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AI-Driven Strategic Reconstruction of Academic Units in Private Universities

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Abstract: *With AI advancement, private higher education urgently requires systemic restructuring. Prior studies focus on technological applications, yet organizational impacts remain underexplored. Focusing on academic units in private universities—exemplified by an art and design college—this study analyzes structural tensions in operations, talent cultivation, and governance amid AI empowerment. Through literature review, policy analysis, and case studies, it proposes a "technology-organization-strategy" coordinated reconstruction path. AI acts not merely as a teaching method driver but as a critical variable reshaping organizational models and development logics. This research offers theoretical and practical insights for strategic optimization and governance innovation in academic units navigating the AI era.*

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Academic Units; Private Universities; Strategic Reconstruction; Organizational Governance*

1. Introduction

With China's economy entering a stage of high-quality development, higher education is gradually shifting toward a connotation-oriented development model centered on quality. The Outline of the Plan for Building a Leading Country in Education (2024–2035) issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China explicitly calls for "accelerating the construction of a high-quality education system, advancing the digital transformation of education, and enhancing education's capacity to serve national strategies and regional development," thereby providing top-level design for the digital transformation of higher education [1].Against this backdrop, private universities, as an important incremental force in the reform of the education system, play a crucial role in enhancing core competitiveness. This is not only related to the implementation of the policy orientation of "classified management and distinctive development" proposed in the Regulations on the Implementation of the Law for Promoting Private Education [2], but also constitutes a key pathway to achieving the "Four New" construction goals outlined in the Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Accelerating the Construction of High-Level Undergraduate Education and Comprehensively Improving Talent Cultivation Capacity [3].The rapid development of AI creates opportunities and challenges for higher education. While AI transforms teaching and supports management decisions, private universities in China face fragmented strategies, resource inefficiency, and faculty capacity gaps. Taking College D (University N's art and design college) as the case, this study employs SWOT analysis to explore its connotation-oriented development strategy under the "AI + education" framework. It addresses how private universities can integrate strategic management with AI to optimize resources, cultivate dynamic capabilities, and build innovation diffusion mechanisms for enhanced competitiveness and sustainable development.

2. Current Status of the Development Strategy of College D

Since its establishment as an independent college in 2011 following departmental restructuring, College D has gradually developed an art education system oriented toward application, innovation, and internationalization. Relying on the institutional resources of the university, its development strategy has continuously evolved across different stages, focusing on the construction of disciplinary systems, optimization of faculty structure, reform of teaching mechanisms, advancement of industry–education integration, and expansion of international cooperation, thereby forming a relatively

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systematic functional strategic framework.

2.1 Strategic Objectives: Integration of Connotation-Oriented Development and Intelligent Transformation

The college envisions cultivating innovative, application-oriented art and design professionals with cultural heritage, global vision, and interdisciplinary capabilities. During the 14th Five-Year Plan, it clarified four strategies: (1) Discipline-based cultivation aligning curriculum with cultural industries, digital art, and interaction design; (2) Digital-intelligence integration using AI, VR, and big data to enable intelligent creativity; (3) Global expansion through international joint programs and dual degrees; (4) Regional engagement via "design + industry" and "design + rural revitalization" to serve local development.

2.2 Functional Strategic Optimization Pathways

Governance Modernization: Implementing dean responsibility under Party committee leadership to establish goal-oriented, performance-centered governance enhancing organizational efficiency.

Discipline Coordination: Optimizing structure through "design + technology + culture" integration, prioritizing clusters in intelligent interaction, digital product, and cultural creative design.

Industry–Education Platforms: Building "design serving local development" platforms with governments and enterprises to establish practice bases, research institutes, and workshops through project-driven teaching.

Dual-Qualified Faculty: Recruiting full-time and part-time faculty balancing academic and industry expertise, encouraging industry practice and R&D participation to enhance practical capabilities.

Research Capacity: Strengthening research platforms and interdisciplinary teams, encouraging participation in provincial projects and industry-funded research to produce influential outcomes.

International Expansion: Establishing partnerships with US, UK, and Japanese universities through joint programs and exchanges to enhance global competence.

Cultural Education: Implementing "Three-All Education" (whole-staff, whole-process, all-round) to build culturally enriched systems strengthening professional identity and social responsibility.

3. Major Issues in the Development Strategy of College D

Although College D has made certain achievements in recent years in areas such as program development and team building, its overall development remains constrained by several factors from the perspective of its current strategic layout. These issues are mainly reflected in the following aspects.

3.1 Outdated Management Philosophy and Educational Concepts

The college's management system remains heavily influenced by corporate logic, lacking autonomous governance aligned with pedagogical principles. This creates deficiencies in institutional adaptability, academic autonomy, and strategic flexibility. Consequently, the advancement of modernized internal governance is significantly hindered.

3.2 Incomplete Strategic Planning System

The college focuses on programs and teaching, lacking systematic forward-looking strategic design. While the "14th Five-Year Plan" explores platform development and industry-education integration, it lacks a chain linking vision, consolidated strengths, and pathways, leaving the college at an extensive stage.

3.3 Overly Singular Development Goals and Structure

The college offers seven undergraduate programs with scale advantages in fine arts and design, but the design-oriented structure neglects digital art, intelligent media, and interdisciplinary integration, lacking flexibility to align with AI-driven educational transformation and regional cultural creative

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industry development.

3.4 Lack of Differentiation and Distinctive Development Pathways

As one of the earliest units, College D shows path dependency and conservative tendencies. While the "14th Five-Year Plan" proposes "design serving local development," the college lacks recognizable disciplinary branding and external communication, with distinctive advantages yet to be fully established.

4. Theoretical Foundations and Logical Framework for the Strategic Reconstruction of College D

Against the backdrop of the ongoing digital transformation of higher education and the continuous advancement of reforms in application-oriented universities, College D urgently needs to shift from a resource-fragmented development model to a systematic, connotation-oriented strategic approach. To enhance the scientific rigor and practical relevance of strategic planning, this study constructs an analytical framework based on the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities Theory, and Innovation Diffusion Theory. This framework supports the overall logic of strategic reconstruction through three dimensions: resource identification, capability building, and idea dissemination.

4.1 Resource-Based View: Defining the Internal Anchors of Strategic Reconstruction

The Resource-Based View posits that an organization's sustained competitive advantage derives from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and effectively utilized [4]. In the context of higher education, such resources mainly include faculty strength, curriculum systems, research platforms, and brand influence. Specifically, College D leverages its existing "dual-qualified" faculty, local cultural resources, and international cooperation platforms to systematically identify and optimize these key assets. For example, through university–enterprise collaboration, the college has developed the "design serving local development" brand, clarified its distinctive positioning, and established competitive advantages that are difficult to replicate.

4.2 Dynamic Capabilities Theory: Transforming Resource Advantages into Strategic Outcomes

Dynamic Capabilities Theory stresses sensing changes, integrating resources, and reconfiguring capabilities to maintain competitiveness. For College D, this means enhancing sensitivity to policies like "Double First-Class" and "AI + education," establishing industry-education platforms through university-enterprise collaboration, and flexibly adjusting curricula. The college recently developed a "practice bases + laboratories + workshops" platform, pooling university and industry resources to improve student practical skills and faculty research translation, demonstrating dynamic capabilities in practice[5].

4.3 Innovation Diffusion Theory: Ensuring the Effective Implementation of Strategic Concepts

Innovation Diffusion Theory suggests that the successful adoption of strategic innovation depends on internal communication mechanisms and the degree of organizational member acceptance [6]. In the process of strategic reconstruction at College D, initiatives such as establishing faculty opinion leader demonstration projects, launching pilot teaching reforms under the "design + industry" model, and implementing systematic technical training for faculty have gradually enhanced acceptance and proactive engagement with new strategies and technologies. For example, a series of seminars on "AI-Empowered Design Education" has facilitated experience sharing and consensus-building among faculty, thereby accelerating the internal diffusion and implementation of strategic innovations.

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4.4 Integration of the Three Theories: Constructing a Closed-Loop Logic for Strategic Reconstruction

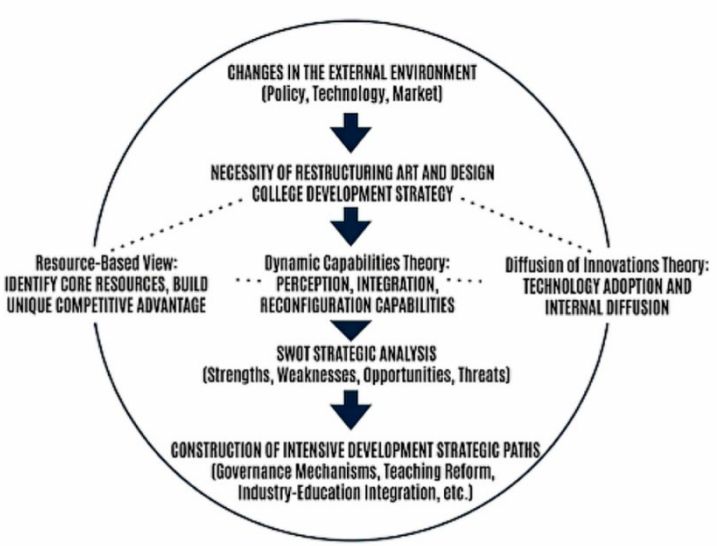

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of the Present Study

As illustrated in Figure 1, the three theoretical perspectives complement each other at different levels—resource allocation, capability development, and organizational mobilization—forming a closed-loop logic for strategic reconstruction. Specifically, the Resource-Based View addresses "what resources we possess," Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains "how we utilize and upgrade these resources," and Innovation Diffusion Theory focuses on "how the organization collectively adopts and sustains reform initiatives." Through the synergistic integration of these theories, College D is able to construct an AI-empowered strategic implementation pathway that ensures a solid resource foundation, a well-structured capability system, and efficient dissemination of strategic concepts, ultimately achieving sustained differentiated competitiveness and high-quality development.

5. SWOT Analysis of D College

To systematically identify the developmental conditions and constraints facing D College amid the Era of Digital Intelligence, this study adopts the SWOT analysis method. The key findings of this analysis are summarized in Table 1. By examining four dimensions—Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats—the analysis dissects the college's internal and external environmental variables, providing a scientific basis and practical orientation for subsequent strategic reconstruction proposals.

5.1 Research Methods and Data Sources

This research follows a mixed-methods approach combining policy text analysis, archival document review, and inductive analysis of interview data. Specific sources include: strategic documents such as the D College Development Strategic Plan (2018–2023) and the 14th Five-Year Education Development Action Plan; policy documents issued by the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education over the past five years regarding higher education structural adjustment and industry-education integration; semi-structured interview records with D College's teaching management and core faculty, covering deans, program directors, and senior teachers; and a strategic diagnostic map constructed through horizontal comparison and longitudinal induction.

5.2 Case Background

D College is affiliated with a private undergraduate university in Jiangsu Province, situated within the Yangtze River Delta urban agglomeration with distinct locational advantages. The college currently offers seven undergraduate programs in Design Studies, Fine Arts, and related fields, with a total

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enrollment of approximately 2,800 students and over 120 full-time and part-time faculty. As one of the university's earliest independently established academic units , D College undertakes important missions in arts talent cultivation, regional service, and international cooperation, possessing strong representativeness and sample value.

5.3 SWOT Analysis Content

5.3.1 Strengths

Policy dividend release: Since the university completed its transition to independent status in 2020, the college has gained greater autonomy, with more flexible institutional mechanisms providing systemic guarantees for distinctive development and brand building.

Faculty structure optimization: The college possesses a cohort of dual-qualified teachers combining theoretical knowledge with practical capabilities. Teaching teams comprise both university experts and industry mentors, balancing teaching quality with application-oriented goals.

Rational program layout: The seven undergraduate programs cover multiple directions including design, fine arts, and performance, with strong cross-fertilization and integration foundations among programs, facilitating the advancement of interdisciplinary talent cultivation.

5.3.2 Weaknesses

Insufficient achievements in program construction: Some programs remain below national first-class undergraduate program standards, lacking landmark achievements with significant industry influence.

Scarcity of high-level talent: The proportion of doctoral faculty and academic leaders remains relatively low, constraining the continuous enhancement of teaching leadership and research capabilities.

Lagging facilities and spatial resources: Some teaching laboratories have outdated configurations, unable to meet the demands of digitalized and interdisciplinary course delivery.

Weak student practical capabilities: The innovation and entrepreneurship training system for current students remains underdeveloped, with student participation in competitions and industry-academia collaborative projects requiring improvement.

Weak research output: Both the quantity and quality of teaching research and academic achievements are insufficient, with academic platforms and project transformation capabilities urgently requiring enhancement.

5.3.3 Opportunities

Industry integration driving talent demand: The accelerated transformation and upgrading of the media industry has expanded demand for interdisciplinary arts and design talent, providing direction for program adjustment and curriculum reconstruction.

Significant regional policy support: Jiangsu Province actively promotes the alignment of education chains with industrial chains, issuing policy measures encouraging industry-education integration and advancing "New Liberal Arts" construction.

Expanded space for international cooperation: The accelerating process of educational internationalization offers opportunities to expand global educational resources through the Belt and Road education initiatives and Sino-foreign cooperation platforms.

5.3.4 Threats

Tightening enrollment policies: In recent years, stricter arts unified examinations and shifting enrollment structures have intensified pressure to compete for high-quality student sources.

Intensified homogenization competition: The systematic advantages of public universities in resources, reputation, and research platforms constitute ongoing challenges to enrollment and brand building for private higher education institutions.

Impact of demographic structural changes: The declining trend in the total college-age population is intensifying, posing long-term risks to private colleges in maintaining enrollment scale and quality assurance.

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Table 1: Simplified SWOT Analysis of D College

Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)	Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
Policy dividends from institutional transition create expanded room for development	Insufficient achievements in program construction; lack of landmark outcomes	Upgrading of media industry drives demand for interdisciplinary talent	Adjustments to arts examination policies challenge the quality of student recruitment
Stable faculty featuring a "dual-qualified" (academic-practitioner) structure	Scarcity of high-level talent; faculty structure requires optimization	Regional policies encourage industry-education integration	Intense competition with peer institutions, particularly public universities
Broad program coverage with strong interdisciplinary integration potential	Weak research capabilities and underdeveloped practical teaching conditions	Expanding space for international cooperation and academic exchange amid educational internationalization	Dual pressure from declining college-age population and enrollment expansion by public universities

6. Strategic Reconstruction Design for D College

Based on SWOT analysis, D College stands at a strategic juncture with institutional, programmatic, and faculty advantages, yet faces dispersed objectives, resource integration difficulties, and recruitment pressure, urgently needing transformation from extensive to capability-oriented strategy.

6.1 Vision and Mission Reconstruction

Against the backdrop of artificial intelligence deeply empowering education, the college has established the strategic vision of "building a new media-featured, teaching-oriented, and internationalized art and design college," which aligns closely with the university's overarching goal of constructing a distinctive, domestically top-tier media-focused application-oriented university.

6.2 Strategic Objective Setting

Taking AI-empowered education reform as the lever and the creation of "Double First-Class" distinctive programs as the goal, the college aims to obtain one national first-class undergraduate program construction site within three to five years; comprehensively enhance faculty quality, curriculum development, practical teaching platforms, industry-education integration capacity, and research innovation standards; and establish a fine arts and design college with provincial reputation and distinctive national characteristics.

6.3 Strategic Implementation Pathway: Prudent W-O (Weakness-Opportunity) Strategy

6.3.1 Program and Discipline Construction: Optimizing Program Layout through AI Integration

The college should clarify the "one core, two wings" development strategy with design studies as the main body and fine arts as well as fashion performance as the two wings; it should focus design programs on cultural inheritance, digital media, and creative design; concentrate fine arts programs on painting and calligraphy appreciation, restoration, and cultural dissemination; and position fashion performance programs to meet fashion industry demands, cultivating professionals with both practical capabilities and innovative qualities[7].

6.3.2 Teaching Strategy: Building an AI-Empowered Teaching System

The college should construct a multi-dimensional AI-integrated teaching system, focusing on developing distinctive courses, promoting the "university-enterprise co-construction" project-based teaching model, building digital resource libraries, and expanding online teaching models; strengthen practical teaching by constructing a comprehensive platform of "practice bases + laboratories + workshops," actively advancing "1+X" industry certification training, and implementing student-centered, capability-oriented cultivation models; deepen curriculum-based ideological and

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political education to comprehensively improve educational effectiveness[8].

6.3.3 Faculty Development: Building a High-Level Professional Teaching Team

The college should strengthen faculty structure optimization through balanced emphasis on recruitment and cultivation, actively hiring high-level part-time industry teachers; implement the "Program Leader" plan to leverage demonstration and driving effects; organize diversified faculty training activities to enhance teaching and research capabilities; and establish teaching research teams centered on teaching reform and curriculum-based ideological education to promote high-level teaching research outputs[9].

6.3.4 Talent Cultivation Strategy: Implementing Capability-Oriented Assessment Reform

The college should implement capability-oriented evaluation reforms,establishing diversified assessment systems with process-oriented evaluation as the main component; construct college student innovation and entrepreneurship platforms to enhance practical capabilities through competitions and project-driven approaches; actively advance New Liberal Arts construction to cultivate interdisciplinary composite talents, comprehensively improving students' comprehensive literacy and employment competitiveness[10].

6.3.5 Opening-up and Exchange Strategy: Expanding International Vision and Enhancing College Influence

The college should expand international cooperative education through Sino-foreign joint courses, dual degrees, and exchange programs; strengthen faculty and student international advancement and partnerships; introduce master workshops and industry lectures to broaden global horizons. These AI-integrated pathways drive transformation from resource-driven to capability-driven development, achieving sustainable differentiated advantages and comprehensive competitiveness[11].

7. Conclusion

Facing the structural transformation amid the transition of higher education governance systems and AI empowerment, academic units of private universities urgently need to transcend traditional resource-patching development models and explore new pathways for the deep integration of strategic management and "AI + Education." This study innovatively introduces Dynamic Capabilities Theory into the governance context of private universities for the first time, collaboratively constructing a strategic reconstruction framework with the Resource-Based View and Diffusion of Innovations Theory, thereby forming a theoretical closed-loop from "resource identification—capability cultivation—organizational adoption." However, low teacher technology acceptance and insufficient university-industry cooperation resources may compromise strategic implementation effectiveness. Therefore, colleges need to establish hierarchical and categorized teacher technology training mechanisms, actively engage in resource co-construction types of university-industry cooperation, and institute strategic dynamic monitoring and feedback mechanisms, so as to achieve a strategic leap from follower development to leading innovation.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory emphasizes that organizations should possess the ability to sense environmental changes, integrate critical resources, and reconfigure capabilities in order to maintain competitiveness in dynamic environments. For College D, this involves, first, enhancing its sensitivity to policy directions (such as the “Double First-Class” initiative and the “AI + education” trend); second, establishing industry–education integration platforms to rapidly combine internal and external resources through deep university–enterprise collaboration and joint R&D projects; and third, implementing flexible adjustments to curriculum structures and teaching models to enable timely strategic resource reconfiguration. For instance, College D has recently developed an integrated teaching platform combining “practice bases + laboratories + workshops,” effectively pooling resources from both the university and industry partners. This has significantly improved students’ practical skills and faculty members’ capacity for research translation, demonstrating the practical application of dynamic capabilities.

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