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Deepening International Exchange and Cooperation in Culinary Education: Pathways and Strategic Recommendations

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of deepening globalization and the high-quality advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the internationalization of culinary education has become a critical pathway for supporting national strategic objectives, addressing talent shortages, and enhancing cultural soft power. Drawing upon the interconnected imperatives of national strategic development, industrial upgrading, and vocational education reform, this study systematically examines the core value of culinary education internationalization. Specifically, it highlights its role in facilitating connectivity and people-to-people exchanges under the BRI framework, supporting the global expansion of Chinese catering enterprises, and promoting the opening-up and modernization of vocational education. The study proposes an integrated framework centered on four key dimensions: joint talent cultivation, brand internationalization, mutual recognition of standards, and knowledge sharing. Building upon this framework, a four-dimensional collaborative model involving government, industry, educational institutions, and civil society organizations is advanced to foster sustainable international cooperation. In response to existing challenges—including insufficient top-level policy design, weak industry–education integration, and limited international influence of Chinese professional standards—the paper further proposes innovative solutions such as the establishment of international standard certification alliances, cross-border sharing of digital educational resources, and localized joint talent-training mechanisms. The study aims to provide both theoretical support and practical guidance for developing a distinctive Chinese model of culinary education internationalization, while contributing Chinese wisdom and expertise to global cultural exchange and the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

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Culinary Education Internationalization; Vocational Education Community; Standards Export; Industry–Education Integration; Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

1. Background: The Call of the Era and Strategic Drivers

The deepening of international exchange and cooperation in culinary education is not an accidental educational phenomenon, but rather an inevitable outcome shaped by the interaction of multiple factors, including the development of the times, national strategies, industrial upgrading, and human development. It carries both profound historical inevitability and urgent practical significance.

1.1 An Inherent Requirement for Serving Major National Strategies

The implementation of national strategies provides a broad platform and fundamental guidance for the internationalization of culinary education. It has become a widely recognized academic consensus that education plays a foundational and leading role in the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), within which vocational education, guided by the value logic of "extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits," makes significant contributions to the building of a community with a shared future for humanity [1]. Against the backdrop of the strategy of strengthening cultural confidence and building a culturally strong nation, the promotion of excellent traditional Chinese food culture, as well as the enhancement of national cultural soft power and international influence, positions culinary education as one of the most systematic, professional, and sustainable pathways for cultural dissemination, enabling a deep integration of skill transmission and cultural interpretation. As Chinese cuisine is one of the most widely encountered forms of Chinese culture in everyday life, its international development has become an inevitable trend [2]. In the broader framework of China–foreign people-to-people exchanges, culinary education, characterized by low political sensitivity and high emotional resonance in cultural communication, is suggested to be incorporated into the "Confucius Institute 2.0" upgrading initiative [3].

1.2 A Practical Demand for Serving the Socioeconomic Development of the Catering Industry

With the accelerated international expansion of Chinese catering enterprises and the deep integration of the global catering market, Chinese culinary education serves as a fundamental form and effective pathway for the dissemination of Chinese food culture. The internationalization of Chinese culinary education essentially represents the inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture [4]. At the same time, through international exchange and cooperation, the absorption of advanced global catering concepts, sophisticated techniques, scientific management experience, and cutting-edge business models can effectively promote the transformation and upgrading of the domestic catering industry and enhance its overall competitiveness.

1.3 A Fundamental Pursuit of Human Development

The essence of education lies in fostering human development. The core objective of deepening the inter-

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nationalization of culinary education is to cultivate high-quality, interdisciplinary culinary professionals with a broad international vision, strong cross-cultural communication skills, excellent professional competencies, and sustained innovative capacity, in order to meet the increasingly diversified talent demands of future society. This not only provides domestic learners with broader career development platforms and lifelong learning opportunities, but also opens the door for international learners to better understand China and integrate into the global culinary community, thereby promoting the enhancement of individual value [5].

1.4 An Era-Oriented Task in Response to New Requirements for Vocational Education Development

At present, China's vocational education has entered a new stage characterized by quality improvement, excellence cultivation, and value-added empowerment. The "Double High-Level Plan" (Double High Plan) explicitly identifies the expansion of international exchange and cooperation as a key task, requiring vocational institutions to significantly enhance their internationalization capacity and to deepen substantive collaboration with high-quality international vocational education resources [6]. As a distinct type of education, vocational education is defined by its openness and strong practical orientation, which determine that it must proactively align with international standards and integrate into the global development trend of vocational education, thereby leading modernization through internationalization.

In this regard, international experience offers valuable references. Since 2013, Germany has implemented the German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (DQR), which incorporates academic qualifications, higher education degrees, and vocational qualifications. It integrates different levels and types of education systems and establishes a "bridging mechanism" that enables the articulation, transfer, and recognition of learning outcomes across various educational qualifications [7].

1.5 A Prominent Contradiction Between Existing Foundations and Structural Bottlenecks

In recent years, China has accumulated certain experience in the international cultivation of culinary professionals, particularly in Chinese cuisine education, laying an initial foundation for further cooperation. However, a critical and increasingly evident constraint is that the severe shortage of internationally competent culinary professionals has become a key bottleneck limiting both the deepening of culinary education internationalization and the overseas expansion of Chinese catering enterprises.

There remains an insufficient supply of interdisciplinary talent who not only possess strong culinary skills, but also command foreign languages, understand international rules and cultural differences, and are proficient in business management. According to a survey conducted by the China Cuisine Association, the shortage rate of interdisciplinary professionals in overseas Chinese catering enterprises reaches 68%, with particularly acute deficits in Southeast Asia, where demand for multilingual catering management talent far exceeds supply. This gap highlights the urgent necessity of strengthening international exchange and cooperation in this field [8].

2. Construction of a "Four-in-One" Internationalization System

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Clarifying the core components of international exchange and cooperation in culinary education is a prerequisite for ensuring correct strategic direction, clear priorities, and effective outcomes. The core framework should center on talent, branding, standards, and knowledge, thereby constructing a "four-in-one" internationalization system, as illustrated in Figure 1.

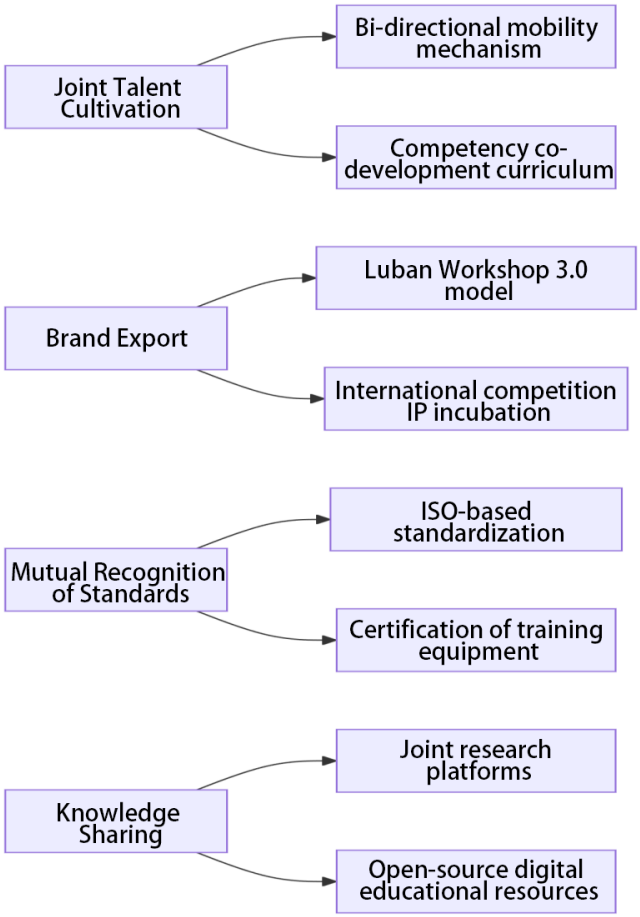


Figure 1. The "Four-in-One" System of International Exchange and Cooperation in Culinary Education

2.1 Talent Development: Bidirectional Mobility and Capacity Building

Talent development represents the core mission and primary task of the internationalization of culinary education. It is embodied in a bidirectional flow of "bringing in" and "going global," as well as in collaborative capacity building. On the "bringing in" side, efforts should be made to actively recruit international students and provide multi-level educational pathways, ranging from associate and bachelor's degree programs to short-term professional training. In addition, non-degree programs focused on specialized culinary techniques and hospitality management should be developed to attract learners from around the world to pursue advanced studies in China. On the "going global" side, training programs should be precisely aligned with the needs of overseas Chinese-invested catering enterprises. Locally tailored talent development programs should be designed to cultivate technical, managerial, and service professionals in host countries. A tripartite curriculum model integrating "language + skills + culture" should be established, such as customized programs like "Cantonese + Cantonese dim sum preparation + Lingnan food culture," to enhance contextualized competency development.

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2.2 Brand Building: Enhancing the International Influence of Chinese Culinary Education

Branding is a concentrated expression of quality, credibility, and influence. It is therefore necessary to integrate high-quality domestic resources in culinary education and develop a portfolio of internationally recognizable and reputable Chinese culinary education brands, flagship curricula, and high-level teaching teams. Vocational institutions, industry associations, and leading catering enterprises with appropriate capacity should be encouraged to form strategic alliances and jointly "go global." Active exploration should be made into establishing overseas branch campuses, training centers, or cooperative education bases, while promoting the innovative application of successful models such as the "Luban Workshop" in the field of culinary education, thereby enhancing the international visibility and attractiveness of Chinese culinary education. On the basis of rich practical experience, conducting systematic theoretical synthesis is not only a natural outcome of the development of vocational education practice, but also a crystallization of its disciplinary system, academic framework, and discourse system [9].

2.3 Standards Export: Enhancing China's Discourse Power in Culinary Education

Standards export represents an advanced stage of educational internationalization and serves as a key pathway for strengthening international discourse power and influence. The core objective is to promote the international adoption and recognition of China's distinctive standards in culinary education, including the "professional teaching standards for culinary-related disciplines," "core curriculum standards," and "practical training teaching standards." Efforts should also be made to develop halal culinary certification standards under the Belt and Road Initiative, and to advance mutual recognition between the National Occupational Skill Standards for Chinese Cuisine Chefs and international certifications such as City & Guilds (UK) and the World Association of Chefs' Societies (WMTC). To support this process, it is necessary to develop multilingual textbooks, digital teaching resources, and online learning platforms, thereby providing a solid foundation for the implementation and dissemination of these standards. At the same time, culinary equipment that aligns with Chinese standards while meeting international market demands should be promoted, particularly intelligent and digital solutions such as AI-powered cooking robots, teaching instruments, and technologically enhanced training environments characterized by visualization, digitalization, and smart systems. The ultimate goal is to achieve a substantive transition from "Chinese standards" to internationally or regionally recognized standards, thereby helping to shape the global direction of culinary education development.

2.4 Knowledge and Experience Sharing: Promoting Civilizational Exchange and Common Development

The sharing of knowledge and experience is an inherent requirement of international exchange and cooperation, aiming to promote the common advancement of culinary education across countries. Efforts should be made to actively host or deeply participate in high-level international forums on culinary education, thematic seminars, and skills competitions, thereby establishing platforms for intellectual exchange and the dissemination of best practices. Greater emphasis should be placed on faculty exchange programs, student mobility initiatives, and joint research collaborations in frontier areas such as food safety, nutrition and health, green cooking practices, and sustainable development in the catering industry. These initiatives will facilitate

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knowledge innovation and the transformation of research outcomes into practice, achieving mutual benefit and win–win cooperation. They will also continuously deepen exchanges and collaboration between China and Belt and Road partner countries across multiple fields [10].

3. Diversified Pathways for International Exchange and Cooperation in Culinary Education

The deepening of international exchange and cooperation in culinary education is a systematic undertaking that requires coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders, including government, enterprises, educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations. It is necessary to explore multi-channel and multi-level implementation pathways.

3.1 Government Level: Policy Guidance and Platform Development

Based on the practical conditions of vocational education internationalization, specific implementation rules should be formulated to ensure the standardized development of international activities in vocational education and to promote its steady advancement [11]. Efforts should be made to actively promote the signing of bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements in culinary education and to integrate them into national-level people-to-people exchange mechanisms. At the same time, national-level platforms for information sharing, quality certification, and evaluation should be established to provide efficient services and quality assurance for collaborative projects. In addition, strong support should be given to the international accreditation of Chinese culinary education standards, thereby enhancing their global recognition and authority.

3.2 Enterprise Level: Demand-Driven Development and Industry–Education Integration

Enterprises are the ultimate employers of culinary talent and also key demand-side stakeholders and active participants in the internationalization of culinary education. Overseas Chinese-invested catering enterprises should proactively communicate precise talent requirements to domestic educational institutions, deeply participate in the design and optimization of talent training programs, provide high-quality internship and training positions as well as employment opportunities, and actively co-establish overseas training bases, thereby enabling seamless alignment between talent cultivation and job requirements. Leading domestic catering enterprises should play a guiding role by collaborating with educational institutions to jointly develop internationally advanced teaching standards and high-quality educational resources. They should export mature training systems and management experience, and use this as a linkage to drive upstream and downstream enterprises in the industrial chain to “go global” collectively. Meanwhile, cooperation with internationally renowned catering enterprises should also be strengthened to introduce advanced curricula and professional certification systems, jointly establish research and development centers, and absorb and learn from international best practices.

3.3 Educational Institutions Level: Core Implementers and Key Platforms

Vocational colleges and various culinary education and training institutions serve as the core implementers and essential carriers of international exchange and cooperation. They should actively establish sister-school

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relationships with high-level overseas institutions and widely engage in substantive cooperation, including credit recognition, "X+Y" dual-degree joint programs, mutual faculty exchange and training, and student exchange programs. Efforts should be made to strengthen alignment with overseas vocational education institutions, gain a deeper understanding of their system characteristics, and promote mutual recognition and interoperability of standards between both sides. This will not only enhance teachers' professional competence and teaching capabilities, but also strengthen the mutual recognition, consistency, and compatibility of international vocational education systems, thereby improving the global influence and competitiveness of China's vocational education [12]. At the same time, close collaboration with domestic and international industry organizations should be strengthened to jointly participate in standard setting, educational resource development, organization of international exchange activities, and vocational competency assessment, thereby enhancing the professionalism and effectiveness of cooperation.

3.4 Non-Governmental Organizations: Bridges and Emotional Linkages

Industry associations, overseas Chinese communities, friendship city organizations, and other non-governmental actors constitute an important force in promoting the internationalization of culinary education, possessing the advantages of extensive networks, grassroots accessibility, and flexible organizational forms. These organizations should be encouraged to actively serve as bridges and connectors by planning and organizing diverse people-to-people activities such as culinary culture exchanges, cooking demonstrations, and short-term study tours for young people. Such initiatives can promote direct interaction and emotional communication between Chinese and foreign culinary professionals and enthusiasts, thereby laying a solid social and public foundation for official cooperation and strengthening mutual understanding among peoples. By fully leveraging the role of vocational education in international engagement, it is possible to cultivate shared values that support the building of a community with a shared future for humanity and contribute to a vision of better and more fulfilling lives for people around the world in the new era [13].

4. Policy Recommendations for Deepening International Exchange and Cooperation in Culinary Education

To ensure the smooth advancement and effective implementation of international exchange and cooperation in culinary education, it is necessary to address existing challenges and strengthen policy recommendations that are strategic, systematic, operational, and implementation-oriented.

4.1 Strengthening Top-Level Design and Systematic Planning to Build a Coordinated Governance Mechanism

The lack or insufficiency of top-level design represents a key constraint on development. First, it is essential to formulate, as soon as possible, a national- or industry-level medium- to long-term strategic plan for the internationalization of culinary education. This plan should clearly define development objectives, priority breakthrough regions, key areas of cooperation, and a structured roadmap with phased implementation tasks. Second, a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism should be improved by integrating resources from multiple ministries and agencies, including education, commerce, culture and tourism, foreign affairs, and finance. A

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dedicated "Special Fund for the Internationalization of Culinary Education" should be established to create policy synergy and operational coordination, thereby avoiding fragmented and uncoordinated efforts. Third, strict quality control over cooperation projects should be implemented by establishing a scientific mechanism for project selection, dynamic evaluation, and exit management. This will guide cooperation from quantity-driven expansion toward connotative and quality-oriented development. In particular, it is important to promote a transition from initial-stage exchanges such as mutual visits and student exchange programs toward higher-level cooperation including joint education programs, co-development of standards, and collaborative research. Finally, a robust monitoring and evaluation system should be established, including the development of an "International Cooperation Project Risk Assessment Matrix" toolkit and an annual release mechanism for a "Belt and Road Culinary Education Development Index." Continuous monitoring and evaluation should focus on key indicators such as talent training quality, standard adoption rate, international brand influence, and actual contributions to industrial development.

4.2 Consolidating the Foundation of International Talent Development and Enhancing Core Competitiveness

Talent is the primary resource, and the cultivation of internationally competent professionals is a core task. It is necessary to build a scientifically designed talent development system and accelerate the upgrading of training models. Professional structures should be optimized by introducing micro-specializations such as Cross-Cultural Culinary Service Design and International Foodservice Law and Regulations Practice to better align with global demand. Curriculum systems should be innovated by integrating content such as cross-cultural communication, international business rules, and foreign languages, while also advancing teaching reforms including bilingual or English-medium instruction, project-based learning (PBL), and case-based teaching. Cross-cultural competencies of both teachers and students should be strengthened through systematic training, overseas study programs, and internship opportunities, thereby enhancing international perspective, intercultural communication skills, and adaptability. Support mechanisms should be innovated by establishing targeted scholarships and international exchange funds for both international and domestic students, and by actively developing culinary-focused study programs under the national "Study in China" brand initiative. Fiscal investment should be increased to support institutional internationalization capacity building, overseas exchange programs for faculty and students, and the development of high-quality teaching resources. Service and support systems should be improved by establishing an integrated enrollment, management, and service framework for international students. A "dual-supervisor system" for overseas internships should be implemented, while facilitating policy support and necessary risk safeguards for overseas program delivery and faculty deployment by educational institutions.

4.3 Strengthening Standards Development and Resource Creation to Enhance International Discourse Power

Standards and educational resources constitute the "hard currency" of internationalization. It is therefore necessary to further advance standards development by systematically reviewing existing Chinese standards in culinary education, including professional standards, curriculum standards, and practical training standards. These should be benchmarked against advanced international practices and improved in terms of

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scientific rigor, advancement, and applicability, so as to form a standardized system with distinctive Chinese characteristics and strong international competitiveness. Greater efforts should be made to develop multilingual teaching resources. This includes investing in the development and publication of high-quality localized textbooks, digital learning resources, and online open courses tailored to the needs of different countries and regions, thereby establishing an internationally oriented educational resource repository. Active efforts should also be made to promote the international certification and dissemination of Chinese culinary education standards. Institutions and organizations should be encouraged to participate in the activities of international standardization bodies to enhance discourse power, seek cooperation with authoritative international certification agencies, and promote Chinese standards through demonstration platforms such as joint education programs and overseas training centers. Through these mechanisms, the international recognition and influence of Chinese standards can be gradually enhanced.

4.4 Expanding People-to-People Exchanges and Brand Communication to Foster a Favorable International Environment

People-to-people exchanges serve as a valuable supplement to official cooperation and provide an important emotional foundation. Grassroots-level initiatives should be strongly encouraged to promote diversified interactions. Vocational institutions, industry associations, and catering enterprises, together with their overseas counterparts, should be supported in organizing various forms of culinary cultural exchange activities, such as cooking workshops, international food festivals, culinary competitions, and cultural immersion programs, thereby strengthening interpersonal friendships. Modern media technologies should be effectively utilized to tell the story of Chinese culinary education in a compelling way. International social media platforms, short-video channels, and professional websites should be fully leveraged. For example, initiatives such as TikTok hashtag campaigns (e.g., #ChineseCulinaryEdu), as well as the development of "virtual influencer" IPs featuring renowned overseas Chinese culinary masters, can vividly showcase the distinctive features of Chinese culinary education, teaching achievements, faculty and student profiles, and meaningful stories of international cooperation, thereby enhancing global visibility and reputation. Across all forms of exchange and cooperation, greater emphasis should be placed on cultivating deep humanistic bonds, respecting cultural differences, and strengthening emotional communication. Efforts should be made to nurture a cohort of international culinary professionals and partners who understand China, appreciate China, and feel friendly toward China, thereby laying a solid social foundation for the sustainable development of internationalization in culinary education.

5. Conclusion

Deepening international exchange and cooperation in culinary education represents a major mission entrusted to China's culinary education system in the new era. It holds irreplaceable significance for serving national strategies, promoting industrial upgrading, enhancing cultural soft power, and advancing the high-quality development of vocational education. Its effective implementation requires a solid foundation in international talent development, with standards export and brand building serving as key strategic levers. This process should be advanced through coordinated efforts across multiple pathways, including government guidance, deep enterprise participation, concrete implementation by educational institutions, and active sup-

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port from non-governmental organizations.

Looking ahead, the internationalization of Chinese culinary education should be elevated to a more strategic positioning and move toward a new stage of "rule-shaping" participation. This transformation requires three major shifts. First, in spatial terms, from fragmented, point-to-point cooperation to the construction of a networked Belt and Road culinary education community. Second, in content terms, from the transmission of techniques alone to a dual output of "technical standards + cultural paradigms." Third, in stakeholder terms, from institution-led initiatives to the co-construction of a cross-border ecosystem involving government, industry, academia, and associations. By exporting "replicable educational solutions"—such as modular curriculum packages, certification systems, and digital platforms—China can transition from a participant in the internationalization of culinary education to a rule-setter and system designer. Ultimately, this will realize the vision articulated by Fei Xiaotong of "harmony in diversity and mutual appreciation of all cultures," fostering a new pattern of civilizational exchange in global food culture. Through sustained and concerted efforts, Chinese culinary education will truly become a bridge for international people-to-people exchanges, a cradle for cultivating global culinary talent, and a messenger for disseminating fine Chinese food culture. It will contribute a distinctive and profound "gastronomic strength" to the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

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