resources and promoting industry-education integration. This enables them to rapidly translate international industrial demands into educational practices, achieving deep integration between globalized education and industrial applications<sup>[6]</sup>.

### **3. The realistic dilemma of private universities' specialized and internationalized education under the guidance of industrial demand in hainan free trade port**

#### **3.1. Unclear positioning of educational institutions and insufficient alignment with industrial demands**

Some private universities in Hainan lack clear industrial orientation in their internationalization efforts, blindly copying the internationalization models of regular universities. They focus on 'studying abroad' and 'language training' as the core of their internationalization, without developing distinctive educational positioning tailored to the differentiated needs of key industries in the free trade port. This results in a disconnect between their educational offerings and industrial demands, producing graduates who lack industry-specific skills and job market adaptability<sup>[7]</sup>.

#### **3.2. Homogenization of talent cultivation, lack of characteristic and international competence development**

The talent development programs fail to adequately address the internationalization demands of the free trade port industry. The curriculum predominantly consists of "general courses + foreign language courses," lacking industry-aligned internationalized specialized courses. This results in insufficient cultivation of students' understanding of free trade port industries, adherence to international industry standards, and cross-cultural workplace competencies. Moreover, the talent development plans for the same major across different universities exhibit significant homogeneity, reflecting severe standardization issues<sup>[8]</sup>.

#### **3.3. Limited resource integration capability and insufficient coordination between international and industrial resources**

Private universities possess limited international educational resources, primarily relying on superficial collaborations such as short-term exchanges and hiring foreign faculty, while lacking in-depth partnerships with overseas applied universities and international industry associations. Additionally, they underutilize local industrial resources in free trade ports, failing to effectively integrate corporate international projects, job standards, and practical resources with global educational offerings, resulting in a lack of synergistic resource effects.

#### **3.4. Lagging faculty development with dual competencies in industry and international affairs**

Private universities primarily rely on in-house faculty, most of whom possess solid professional expertise but lack practical experience in free trade port industries and international teaching capabilities. They are unfamiliar with the job requirements of industrial internationalization and struggle to implement bilingual or international curriculum instruction. Additionally, the integration of corporate adjunct faculty and international educators remains low, failing to establish a collaborative teaching team combining "in-house teachers + industry experts + international faculty." The coordination mechanisms between private universities and free trade port industry authorities, key industrial parks, and foreign enterprises are underdeveloped, lacking regular talent demand platforms and cooperative frameworks. School-enterprise collaboration often remains at the internship and training level, failing to deeply participate in talent development planning, curriculum design, and practical teaching, making it difficult to establish a comprehensive support system for collaborative

education between schools, local communities, and enterprises<sup>[9]</sup>.

## **4. Implementation path of private universities' specialized and internationalized education under the guidance of industrial demand in hainan free trade port**

### **4.1. Anchoring industry needs, defining the positioning of specialized and internationalized education**

A distinctive and internationalized educational positioning is fundamental to specialized and globalized education. Private universities should align with the industrial demands of the Free Trade Port, leveraging their professional strengths to establish a strategic framework characterized by “precise industry alignment, distinctive program features, and targeted international empowerment.” First, conduct thorough industry research in collaboration with Free Trade Port authorities, key industrial parks, and multinational enterprises to identify international trends and specialized talent needs in sectors like tourism, cross-border e-commerce, digital economy, and healthcare. Second, develop differentiated positioning based on institutional strengths. For instance, a private university with tourism management as its core discipline could position itself as a “Specialized International Talent Development Base for Free Trade Port Tourism and Wellness Industry,” while one excelling in e-commerce might focus on becoming a “Global Technical Talent Training Hub for Free Trade Port Cross-border E-commerce Industry.” Third, formulate an internationalized development plan that integrates Free Trade Port industry characteristics throughout the educational process. This involves clarifying educational objectives, prioritizing key areas, and outlining implementation steps to avoid homogenized development<sup>[10]</sup>.

### **4.2. Reconstructing the talent cultivation system to develop an industry-oriented, distinctive, and internationalized training model**

Talent cultivation serves as the cornerstone of specialized and internationalized education. Guided by the international competency requirements of free trade port industries, we must reconstruct an integrated talent development system encompassing “job-course-competition-certification-innovation” to achieve deep integration of professional training, industrial practice, and global literacy. First, schools and enterprises should collaboratively develop specialized internationalized training programs. By partnering with foreign-related enterprises in free trade ports and international industry associations, we will establish knowledge, skill, and competency objectives aligned with international occupational standards and industry requirements, emphasizing a three-dimensional training framework that combines industry-specific competencies, globally applicable skills, and free trade port awareness. Second, we will develop a curriculum system that integrates “industry characteristics with international adaptability.” Core courses will incorporate international industry norms, free trade port policies, and cross-border operational practices, while introducing specialized international courses such as Free Trade Port Industry English, International Business Etiquette, and Cross-border Project Management. Additionally, we will adapt high-quality international courses and micro-courses to local needs. Third, we will align “job-course-competition-certification” with international industry demands by incorporating international professional qualifications (e.g., International Wellness Practitioner, Cross-border E-commerce Operator) and free trade port skill competition standards into the curriculum. This enables students to simultaneously complete practical job training, certification acquisition, and competition preparation, enhancing the alignment between talent development and industry needs. Fourth, we will innovate teaching models by adopting a blended approach of “bilingual instruction + project-based learning + industry practice.” Free trade port enterprises' international projects and cross-border business cases will be transformed into teaching topics, allowing students to develop specialized international competencies through authentic industrial practice scenarios<sup>[11]</sup>.

### **4.3. Integrating diverse resources to build an “international + industry + school-based” collaborative resource system**

Resource integration serves as the cornerstone for specialized and internationalized education. Private universities should

leverage industrial demands as a nexus to integrate global educational resources, free trade port industry resources, and institutional resources, establishing a synergistic resource system. First, deepen targeted alignment of international educational resources by moving beyond “broad internationalization” collaborations. Focus on partnering with overseas applied universities and international industry associations in sectors relevant to free trade port priorities. For instance, align tourism management programs with Southeast Asian tourism institutions and cross-border e-commerce programs with international e-commerce alliances, introducing advanced curricula, teaching standards, and faculty resources. Second, enhance in-depth integration of free trade port industry resources by collaborating with foreign enterprises, multinational corporations ‘Qiong branches, and key industrial parks. Consolidate corporate international projects, training bases, and technical experts, embedding industrial practice scenarios and cross-border job requirements throughout the educational process. Third, activate institutional resources by leveraging the university’s professional strengths, training platforms, and faculty teams to develop a specialized internationalized teaching resource repository. This repository will integrate international courses, industry case studies, and free trade port policies, enabling resource sharing and dynamic updates<sup>[12]</sup>.

#### **4.4. Strengthening faculty development to build a dual-qualified team with industrial, international, and professional expertise**

The faculty team serves as the cornerstone of specialized and internationalized education. We must establish a distinctive dual-qualified teaching team that aligns with the Free Trade Port’s industrial demands, focusing on cultivating “industry practice skills + international teaching capabilities + professional pedagogy.” First, we will enhance faculty dual competencies through a dual-track approach: dispatching core faculty members to intern at Free Trade Port enterprises for cross-border project management and international role experience to strengthen industry practice, while organizing bilingual teaching and international curriculum development training with overseas partner institutions to boost global teaching proficiency. Second, we will strategically recruit specialized international talents, including seasoned Free Trade Port industry experts, international certification holders, and outstanding faculty from applied overseas universities as adjunct instructors to enrich the teaching team. Third, we will form industry-academia collaborative teams organized by discipline, integrating campus faculty, Free Trade Port experts, and international educators to jointly develop curricula, implement project-based learning, and provide practical guidance, achieving deep integration of professional instruction, industrial practice, and global education.

#### **4.5. Deepening the collaboration among schools, local authorities and enterprises to build an industry-oriented educational support system**

The distinctive and internationalized development of private higher education institutions requires collaborative support from local governments, enterprises, and academic institutions. By leveraging the industrial development of the Free Trade Port, we should establish a collaborative education system featuring “government guidance, university leadership, corporate participation, and park coordination.” First, strengthen policy guidance and resource allocation through proactive engagement with Hainan Provincial Department of Education and Free Trade Port industry authorities to secure policy support and funding subsidies for specialized international education. Utilize government platforms to connect industrial resources with global educational resources. Second, deepen cooperation with key Free Trade Port industrial parks by establishing partnerships with Yangpu Economic Development Zone, Haikou Comprehensive Bonded Zone, and Sanya Central Business District. Create talent demand matching platforms, jointly build training bases and innovation incubators, and achieve precise alignment between talent cultivation and industrial development. Third, advance school-enterprise collaboration through deep industry-education integration. Sign strategic cooperation agreements with foreign-related enterprises in the Free Trade Port, co-establish industry colleges and customized classes, and jointly develop training programs, curricula, teaching methods, and talent evaluation systems. This ensures full enterprise participation in the entire

talent development process, achieving synchronized development between education and industrial progress.

## **5. The guarantee strategies of private colleges' specialization and internationalization under the guidance of industrial demand in hainan free trade port**

### **5.1. Policy support: seize the policy dividends of the free trade port and improve the supporting systems on campus**

Leverage the policy incentives of Hainan Free Trade Port in educational openness and industry-education integration. Actively apply for pilot projects on international education and demonstration bases for industry-education integration, and seek government support in funding, project coordination, and resource allocation. Based on the school's operational realities, refine internal management systems, and establish specialized frameworks for international curriculum development, detailed implementation rules for school-enterprise collaborative education, and incentive mechanisms for teacher internationalization. Clearly define departmental responsibilities to provide institutional safeguards for distinctive international education.

### **5.2. Financial guarantee: establishing a diversified funding system for precise support of distinctive development**

To ensure the smooth advancement of distinctive and internationalized education, a diversified funding system will be established, combining institutional investment from private universities, government special support, corporate collaboration, and social resource participation. Funds will primarily support international curriculum integration, practical training platform development, faculty internationalization, and industry-academia partnership projects. This approach prevents indiscriminate fund allocation, ensures precise alignment with industrial demands and program-specific needs, and ultimately enhances fund utilization efficiency<sup>[13]</sup>.

### **5.3. Evaluation guarantee: establishing a multi-dimensional evaluation system oriented by industrial demand**

Breaking away from the traditional single evaluation model focused on teaching outcomes, we establish a diversified assessment system centered on industrial alignment, corporate satisfaction, and students' job competitiveness. The evaluation involves private universities, free trade port enterprises, international industry associations, and students. Key evaluation criteria include talent cultivation quality, curriculum system adaptability, faculty competence, and school-enterprise collaboration effectiveness. The metrics emphasize the free trade port's industrial characteristics and internationalization capabilities, such as international certification acquisition rates, cross-border employment rates, and corporate participation in global projects, ensuring the results authentically reflect the achievements of specialized and internationalized education<sup>[14]</sup>.

### **5.4. Cultural safeguard: cultivating an international education culture with free trade port characteristics**

By integrating the open and inclusive regional culture and industrial characteristics of Hainan Free Trade Port, the school cultivates a distinctive international educational culture that combines "global vision, industrial passion, and practical skills." Through initiatives such as offering courses on Free Trade Port industrial culture and international regulations, hosting international forums on Free Trade Port industries, organizing student participation in international exhibitions and cross-border industrial projects, the school enhances faculty and students' understanding of Free Trade Port industries and international competence. By incorporating industrial and international cultures into campus development, the school creates an internationalized campus environment with Free Trade Port characteristics, making educational culture the

spiritual foundation for its distinctive and globalized educational approach<sup>[15]</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

The internationalization and differentiated development of industries in Hainan Free Trade Port have set new requirements for private universities. Specialized internationalization has become an inevitable choice for Hainan's private universities to serve the Free Trade Port construction and achieve high-quality development. The core of specialized internationalization lies in aligning with the industrial needs of the Free Trade Port, leveraging their own professional strengths, and achieving precise alignment between education and industry, deep integration of international and industrial resources, and high-level matching between talent cultivation and job demands.

This paper explores distinctive internationalization pathways for Hainan's private universities through four dimensions: institutional positioning, talent cultivation, resource integration, and university-local-enterprise collaboration. It proposes four safeguard strategies—policy support, funding mechanisms, evaluation systems, and cultural development—to help these institutions break away from homogeneous internationalization models and establish a specialized education system aligned with the Free Trade Port's industrial needs. Leveraging their flexible operational mechanisms, private universities should capitalize on the Free Trade Port's policy incentives, deepen university-local-enterprise partnerships, and integrate the port's industrial characteristics into international education processes. This approach will cultivate specialized interdisciplinary talents suited for the Free Trade Port's global development, highlighting private universities' unique strengths while fulfilling their social mission of serving Hainan's Free Trade Port construction. Ultimately, this strategy achieves mutual empowerment and shared growth between private universities' development and the Free Trade Port's industrial upgrading.

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