

Analysis of the Development Trend of Regional Higher Education in Guangxi under the Background of the “One Zone, Two Lands, One Park, and One Corridor” Strategy

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The “One Zone, Two Lands, One Park, and One Corridor” development strategy implemented in Guangxi, as a key component of China’s regional strategic deployment, provides opportunities and challenges for the development of local higher education. By comparing the strategic requirements, this paper uses the SWOT analysis method to conduct an in-depth analysis of the current status of higher education in Guangxi. The analysis results show that Guangxi’s higher education has certain advantages in geographical location but lacks educational resources. At the same time, the region’s higher education faces opportunities such as policy support and local industrial transformation and upgrading, but it also faces risks such as fierce external competition, mismatches between talent supply and demand, and financial constraints. Aiming at the above problems, this paper further proposes the Opportunity Capture Strategy, Adversity Breakthrough Strategy, Advantage Defense Strategy, and Disadvantage Resolution Strategy, aiming to solve the problems faced by regional higher education in serving the transformation of local development strategies.

Keywords: regional higher education, trend analysis, high-quality development, discipline construction, SWOT analysis

Introduction

In July 2024, the 8th Plenary Session of the 12th Committee of the Communist Party of China Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region proposed the strategic task of “focusing on building a demonstration zone for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, creating a convenient land for domestic and international dual-circulation market operations and an important strategic hinterland for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, deeply promoting the construction of various parks led by border and port industrial parks, and building a high-level international corridor facing ASEAN led by the Western Land-Sea New Corridor,” namely the “One Zone, Two Lands, One Park, and One Corridor” strategy.¹ Focusing on the new strategic goals, regional higher education should further adjust its structure, optimize its functions, and

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¹ People’s Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Communiqué of the 8th Plenary Session of the 12th Committee of the Communist Party of China Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region [EB/OL]. (2024-08-01) [2025-01-05]. https://nntb.mofcom.gov.cn/zmgx/art/2024/art_37e812d25c004d509c7df5807eaba923.html

support local economic and social development. At present, Guangxi's higher education is facing real problems such as limited resources, a weak development foundation, and weak core competitiveness, making it difficult to support industrial transformation and upgrading under the new strategy. To analyze the existing problems and find solutions, this paper uses policy research, SWOT analysis, and other methods to conduct an analysis of the development trend of Guangxi's higher education under the new development strategy, providing a reference for the high-quality development of regional higher education.

Theoretical Foundation and Research Framework

The SWOT analysis method originated in the 1980s and is derived from theories such as strategic management theory, systems analysis theory, and behavioral science. It is widely used in corporate strategic management. Through SWOT analysis, it identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of an enterprise to formulate or optimize business strategies to meet development requirements (Zhang, 1993, pp. 25-26+5). The SWOT analysis method has also been used for a certain period in the study of regional higher education development, such as researching the undergraduate major structure of provincial higher education (Li & Shao, 2008, pp. 191-194), analyzing the competitiveness of regional higher education based on third-party data (Zeng & Wang, 2020, pp. 84-92), and exploring the development path of "Double First-Class" construction in local colleges and universities (Yang, 2020, pp. 13-15). However, there are few literatures studying the development trend of regional higher education against the backdrop of local development strategy transformation. As an underdeveloped region in China's higher education, analyzing the development trend of Guangxi's higher education has certain theoretical value and practical significance for the high-quality development of regional higher education.

Based on the basic framework of the SWOT analysis method, this study analyzes the development trend of Guangxi's higher education in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. According to the analysis results, combined with specific cases, it proposes strategic suggestions and specific countermeasures for SO, WO, ST, and WT strategies to achieve the strategic goal of high-quality development of regional higher education.

SWOT Analysis of Higher Education in Guangxi

Strengths Analysis of Guangxi's Higher Education

Locational advantages

Guangxi's higher education has unique locational advantages. Guangxi is coastal, bordering, and along the river, and is the only province in China adjacent to ASEAN by land and sea. It has the unique locational advantage of "connecting eleven countries with one bay and enabling positive interaction between the east, middle, and west." Guangxi is a frontier and window for China's opening up and cooperation with ASEAN, the most convenient sea passage for southwest China, and the junction between the resource-based economy in western China and the open economy in the southeast. As an "important strategic hinterland for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area" and a "convenient land for domestic and international dual-circulation markets," it occupies an important position in domestic and foreign economic exchanges. In

addition, Guangxi is rich in natural resources such as mineral resources, water resources, and marine resources, which provide strong support for the economic and higher education development of Guangxi.

Advantages in graduate employment and enrollment areas

According to the Annual Report on the Employment Quality of General College Graduates in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in 2023, the student sources of Guangxi college graduates in 2023 were mainly from within the region, with 332,000 people, accounting for 83.77% of the total number of graduates. The employment areas were mainly distributed in Guangdong and Guangxi. Among them, 163,300 people signed contracts within the region, accounting for 61.89% of the total number of signed contracts, and 59,800 people signed contracts in the Pearl River Delta region, accounting for 22.67% of the total.² The number of people employed in Guangdong and Guangxi accounted for 84.56% of the total, indicating that the talent training of Guangxi's higher education has strongly supported the related industries in Guangdong and Guangxi.

Advantages of provincial colleges and universities

In terms of overall scale, Guangxi has a total of 91 colleges and universities, including 37 undergraduate colleges and universities, 1 "Double First-Class" discipline construction university, 31 ordinary undergraduate colleges, 3 independent colleges, and 2 vocational undergraduate colleges. In terms of school types, among the 37 colleges and universities, there are 12 comprehensive colleges, 7 science and engineering colleges, 5 medical colleges, 5 normal colleges, 2 art colleges, 2 finance and economics colleges, 1 political science and law college, 1 language college, 1 agricultural college, and 1 ethnic college. These institutions are all provincial local colleges and universities that can fully serve the regional economy and cultivate various talents for the local area and provide scientific and technological support for regional industrial development.

Weaknesses Analysis of Guangxi's Higher Education

Inadequate funding investment and limited development resources

Guangxi is an economically underdeveloped region and an important border ethnic area, and its higher education is influenced and restricted by its economic level. According to public data from the Ministry of Education, the general public budget education expenditure in Guangxi in 2023 was 117.675 billion yuan, lower than the national average of 125.956 billion yuan. The per-student general public budget expenditure on education for ordinary colleges and universities ranked last in the country, and the per-student general public budget expenditure on public funds ranked sixth from the bottom, 34.76% and 16.44% lower than the national average, respectively. From the above data, Guangxi's higher education has significant disadvantages in educational resources and funding investment.

Weak capacity for cultivating high-level talents

First, the scale of high-level talent cultivation is small. High-level talents play an important role in supporting the high-quality development of the local economy and society, especially the cultivation of postgraduate-level talents (Li & Sun, 2021, pp. 1-9), which significantly promotes economic and social development. However, postgraduate cultivation depends on the scale of local master's and doctoral degree programs. Guangxi has only 67 doctoral degree authorization points and 393 master's degree authorization

² Department of Education of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Annual Report on the Employment Quality of College Graduates. [EB/OL] (2023-12-18) [2025-03-02] <http://jyt.gxzf.gov.cn/zfxxgk/fdzdgknr/qtndbg/jyjlbg/>

points, ranking 24th and 22nd in the country, respectively, at a relatively backward level. At the same time, the scale of postgraduate cultivation in Guangxi is small. In 2023, it only enrolled 1,100 doctoral students and 24,100 master's students, accounting for 0.72% and 1.85% of the national total, respectively, also at a backward level. Second, there is a mismatch between the talent supply structure and the industrial demand structure. Guangxi's Three-Year Action Plan for a New Round of Industrial Revitalization proposes a new industrial pattern of "10+5+4", including 10 traditional industries, 5 strategic emerging industries, and 4 future industries. However, compared with the talents required by the industry, the supply structure of local colleges and universities in Guangxi cannot fully meet the demand, and some disciplines required by the industry are still blank, such as ship and ocean engineering, marine science, and energy storage principles and technology.

Weak core competitiveness of disciplines

First, there is a lack of leading talents. The number of leading talents with important academic influence at home and abroad in Guangxi's colleges and universities is small, and there is a lack of high-end talents who can make breakthroughs in international frontier research fields. The overall level of ordinary teachers is low, and the structure of academic qualifications and professional titles needs to be optimized. Second, the output and influence of scientific research are limited. The scientific research productivity and influence of Guangxi's colleges and universities still need to be improved. From the analysis of data such as ESI and InCites, the quantity and quality of scientific research papers in Guangxi's colleges and universities need to be enhanced (Peng & Ma, 2024, pp. 71-74). From the perspective of scientific research performance, the scientific research performance level of Guangxi's colleges and universities is lower than the national average (Liu, Wang, & Li, 2023, pp. 89-96), indicating that there is still room for improvement in Guangxi's scientific and technological innovation environment, investment and output in scientific and technological activities, industrialization of high-tech, and the promotion of economic and social development by science and technology. Third, the number of high-level discipline platforms is small and the level is low. Guangxi has only 1 "Double First-Class" discipline construction university, 4 national key laboratories, and 35 national and Ministry of Education scientific research platforms, which are far from meeting the construction needs of Guangxi.

Opportunities Analysis of Guangxi's Higher Education

The "One Zone, Two Lands, One Park, and One Corridor" development strategy has brought important opportunities for the high-quality development of Guangxi's higher education. First, talent training and professional setting optimization. The "One Zone, Two Lands, One Park, and One Corridor" strategy in Guangxi promotes economic cooperation between Guangxi and surrounding regions and internationally. For example, the construction of the Western Land-Sea New Corridor requires a large number of professionals in logistics, trade, finance, and other fields. At the same time, the strategy promotes industrial collaborative development among regions, providing opportunities for cooperation between colleges and universities and enterprises. Second, discipline construction and scientific research innovation. The strategy promotes cooperation between Guangxi's colleges and universities and high-level universities and scientific research institutions at home and abroad, promotes discipline exchanges and resource sharing, and helps improve the discipline construction level of Guangxi's colleges and universities and promote the construction of first-class disciplines. At the same time, the strategy promotes regional scientific and technological cooperation.

Guangxi's colleges and universities can strengthen cooperation with scientific research forces in surrounding regions and internationally, carry out scientific research projects together, enhance scientific research innovation capabilities, and promote the transformation of scientific and technological achievements. Third, construction of the teaching staff. The strategy enhances Guangxi's locational advantages and influence, attracting more excellent talents to teach in Guangxi's colleges and universities. At the same time, teachers in Guangxi's colleges and universities have more opportunities to exchange and study in well-known domestic and foreign universities and scientific research institutions, improving their teaching and scientific research levels. In addition, the strategy promotes cooperation between Guangxi's colleges and universities and domestic and foreign educational institutions, carrying out teacher training projects to improve teachers' professional and teaching abilities and promote the overall level of the teaching staff. Fourth, strengthening international cooperation and exchanges. The strategy promotes educational exchanges between Guangxi and ASEAN countries and countries along the "Belt and Road." Guangxi's colleges and universities can carry out cooperative education, student exchange, credit mutual recognition, and other projects with foreign universities, improving the level of international education. Through strengthening cooperation with international universities and scientific research institutions, Guangxi's colleges and universities can enhance their popularity and influence in the international education field and attract more international students and scholars to Guangxi for exchange and study. Fifth, serving local economic and social development. The strategy promotes industrial upgrading and economic structure adjustment in Guangxi. Guangxi's colleges and universities can provide intellectual support and talent guarantees for local economic and social development through cultivating high-quality talents and carrying out scientific research innovation. At the same time, the strategy promotes the coordinated development between Guangxi and surrounding regions. Guangxi's colleges and universities can actively participate in regional cooperation projects, providing technical support and talent services for regional coordinated development.

Threats Analysis of Guangxi's Higher Education

Guangxi's higher education not only faces opportunities brought by the "One Zone, Two Lands, One Park, and One Corridor" development strategy but also faces external threats. First, external competition squeeze. Neighboring provinces such as Guangdong and Hunan have rich higher education resources, forming a competitive relationship with Guangxi's higher education, and Guangxi's higher education is at a disadvantage. At the same time, universities in ASEAN countries such as Vietnam and Thailand also compete with Guangxi's universities, and these countries' universities have certain advantages in international education, attracting some student sources and educational resources. Second, industrial transformation risks. Industrial transformation and upgrading are dynamic processes, and misjudgments about industrial transformation and upgrading may lead to a cliff-like drop in talent demand, further intensifying the mismatch between the talent chain and the industrial chain. Guangxi's colleges and universities may have lag in professional settings and talent training, making it difficult to adapt to the rapid changes in industrial needs in a timely manner, which may lead to graduate employment difficulties and a disconnect between talent training and market demand. Third, intensified financial constraints. Guangxi is an economically underdeveloped region, and financial tensions may affect investment in education. At the same time, since Guangxi's colleges and universities are

mainly local institutions, the sources of educational resources are single, mainly relying on financial appropriations and tuition fees, with limited other self-raised income. This will have a negative impact on the guarantee of school-running funds and the improvement of education quality in the case of financial tensions.

Strategic Choices for the High-Quality Development of Guangxi’s Higher Education

Based on the SWOT analysis of Guangxi’s higher education, this study further proposes the Opportunity Capture Strategy, Adversity Breakthrough Strategy, Advantage Defense Strategy, and Disadvantage Resolution Strategy, as shown in Figure 1.

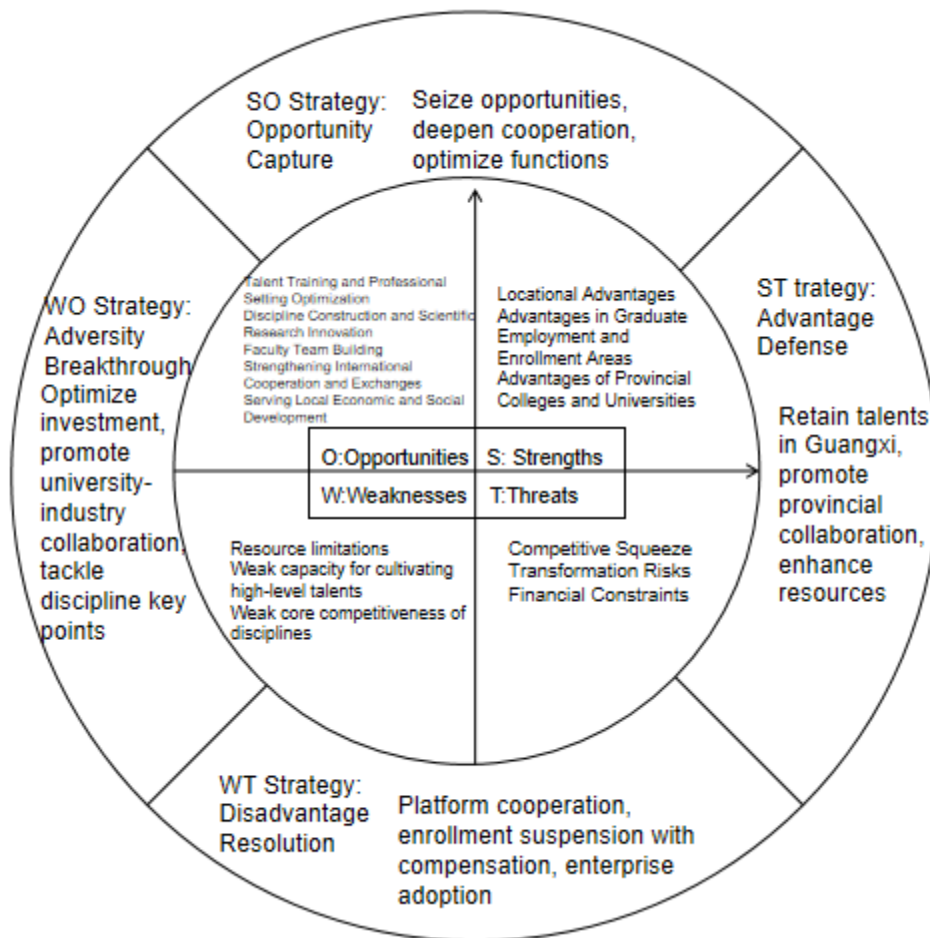


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of SWOT Analysis of Guangxi’s Higher Education.

Opportunity Capture Strategy (SO Strategy): Seize Opportunities, Deepen Cooperation, and Optimize Functions

The implementation of the “One Zone, Two Lands, One Park, and One Corridor” strategy has brought unprecedented opportunities and provided a solid policy guarantee for the high-quality development of Guangxi’s higher education. First, Guangxi’s higher education should seize the opportunity of building a demonstration zone for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, enhance the social service capabilities of colleges and universities, and actively promote the construction of the historical materials system,

discourse system, and theoretical system of the Chinese national community. At the same time, improve the working mechanism and exchange and integration mechanism for creating national unity and progress, and promote the development of related disciplines such as Marxist theory, ethnology, sociology, and history. Second, it should make full use of the policy advantages of being an “important strategic hinterland for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area,” comprehensively promote docking with the Greater Bay Area. Taking the opportunity of establishing a cross-regional industrial chain collaboration mechanism and seizing the opportunity to build an industrial collaboration system of “Greater Bay Area R&D + Guangxi Manufacturing + ASEAN Market,” it should continuously optimize the discipline and professional structure according to industrial needs, providing talent support, scientific and technological leadership, and resource linkage for regional economic and social development. Continue to strengthen cooperation with high-level universities in Guangdong, make full use of the university counterpart support policy, and improve the overall level of Guangxi’s higher education and optimize social service functions. Finally, it should make full use of policies such as the “convenient land for domestic and international dual-circulation market operations” and the “Western Land-Sea New Corridor,” actively open up to the outside world, carry out high-quality transnational intercollegiate cooperation, and targetedly strengthen the construction of related disciplines such as business, economics and trade, and culture and tourism.

Adversity Breakthrough Strategy (WO Strategy): Optimize Investment, Promote University-Industry Collaboration, and Tackle Discipline Key Points

To achieve the Adversity Breakthrough Strategy, Guangxi’s higher education needs to seize opportunities and actively make up for its weaknesses. Guangxi’s “10+5+4” industrial system and the “One Zone, Two Lands, One Park, and One Corridor” development strategy provide clear guidance and support for the development goals of Guangxi’s higher education. Guangxi’s higher education should seize this opportunity to improve the current weaknesses to promote future development. First, it should increase investment in disciplines that have a strong supporting role for regional economic and social development and optimize and adjust the repetitively set majors and convergently constructed disciplines within the region. Based on the 63 Guangxi first-class disciplines that have been approved for construction, it should conduct in-depth research on the entire industry, identify the “broken links” in the docking between the discipline chain and the industrial chain, and strengthen the cultivation and support for these “broken link” disciplines. At the same time, it should further optimize the disciplines that cannot effectively support Guangxi’s development strategy and industrial development needs, improve their fit with the strategy and synergy with the industry, and issue warnings or consider canceling the disciplines that do not meet the development needs. Second, it needs to strengthen the tripartite cooperation among the government, industry, and academia, enhance university-local and university-enterprise cooperation, and make full use of the radiation effect of university clusters in Nanning and Guilin to drive the development of surrounding cities. Local governments should play a leading role, provide support in terms of funds, projects, and talent introduction, activate local development potential, improve the policy for government-university-enterprise cooperation, strengthen communication and collaboration across departments and units, and increase the efforts to build exchange platforms jointly participated in by government, universities, enterprises, and other parties. Finally, fully support the construction of first-class

disciplines. The low level of discipline construction and insufficient service capabilities are key problems faced in the development of Guangxi's higher education. The construction of first-class disciplines is an effective way to improve discipline levels and enhance service capabilities. Guangxi's colleges and universities should deepen counterpart support work, strengthen cooperation with high-level universities outside the region, and focus on the construction of important degree programs, especially increasing the construction efforts for urgently needed degree programs.

Advantage Defense Strategy (ST Strategy): Retain Talents in Guangxi, Promote Provincial Collaboration, and Enhance Resources

In the process of strengthening the Advantage Defense Strategy, it is necessary to pay attention to avoiding potential threats. First, deepen the plan to retain scarce talents in Guangxi, and strengthen the introduction and cultivation of master's and above degree talents serving Guangxi's key industries. On the one hand, increase the standard of settlement allowances to provide more superior living conditions for introduced talents, promoting their stable settlement in Guangxi. On the other hand, increase scientific research start-up funds to ensure that talents receive sufficient financial support in scientific research activities, motivating them to carry out innovative research in their respective professional fields and thus promoting the progress of related industries in Guangxi. Second, to prevent the homogenization of university and discipline construction, it is recommended to build a provincial university collaborative development mechanism. According to the resource endowments and university characteristics of neighboring provinces, implement a differentiated development strategy to avoid the homogenization of discipline construction. Guangxi's neighboring provinces include Guangdong, Hunan, Guizhou, and Yunnan. Among them, Guangdong has the most abundant higher education resources, while Guizhou and Yunnan are in the western region like Guangxi, and Hunan is in the central region. Each province has unique resource advantages and geographical conditions, providing sufficient conditions for the differentiated development of similar disciplines. In addition, each province has different focuses in serving national strategies, so a collaborative and complementary development pattern should be built to avoid the homogenization of university and discipline construction. Third, raise funds through multiple channels for the construction of high-level disciplines and the cultivation of subsequent degree programs for Guangxi's industries. Improve the education investment guarantee mechanism, ensure that the general public budget education expenditure at all levels increases steadily year by year, dynamically adjust the per-student appropriation standard and student scholarship standard, and make various investments reach the national average as soon as possible. Relax investment access conditions, actively promote the government and social capital cooperation (PPP) model, and encourage enterprises and individuals to support education through providing free services, donations, and other means. Establish a social donation mechanism, set up discipline development funds through accepting targeted donations, and support colleges and universities in discipline construction and talent training in related fields. Strengthen cooperation with enterprises, attract social capital investment through industry-university-research integration, and jointly promote discipline development.

Disadvantage Resolution Strategy (WT Strategy): Platform Cooperation, Enrollment Suspension with Compensation, and Enterprise Adoption

To cope with resource limitations and competitive pressures, implementing the Disadvantage Resolution Strategy requires relying on a series of innovative mechanisms. First, strengthening cooperation with colleges and universities in regions with rich higher education resources is crucial. Specific strategies include promoting the establishment of close cooperative relationships between local colleges and universities and those in these regions and promoting academic exchanges between teachers and students. Such exchanges not only enable local teachers and students to be exposed to more advanced academic concepts and research methods, expanding their academic horizons but also significantly improving their academic levels and innovation capabilities. In addition, invite colleges and universities in developed regions to jointly participate in the construction of high-level discipline platforms, using their rich experience and resources to effectively make up for the shortcomings of local colleges and universities in discipline platform construction, thereby enhancing the overall strength and competitiveness of disciplines. This provides a more solid support for cultivating high-quality talents. Second, implement the “enrollment suspension with compensation” policy for majors with low employment rates in recent years and those that do not meet the needs of local economic development strategies. Through in-depth research and data analysis, accurately identify majors with poor employment situations and those that do not match the needs of local economic development, and stop enrolling students. Allocate the funds saved from the enrollment suspension to professional fields that meet the local economic development strategy and have a shortage of talents. This measure not only avoids the waste of educational resources but also concentrates resources on developing majors that have an important supporting role for the local economy, improving the efficiency of educational resource use and better serving local economic and social development. Finally, further improve the diversified investment mechanism. Under government guidance, actively promote new university-enterprise joint models. Encourage enterprises in talent-scarce industries to “adopt” corresponding university disciplines and majors, and enterprises can support discipline construction through investment. To motivate enterprises to actively participate, the government can provide preferential policies such as corporate income tax credits, and enterprises can obtain priority in recruitment. In this way, enterprises can directly participate in the talent training process, cultivate suitable talents according to their own needs, and at the same time provide stable financial support for university discipline construction, forming a win-win situation between universities and enterprises and effectively solving the problem of insufficient investment in educational resources.

Conclusion

This paper uses the SWOT analysis method to deeply explore the development trends of higher education in Guangxi under the “One Zone, Two Lands, One Park, and One Corridor” strategy and proposes corresponding strategic choices. These strategic choices aim to address issues in resources, talent, and discipline construction in Guangxi’s higher education, promote its high-quality development, and provide strong support for local economic and social development as well as industrial transformation and upgrading.

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