
**THE CURRENT SITUATION, PROBLEMS AND COUNTERMEASURES
OF THE COOPERATION ON HIGHER EDUCATION BETWEEN CHINA
AND ASEAN**

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Abstract

The completion of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Zone has opened up a new stage of China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation. The proposal and implementation of the “The Belt and Road Initiative” has further deepened the all-round exchanges and cooperation between China and ASEAN countries on higher education. Since both sides have significant differences in education systems, models and concepts, so summarizing the current situation and analyzing the main problems of china-ASEAN higher education international cooperation so as to propose effective solutions are conducive to promote the sustainable and healthy development of China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation.

Keywords: China-ASEAN; internationalization of higher education; current situation; problems; countermeasures

Introduction

After 40 years rapid, sustained and stable reform and opening up development, China has ushered in a new era of all-round opening up. With the gradual completion of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Zone, the international cooperation of higher education between China and ASEAN countries has entered a new stage, especially the proposal and implementation of the “The Belt and Road Initiative”, which has expanded the depth and breadth of China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation. Although China and the ASEAN countries are connected by mountains and rivers, shared intertwined economy and interpenetrated culture, the two sides have prominent differences in the education system, model and philosophy. So sorting out the current situation of China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation, and finding problems in the legal guarantee, path and content of cooperation between two sides thus to analyze reasons and propose effective strategies are conducive to promote the sustainable and healthy development of China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation and can provide a solid guarantee for “south-oriented” strategy.

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Current Situations of China-ASEAN Higher Education International Cooperation

2.1 China-ASEAN Higher Education International Cooperation Ushers in New Opportunities

As the largest developing country in the world, China has always attached great importance to exchanges and cooperation with neighboring countries, especially with ASEAN. Geographically and culturally, China and ASEAN members are closely linked and they shared a lot in common. Since the opening of the dialogue process between China and ASEAN in 1991, the exchanges and cooperation between China and ASEAN have been strengthened, providing a good international and social environment for China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation. With China's accession to the WTO in 2001 to 2002, China has further strengthened its economic and trade exchanges with ASEAN. The two sides signed *the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between China and ASEAN*, which clarified the goal of completing the China-ASEAN Free Trade Zone by 2010. As the completion of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Zone as scheduled in 2010, the partnership between China and ASEAN has entered a new stage, which has also provided an opportunity for China-ASEAN international cooperation in higher education. 2013 marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of a strategic partnership between China and ASEAN. In September 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the initiative to jointly build the "Silk Road Economic Belt". In October, Xi also emphasized the joint construction of the 21st Century "Maritime Silk Road" and "Working Together to Build a China-ASEAN Community with shared future" in Indonesia. As "The Belt and Road Initiative" strategic concept formally formed, the China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation was ushered in new development opportunities. In addition, Premier Li Keqiang pointed out respectively at the 16th and 17th China-ASEAN (10+1) leaders meeting: "The root of friendly cooperation lies in the people", "people-to-people exchanges are silent, and private cooperation is fundamental." "The two sides will jointly formulate *the China-ASEAN Cultural Cooperation Action Plan* and host the 2014 China-ASEAN Cultural Exchange Year. In the next three to five years, China will provide 15,000 government scholarships quota to ASEAN countries, and establish more education centers for ASEAN countries." At the same time, "the second batch of China-ASEAN education and training centers will be established to support the China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week." Since then, China - ASEAN's higher education international cooperation has ushered in new opportunities.

2.2 The Gradual Improvement of China-ASEAN Higher Education International Cooperation Mechanism

China-ASEAN higher education international exchanges and cooperation has been steadily developed from the aspects of cooperation content, form and platform construction in exploration and learning, and gradually formed an "all-dimensional, multi-level and wide-ranging long-lasting cooperation mechanism. At the initial stage of the international cooperation between China and ASEAN, both sides are committed to language talents cultivation. However, with the continuous development of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Zone and broadening of cooperation fields, it is difficult for a monolingual talent to meet the needs of China and ASEAN

development at the present stage. Therefore, the governments of China and ASEAN countries have begun to attach great importance to the cultivation of applied and compound talents, and the content of China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation is increasingly enriched. In order to ensure the continuous and steady development of exchange activities, both sides have establishment of exchange week, education and training alliance, education and training base and other platforms through endless exploration. Among which, "China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week" serves as a significant communication platform. It was co-sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Guizhou Provincial Government. The first event was held in Guiyang on July 26, 2008, during which 29 foreign schools and 14 institutions from ASEAN countries and Australia, together with 200 representatives in 37 schools in China were attended the conference. Since then, the "China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week" has been held once a year. Up to now, more than 1,800 schools and educational institutions have participated in the event with nearly 800 cooperation agreements have been signed. The China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week has recognized as an important communication platform for international cooperation between China and ASEAN. Thai Deputy Prime Minister Bajin highly praised that "China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week has become an important communication platform for education innovation and technology cooperation in Asia as well as a significant open platform for China and ASEAN to deepen cooperation in the humanities field." With the success accomplishment of the "China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week", a series of education and training centers, bases and alliances such as "China-ASEAN Education and Training Alliance" have been established one after another, becoming an important platform for China-ASEAN exchanges. At present, China has established 30 China-ASEAN education and training centers coupled with 9 state-level China-ASEAN education and training bases in Guangxi. The China-ASEAN Education and Training Center and Base have effectively strengthened the in-depth cooperation in disciplines, academic research, and student development among China and ASEAN universities, and trained a batch of agriculture, finance, transportation talents for ASEAN, promoting the exchange of educational experiences and project cooperation between China and ASEAN universities and deepening the international cooperation process of China-ASEAN higher education.

2.3 The Effectiveness of China-ASEAN Higher Education International Cooperation is Increasingly Remarkable

Thanks to joint efforts of China and ASEAN member states, higher education international exchanges and cooperation have been expanded and deepened with remarkable achievements. First of all, the number of international students between China and ASEAN has increased significantly. In August 2009, Vice Minister of Ministry of education, Hao Ping said at the 2nd China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week that we will strive to achieve 100,000 student mobility plans by 2020. In recent years, "with the development of China's higher education and the improvement of education quality together with the Chinese government's scholarship funding and various preferential policies for ASEAN national government, numbers of students from ASEAN countries studying in China is increasing continuously. According to statistics, "the amount of international students from ASEAN countries is over 40,000 in 2011, and

international students from China is more than 70,000.” “As of 2015, the number of Chinese students studying in ASEAN countries reached 120,000, and ASEAN countries students studying in China has amounted to 72,000.” As such, "the Double Ten" plan of China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation will be successfully completed by 2020. By then, the number of exchange students in China and ASEAN will exceed 100,000.

Current Problems of China-ASEAN Higher Education International Cooperation

3.1 The degree of internationalization of higher education in China is still at a relatively low level

The purpose of China- ASEAN higher education international cooperation is to cultivate international talents who can adapt to the economic development of China and ASEAN. Therefore, the internationalization of China's higher education plays an important role in the international cooperation of China- ASEAN higher education. However, comparing with other countries, especially developed countries, China's internationalization of higher education is still at a relatively low level no matter in the number of international students or education resources. First of all, in terms of internationalization of students, “In 2013, the number of Australian higher education overseas students reached 259,404, accounting for 22.8% of the total number of higher education, while the number in China is only 1.38%.” In 2016, German higher education overseas students up to more than 340,000 people, taking up about 12% of the total number. Although the number of overseas students in China reached 442,773, it only accounted for 1.18% of the total number of students. It is obviously that the number of international students in China accounts for a small proportion compared with developed countries, and the internationalization of Chinese students is at a relatively low level. Secondly, in terms of the internationalization of teachers, according to the survey "Data Survey and Statistical Analysis of the Internationalization Development Status of China's Key Universities" on 71 key universities in China from 2012-2013: "the number of Chinese and foreign full-time teachers in key universities in China is still very small, with an average of less than 50 students per school, accounting for 2.3% of the total number of full-time teachers. While Japan already reached 3.4% in 2008, and the proportion of foreign full-time teachers ups to 9.5% in 2009. From the comparison of the above data, the level of internationalization of teachers in China is far behind that of developed countries. In addition, foreign full-time teachers in China are mainly focus on language, while other professional foreign teachers are scarce. Finally, in terms of curriculum planning and teaching methods, although Chinese universities have gradually set up and added a series of professional courses for the development of economic globalization in recent years, and the teaching methods have gradually changed from a monolingual Chinese teaching to a bilingual teaching, it has not been fully implemented and popularized in colleges and universities across the country. Even worse, the professional courses for ASEAN students in China are rare in colleges and universities nationwide which are only center on local universities that bordered by ASEAN such as Guangxi and Yunnan.

3.2 Regulations Related to China-ASEAN Higher Education International Cooperation are Imperfect

In developed countries, international cooperation in the field of higher education forms a sound regulatory system to regulate the behavior of all parties. For example, the EU's higher education cooperation has decision-making operational rules at the EU level, implementation rules at the member level, and specific operational rules at the school level, thus forming a series of effective systems. Since the establishment of Free Trade Zone at China-ASEAN countries, both sides have cooperated and exchanged with increasing frequency and also have signed relevant bilateral and multilateral agreements. However, China and ASEAN countries enjoy their own interests in development and the two parties have certain dissent and disputes, therefore, China-ASEAN higher education cooperation has not formed a complete set of universally binding laws and regulations currently, bringing great obstacles for their cooperation. For instance, China and ASEAN have not reached a general consensus on higher education access policy and specific rules for trade access of educational services. Furthermore, China's specific regulations on Sino-foreign cooperative education are not perfect enough. In China, Chinese-foreign cooperative education must be approved by the Ministry of Education or the provincial and municipal local education departments. And the approval and management of Sino-foreign project cooperation is based on the "Regulations on Sino-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools" which is implemented in September 2003. However, this regulation does not clearly define the concept and mode of cooperation of the project cooperation mode, as a consequence, the concept of cooperation projects in China is currently confusing, the models are diversified, and the quality of school running is not high, which ultimately damage students' interest. Meanwhile, when submitting relevant materials for the establishment of a Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run school (SFCRS), the regulation just requires cooperation agreement for the applicant cooperation including cooperation period and dispute resolution, etc." Such general requirements will result in unclear rights and obligations and thus affect the smooth progress of cooperation.

3.3 Mutual Recognition of China-ASEAN Credits, Academic Qualifications and Degree are Not Thorough

"The premise of education integration is mutual recognition of qualifications, which not only targets at higher education, but also include mutual recognition of qualifications, degrees, certificates and professional qualifications between the two countries. Mutual recognition of qualifications can not only provide policy and legal guarantees for international students' education, it can also remove the worries of the employment problems, and it serves as an important consideration for international students when they study abroad." However, the non-thoroughly mutual recognition of China-ASEAN credits, academic qualifications and degrees becomes a major constraint of China-ASEAN international cooperation. As of 2011, the number of countries and regions that have signed a higher education mutual recognition agreement with China has reached 44. However, these countries are mainly concentrated in Europe and the United States where higher education is highly developed. While the process of mutual recognition of credits, academic qualifications and degrees in China and ASEAN countries has

been relatively slow. So far, China has only signed formal agreements on mutual recognition of higher education credits, degrees with ASEAN member countries as Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia. With the continuous deepening of cooperation between China and ASEAN in the field of higher education, the in-agreement and in-consensus on mutual recognition of academic qualifications will certainly hinder the international students. Even worse, some organizations and enterprises don't recognize the credits, academic qualifications and degrees obtained in foreign countries, some universities even do not accept exchange students, bringing adverse effect to the stable and lasting cooperation of China-ASEAN higher education. In August 2010, the "First China-ASEAN Education Ministers Round Table" was held in Guiyang. Guests and representatives attended are unanimously demanded that China and ASEAN should gradually realize the mutual recognition of credits, academic qualifications and degrees. Although China and ASEAN have conducted many consultations and negotiations on the issue of mutual recognition of credits, academic qualifications and degrees in recent years, it is still very difficult to provide recognition and guarantee agreements for all member states from China and ASEAN, and ensure the follow-up employment and further study of international students in such a short time.

3.4 The Structure of International ASEAN Students is Unreasonable

At present, an important factor affecting the further and in-depth cooperation between China and ASEAN higher education is the imbalanced structure of foreign students. On the one hand, the regional education of foreign students in our country is out of tune. As a gateway to Southeast Asia, the Southwest region is similar to the ASEAN countries with convenient transportation and low study cost. As such, more and more ASEAN students are willing to study in Southwest China. According to statistics, "in 2013, there are 28 schools in Guangxi enrolled foreign students, with a total number of 10,112. Guangxi has become one of the largest provinces to enroll Southeast Asia students. At the same time, the number of international students studying in ASEAN is as high as 5,000, ranking first across the country". However, compared with other parts of China, the south-western region is relatively backward in terms of economy, culture and social development. Therefore, in the field of higher education, there are fewer key universities in the Southwest and the level of schools running is relatively lower. Although there are many colleges and universities in other parts of China with are sufficient education funds, they are far different from ASEAN countries in obvious cultural gap and high living consumption. Thus, most ASEAN students are reluctant to study in China, which leads to the regional imbalance of the international student's education in China, and it is unable to give a full play to the high-level educational resources of foreign students, affecting the quality and level of international students education in ASEAN countries.

On the other hand, it is the imbalance between academic education and non-academic education. "Generally, the proportion of foreign students in world-class universities is over 15%, of which the proportion of academic students is more than 90%." While the international education in China mainly focuses on non-degree education, including short-term education such as language training and exchange activities. "In 2012, there were 133,509 academic degree international

students study in China, accounting for 40.66% of the total number of international students; and 194,821 non-degree international students, taking up 59.34% of the total number. Compared with academic education, non-degree education has a relatively low level, and it is difficult for international students to learn systematic professional knowledge. Moreover, the level of academic qualifications of international students in China is relatively low, and the development of postgraduate and doctoral students is lagging behind that cannot meet the high-level needs of international students. Therefore, the problem of imbalanced education structure of international students in China will undoubtedly affect the healthy and sustainable development of China's trade in higher education services.

Countermeasures for Strengthening China-ASEAN Higher Education International Cooperation

4.1 Enhance the level of China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation

In order to further deepen the international cooperation in higher education between China and ASEAN countries, we must upgrade the internationalization level of higher education in China. President Xi Jinping stressed: "China will strengthen its educational exchanges with countries around the world, expand education opening to the outside world, actively support the development of education in developing countries, and work together with people of all countries to promise a better tomorrow." In order to achieve this, we must first continue to develop the ASEAN international student market. On the one hand, the state finance should increase its support for China-ASEAN higher education cooperation and further expand the coverage of the "Chinese Government Scholarship". Of course, it is necessary to "encourage social groups, organizations and enterprises to set up scholarships for foreign students and expand the number of students who are funded". On the other hand, we should improve the existing foreign student policy, further refine the "Regulations on the Administration of Foreign Students", improve the service system of ASEAN students, and strengthen the concern and help for ASEAN students both in daily life and study. Furthermore, we must strengthen the construction of international faculty in China's colleges and universities. The Chinese government should actively implement the "Silk Road" teacher training program, "strengthen the 'Silk Road' teacher exchanges, promote exchanges and communications between the principals of the countries along the Silk Road countries, research and study of teachers and management personnel, and advance the quality education model alongside". All local colleges and universities should actively send their full-time teachers to ASEAN universities to improve the ASEAN teachers' minority language level and international teaching ability. At the same time, it is necessary to "hire more foreign teachers, and further increase the proportion of foreign teachers in universities, improve the professional standards system to promote the certification of foreign teachers, and provide an international perspective and exchange chances for teachers". Finally, Chinese universities must build an international curriculum system. With the completion of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Zone and the in-depth implementation of "the Belt and Road Initiative" strategy, we must build an international curriculum system that is oriented toward the ASEAN countries and conducive to "the Belt and Road Initiative". This requires that China's colleges and universities should pay

much attention to the learning needs of ASEAN students, and establish language, agriculture, transportation, construction, energy and environment, water conservancy projects, ecological protection and other professional courses that ASEAN countries are badly in need, set up international curriculum system for talents training to promote China-ASEAN economic development with bilingual language and other minority languages so as to overcome the learning obstacles of ASEAN students from a greatest extent.

4.2 Promote the Connectivity of China-ASEAN Academic Degree Certification Standards

The issue of mutual recognition of academic degrees has always been a bottleneck hindering the development of international students' education in China and ASEAN countries. Promoting the connectivity of China-ASEAN academic degree certification standards is the basis for China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation and mutual trust. Only by insisting on mutual trust, can we achieve mutual benefit. The Chinese government attaches great importance to this issue, so the Ministry of Education issued the "Educational Action to Promote the Belt and Road Initiative" in 2016 to emphasize the need of academic degree certification standards connectivity. It is pointed out that China will "promote the implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region, support UNESCO's establishment of a worldwide mutual recognition mechanism for academic qualifications, and achieve mutual recognition of bilateral multilateral academic degrees in the region. It will also call on countries to improve the quality of education system and certification mechanism to accelerate the framework development of the national education qualifications, thus to help learners transfer freely in different types and stages of education and to promote the construction of lifelong learning society. Promoting the connectivity of China-ASEAN academic degree certification standards is of great significance for the international recognition of Chinese higher education. First of all, Chinese government should further strengthen communication and consultation with the governments of ASEAN countries, actively carry out in-depth discussions with ASEAN state members on the mutual recognition of academic degrees, and eliminate the objections and prejudice between China and ASEAN countries on mutual recognition of academic degrees. We should formulate the accreditation standards and gradually realize the mutual recognition agreement between China and all ASEAN member countries. Secondly, we also should encouraged Chinese universities and colleges to go global under the premise of improved international higher education in China, make full use of the "China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week" and other important platforms to promote and demonstrate the quality and level of China's higher education to ASEAN countries so as to make China's higher education recognized by ASEAN countries. Finally, we must vigorously promote the construction of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms in ASEAN countries, so that ASEAN students can better understand China's splendid traditional culture, enhance China's cultural influence, enhance the attractiveness of higher education, and enable ASEAN countries to take the initiative to sign mutual degree recognition agreement with China.

4.3 Improvement of China-ASEAN Higher Education International Cooperation Regulations

At present, the educational exchanges and cooperation between China and ASEAN countries are still mainly subject to the overall framework of economic cooperation, and bounded and protected by the convention on economic exchanges and cooperation, so, it lacks special international cooperation laws and regulations. To this end, internationally, the Chinese government should strengthen education policy consultations with ASEAN member, and learn from and absorb the successful experience of the EU's regional higher education exchange and cooperation laws and regulations guarantee mechanism based on the existing international rules as well as jointly formulate and improve the laws and regulations on higher education international cooperation that China and ASEAN countries must abide by. For example, we conducted collaborative discussions and research in the education service trade market access rules, international student visa, and the establishment of China-ASEAN region teaching quality supervision and evaluation standards and other issues, and called on governments to actively sign bilateral, multilateral and sub-regional related agreement as well as formulate the China-ASEAN Convention on International Cooperation in Higher Education. In China, Chinese government should strengthen the legislation of the basic law on China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation, revise and improve the basic laws and regulations such as the Regulations on the Administration of Chinese and Foreign Universities and the Application Procedures for the China-ASEAN Scholarship Program, further refine the specific laws and regulations and implement and operate the rules to strengthen policy guidance from a macro perspective. At the same time, it is necessary to formulate China-ASEAN supplementary laws and regulations on higher education cooperation, put the issue of the quality assessment of foreign students education, the certification of foreign teachers, and the financing of colleges and universities to the height of law so as to guarantee the quality and international level of higher education in China's colleges and universities. In addition, we must strengthen law enforcement and supervision. Establishing a hierarchical supervision and management organization from the school to the central government and unblocking the complaints and reporting platform. We would severely punish those who violate the laws and regulations related to China-ASEAN higher education international cooperation as a way to establish the majesty of China's education laws and regulations, and timely protect the legitimate rights and interests of ASEAN students.

4.4 Optimizing the Overall Education Structure of ASEAN Students Studying in China

Optimizing the overall international students education structure in China is the basis for promoting all-round and deep-level exchanges and cooperation between China and ASEAN. First of all, the Chinese government should further increase the education funding support and investment of colleges and universities in the southwest region, improve the overall education quality and standard, and give full play to the regional advantages of "bridgehead" in Southeast Asia. We actively encourage colleges and universities in the southwest to go outside, establish "friendly and sibling friendships" with ASEAN countries in an orderly manner, and carry out overseas schools in various modes so as to enhance the international influence of China's higher education. Colleges and universities in the south-western region should strengthen the construction of minority language disciplines to improve students' language application ability and cultivate a batch of professional talents who are proficient in the ASEAN countries

languages. What's more, universities also should establish a special professional training base to cultivate the application-oriented talents for China- ASEAN economic development. In addition, we must integrate the domestic educational resources. The number of foreign students in ASEAN universities in Southwest China is the highest among all universities in China, but the education level of international students is lower than that of other key universities in China. Therefore, colleges and universities in Southwest China can send exchange ASEAN students to key universities in other regions of China so that more ASEAN students can get to know the universities in China. Furthermore, key universities in other regions of China have given more guidance and assistance to universities in Southwest China in terms of superior disciplines, excellent teacher resources and advanced teaching methods, thus improving the education level of international students in Southwest China. Apart from that, key universities in other regions of China should strengthen their propaganda in ASEAN countries and set up various forms of scholarships to reduce the study cost and attract more ASEAN students. Finally, in the long run, it is required that Chinese colleges and universities should follow the standards of research-based universities, impart international students in ASEAN countries based on academic education, and improve the standard of academic education both in undergraduate educations and related majors in Master's and Doctoral training programs.

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