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From Scale to Quality: Institutional Reform for Applied Research Faculty in Private Universities — A Case Study of Jilin Province

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Abstract

Amidst the national strategy to integrate education, science, and technology, and human talent, China's private higher education sector is undergoing a critical transition from scale expansion to quality-oriented, connotative development. However, this transition is increasingly constrained by classified management policies, shifting demographics, and regional economic disparities. Focusing on Jilin Province—a typical economically transforming and less-developed region—this empirical study investigates the institutional dynamics required to build a high-caliber, applied research faculty essential for the sustainable development of private universities. Utilizing an interdisciplinary framework that merges human resource management and policy instrument theories with perspectives from organizational behavior and educational economics, this study adopts a mixed-methods design. Empirical data was gathered via a questionnaire survey of 1,000 faculty members and semi-structured interviews with 30 administrators across 12 private universities in

Jilin. Using comparative insights from developed coastal regions (Zhejiang and Guangdong), the analysis exposes critical institutional barriers in top-level design, talent recruitment, faculty development, research incentives, teaching-research integration, and institutional governance. The findings reveal a pronounced deficit in effective incentives and localized policy support, underscoring the urgent necessity for systematic institutional reform and policy optimization. Ultimately, this study contributes rare empirical evidence to the discourse on applied faculty development, offers a nuanced explanation of research motivation under institutional constraints, and provides actionable implications for private higher education institutions in other developing economies facing parallel demographic and structural transitions.

Keywords: Private universities; Applied research faculty; Institutional reform; Quality development;

Case study