

# Policy Analysis and Practice Effect of “The Belt and Road Initiative” Education Action

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## ABSTRACT

As the current Chinese government’s medium and long-term development strategy, “the Belt and Road Initiative” has attracted the attention of the world. As an important part of “the Belt and Road Initiative”, the Education Action plan issued by the Ministry of Education has achieved initial effect in the past three years since its promulgation and implementation, fully demonstrating the continuity, persistence and vitality of education reform and opening up policy in China. China’s education sector has continued to follow up this strategy, continuously strengthened think tank research and comparative education research, seriously solved the problem of insufficient educational cooperation platforms, resolved the contradiction between educational needs and resource capabilities, actively promoted non-governmental participation and strengthened internal coordination among educational subjects. All tasks have been carried out steadily and remarkable effects have been achieved. Therefore, it is of great significance to carefully interpret the Education Action policy, analyze the existing problems and summarize the results of practice in the past three years.

**Keywords:** *The Belt and Road Initiative, education action, policy analysis, practice effect.*

## 1. POLICY BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONTENTS OF EDUCATION ACTION PLAN

Opening up is one of the important signs of China’s economic development at present. The Promoting the Co-construction of “the Belt and Road Initiative” Education Action issued by the Ministry of Education is an important part of “the Belt and Road Initiative”. The concept “the Belt and Road Initiative” education community put forward in Education Action has clear policy background and theme contents, including following six parts: “education mission”, “cooperation vision”, “cooperation principle”, “cooperation focus”, “China’s education takes action” and “create a better tomorrow for education” whose main content can be roughly summarized as responsibilities, measures and goals. Education Action reflects the basic attitude and promotion path of Chinese education in active participation in the construction of “the Belt and Road Initiative” education in a centralized way.

### 1.1. Policy Background of Education Action

On September 28, 2015, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech at the UN General Assembly entitled Jointly Build a New Partnership for Win-win Cooperation and Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for

Mankind, further elaborating on the previously proposed concept of a community of shared future for mankind. It is emphasized that the community of shared future for mankind not only aims at building an open economic system oriented to the future, but also should become a common human attitude for all countries worldwide to put aside their current prejudices and conflicts of interests and jointly face and solve common problems disturbing mankind and the earth. “The Belt and Road Initiative” education community advocated in the Education Action plan is obviously based on the cognition of the community of shared future for mankind. In the past, when the media and scholars talked about “the Belt and Road Initiative”, they often emphasized the principle of interests and thought that the core of interest between a country and the world was interest, and the world order and the national comprehensive strength determined the interest demand. However, interest is by no means the only link between countries and between a country and the world. In addition to interest, there are many ties such as feelings, faiths and beliefs; without these ties, even if there is room for interest, there may not be any interest behavior. The concept of education community put forward in Education Action has strengthened the emotional tie in popular feelings and other aspects, showing the Chinese government’s firm determination to commit itself to educational cooperation along “the Belt and Road Initiative”. Education has become the bridge and means to build a community of shared future for mankind for countries along “the Belt and Road Initiative”. The common development of regional education and culture is also the

direction and goal of the development of “the Belt and Road Initiative” education community.

### ***1.2. Main Contents of Education Action***

Education Action regards common development on education of China and countries along “the Belt and Road Initiative” as its mission and responsibility. In recent years, cooperation, innovation and reform are mentioned with high frequency in the official statements of Chinese leaders and the Chinese government. Innovation is for development, reform is for development, and cooperation is also for development. The construction of foreign cooperation means that we should consider not only the interests of our own country but also those of other countries; in addition, we should consider not only the feelings of our own country but also those of other countries. It is China’s duty to develop its own education and improve the relatively backward regional education standard. Education Action highlights that the Chinese government consciously bears the burden of education development in countries and regions along the Silk Road. “China is willing to undertake more responsibilities and obligations within its capabilities to make greater contributions to the great development of regional education”<sup>[1]</sup>. From the perspective of responsibility, the concept of education community advocates the mutual cooperation and common development of members within the community in terms of resource sharing and talent support so as to promote the common feelings of the people.

In human history, similar consanguinity, geography and living customs often become opportunities for the existence of the community, belonging to the natural aggregation of human groups in long-term communication. With the deepening of globalization, social development, economic communication and religious dialogue have also become effective ways for community exchanges and interactions. We are committed to the long term and the future with the help of the government through interaction and mutual assistance. There is no doubt that the education bridge plays a role in laying the emotional foundation of the people in and around the region. This is also the “people-to-people exchange” repeatedly stressed in Education Action.

### ***1.3. Service Strategy of Education Action***

As the implementation program of “the Belt and Road Initiative” education, Education Action serves “the Belt and Road Initiative” firstly. It is mainly shown in that the countries along the route should “expand the scale of international students and cooperate in running schools and China provides 10,000 government scholarships to the countries along the route every year” and “deepen the cooperation in talent exchange along the route”<sup>[1]</sup>. The cooperation in running schools, the exchange of international students and the cooperation in international talent exchange mentioned here have been the consistent

policies of China’s higher education since the Reform and Opening Up, while a large number of government scholarships is the important measure taken by the Chinese government to attract foreign students to study in China.

Over the past few years, the China’s education has actively responded to “the Belt and Road Initiative” and continued to follow up this initiative. It conscientiously implements the “education mission”, “cooperation vision”, “cooperation principle”, “cooperation focus” and other contents contained in the Education Action plan, from concept to principle, from mode to practice, from vision to action, are implemented and developed well. It also promotes the human civilization spirit of peaceful development, mutual cooperation, mutual benefit and win-win result, tolerance and mutual learning contained in the strategy to take root in China’s education.

Meanwhile, Education Action continues the Chinese government’s consistent practice of rewarding and supporting students from countries along the Silk Road to study in China in recent years. In Education Action, the number of scholarships for overseas students from countries along the route has exceeded 10,000 per year. It has gone beyond any stage since the founding of new China and has also gone beyond the efforts of other countries in international education, demonstrating China’s boldness and determination to education cooperation and opening up along “the Belt and Road”.

In the era of globalization, the breadth and depth of education opening directly reflects the breadth and depth of China’s overall education development and is an important way to realize education modernization. Taking universities as an example, the specific contents of expanding educational opening include strengthening international exchange and cooperation, introducing high-quality educational resources and improving the level of exchange and cooperation, all of which are highlighted in the Education Action. Education Action has become the general declaration of opening-up of China’s education in the new international and domestic situation; it can also be regarded as the specific implementation plan of the Ministry of Education for the national “the Belt and Road Initiative” in education.

## **2. MAIN MEASURES AND IMPLEMENTATION EFFECT OF EDUCATION ACTION**

On the premise of striving to establish rules, “the Belt and Road Initiative” education cooperation has already formed practical exchanges in scientific research, academic and technological achievements, and has realized the sharing of high-quality educational resources; at present, a platform for language exchange and application has been formed through language colleges, major construction and teacher training; a comprehensive and true understanding and recognition of China has been formed through conducting research on topics related to China with countries along the route and a stable education field and job market have been

formed that can be used in many fields through the exchange of academic qualifications and degree certification standards. It can be said that the latter four items are around the first item and the first item relies on the latter four items, which commonly constitute the foundation of “the Belt and Road Initiative” education cooperation.

### **2.1. Main Measures of Education Action**

The “cooperation focus” part in Education Action proposes construction measures in basic, supportive and leading measures, each with its own focus: the key word of the basic measures is interconnection, which is the focus of the cooperation focus. It emphasizes the interconnection in five aspects: education policy, education cooperation channels, language construction, popular connection and academic qualifications and degree certification standard.

The exchange of education is first and foremost the exchange of policies. For example, the exchange of educational information between them will be formed, and efforts will be made to sign or form a platform and cooperation framework for education cooperation between two parties or among many parties through specific research on the laws and policies of the countries along the route. This is actually the focus on the exchange of rules. The document proposes to “actively sign bilateral, multilateral and sub-regional framework agreements on education cooperation, formulate international conventions on education cooperation and exchange among countries along the route, and gradually unblock policy bottlenecks in education cooperation and exchange”<sup>[1]</sup> with the purpose of forming cooperation rules jointly recognized and observed by countries along the route and forming further cooperation within the framework of corresponding platforms. The content of this initiative is a major premise for education cooperation among countries along “the Belt and Road Initiative” with far-sighted significance.

The key word of supportive measures is promotion. Set up corresponding plans in promotion of overseas study, cooperation in running schools, teacher training and joint talent cultivation in the name of “the Silk Road”. In this regard, the Chinese government has shown sufficient sincerity and determination that it has attracted talents from various countries to study in China through the establishment of the “Silk Road” Chinese government scholarship to train tens of thousands of industry leaders and specialized technical talents for the countries along the route. At present, China has become the world’s largest exporter of overseas students, while the further opening-up of “the Belt and Road Initiative” has also made China a destination country for students from countries along the route.

The key word of leading measures is mechanism. Education cooperation along the Silk Road not only attaches importance to “top-down” high-level consultation and top-level design, but actively encourages cooperation and exchanges between grassroots and non-citizens. Now, the overall layout, cooperation mechanism and coordination mechanism of the Silk Road education cooperation have

been formed through bilateral or multilateral high-level humanistic exchanges and cooperation and extensive exchanges between enterprises and people. 11 cooperation organizations at different levels, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the East Asia Summit and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, mentioned in the Education Action are playing an important role. A new pattern of mutual assistance in international education has taken shape and many countries have begun to give appropriate rewards to outstanding contributors in “the Belt and Road Initiative” education cooperation and exchanges and the common development of regional education, which has achieved remarkable results.

### **2.2. Platform Construction of Education Action**

The Education Action plan not only constructs the framework, platform and rules in education exchanges, but forms the common respect and sharing of rules by all countries as well as the symbol of education community, which has formed bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanism in education between China and other countries along the route, gave full play to the advantages of international cooperation platform and expanded new connotations to education cooperation. In addition, Education Action has also made use of international forces, such as UNESCO, to make its participating countries larger than “the Belt and Road Initiative”, in which China plays a leading role. At present, international education exchange platforms, such as “China-ASEAN Education Cooperation Week”, “China-Japan-Korea College Exchange and Cooperation Promotion Association” and “China-Africa 20+20 College Cooperation Program”, have been established; in addition, Xi’an Jiaotong University, together with more than 10 domestic and foreign universities such as Zhejiang University, Tsinghua University, University of Novi Sad and Tunku Abdul Rahman University as founding members, has jointly initiated and established exchange platforms such as “the Belt and Road Initiative” International Alliance for Engineering Education. At present, China has signed mutual recognition agreements with 24 countries along the route on degree certification. In order to meet the urgent demand of interconnection of countries and regions along the route on language learning, Beijing Foreign Studies University, based on the advantage of multi-lingual features, has made precise efforts to promote language exchange, education cooperation and cultural exchange with the countries along the route. 19 languages of countries along “the Belt and Road Initiative” have been added over the past five years, comprehensive evaluation and enrollment of 22 languages of countries along “the Belt and Road Initiative” has been implemented and the “7+1” or “6+2” mode of undergraduate studies has been applied; in addition, nearly 90% of non-common language undergraduates have the opportunity to study abroad for at least one semester. Furthermore, the university deepens the reform of the postgraduate cultivation mechanism and has added “the Belt and Road Initiative” language class since 2018 to train high-quality non-common

language professionals who are familiar with the political and economic characteristics of countries along the route<sup>[2]</sup>. The “Confucius New Sinology Program” is implemented to recruit officials from countries along the “the Belt and Road Initiative”, non-governmental organizations and university presidents to study for doctoral degrees. Of the 141 special research topics released by the Ministry of Education, 70 are related to the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative with 46 countries along the route; in addition, 2,539 cooperative education projects are signed<sup>[3]</sup>, fully proving that the proposal of education community is indeed forward-looking. At present, decision makers, policy researchers and executives are committed to continuously enriching the content and form and continuously seeking new breakthroughs in the effect.

### 2.3. Implementation Effect of Education Action

It is required in Education Action that “the Belt and Road Initiative” education cooperation shall be launched in education. It not only needs unilateral action by the education sector, but also requires cooperation and joint action by the education sector and all social sectors, including the emphasis on overall planning and coordination among various departments and cities in China, the promotion of local priorities and the orderly operation of various schools in the education system, as well as the call for the participation and joint efforts of various social forces, especially non-governmental forces, with a view to the early formation of preliminary results of regional education cooperation.

At the beginning of the education action, positive results have been achieved through official investment and increased support. What is more striking is that both in

attracting students from countries along the route to study in China and in sending domestic students to study in countries along the route, the intensity shown is unprecedented. In the specific implementation process, on one hand, it is to “import” to establish Sino-foreign cooperative education projects in domestic colleges and universities. By the end of 2019, the Ministry of Education has signed memorandums of international cooperation on “the Belt and Road Initiative” education actions with 14 provinces and cities (autonomous regions) including Gansu, Yunnan, Hainan, Xinjiang, Guangxi and Heilongjiang, and 87 universities have launched Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools with universities in 8 “the Belt and Road Initiative” countries such as Singapore and Russia. On the other hand, it is to “go global” to steadily promote overseas education programs. As of 2019, Chinese universities have held 4 institutions and 98 school-running projects overseas, distributed in 14 countries and regions, most of which are along the “the Belt and Road Initiative” route<sup>[3]</sup>. The practice of initiative “introducing” and active “going global” has already formed a huge wave of intellectual resources exchange for scientific research, study, further study or training in countries along the route.

According to statistics, the number of foreign students from countries along “the Belt and Road Initiative” to China reached 317,200 in 2017 with an increase of 11.58%. In 2018, 492, 200 students came to China to study in 1, 004 institutions of higher learning among 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities (figures above exclude Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan).According to statistics by continent, Asia has the largest number of foreign students, accounting for nearly 60%, with 295,000<sup>[4]</sup>. The number and proportion of international students from different continents are shown in figure 1.

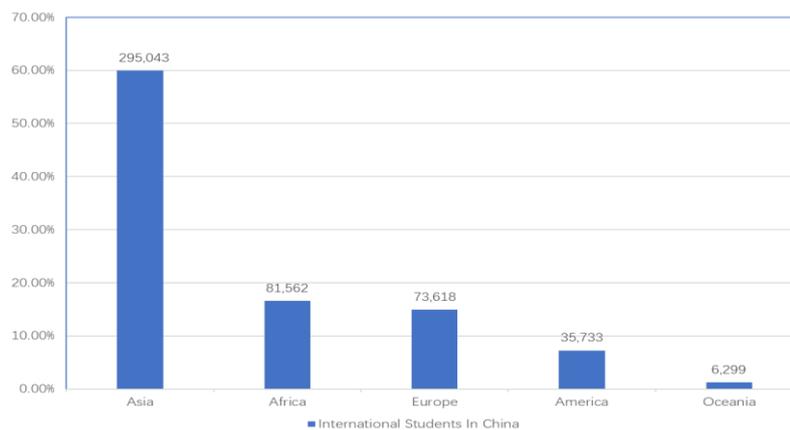
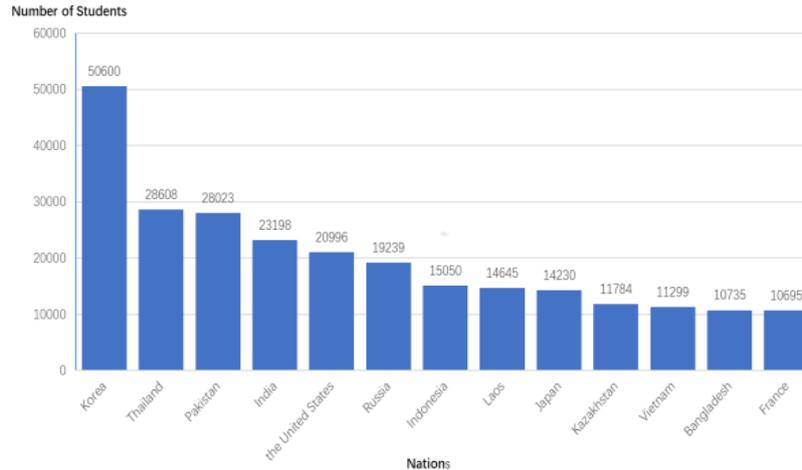


Figure 1 Statistics of the number and proportion of international students from different continents in 2018

By countries, the top six are South Korea (50,600), Thailand (28,608), Pakistan (28,023), India (23,198), the United States (20,996) and Russia (19,239)<sup>[4]</sup>. The comparative

arrangement of the number of foreign students from major countries is shown in figure 2.



**Figure 2** Comparison of the number of students from major countries in China in 2018

Among the above groups, the total number of foreign students receiving academic education is 258,122, accounting for 52.44% of the total number of international students in China, among which, 25,618 are doctoral students and 59,444 are master students. The number of students receiving Chinese government scholarships reached 63,041, or 12.81 percent of the total number of students visiting to China<sup>[4]</sup>.

### 3. MAIN PROBLEMS AND RESPONSE PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION ACTION PLAN

Although “the Belt and Road Initiative” education cooperation has achieved certain results, due to various difficulties, factors and conditions, there are still some problems in the implementation process. It is needed to make a careful analysis and take more measures to solve the problem together.

#### 3.1. The contradiction between education needs and resource capacity needs to be solved

The construction of “the Belt and Road Initiative” education needs to face up to itself. We must see that there are still many problems in education fairness, resource balance, education structure and financial distribution in China. For example, children from backward areas in the central and western regions change their personal fate by taking exams, but they often do not choose to return to their hometown after graduating from college; therefore, the changes in personal development have not brought about the overall changes in the central and western regions, but have intensified the brain drain. Although China is currently taking measures to meet the education needs of opening up and promote the education balance by increasing financial investment in the central and western regions, it will take some time to truly cultivate high-level talents, retain high-

level talents and substantially change the backward education in the central and western regions. The above problems are related to how to position “the Belt and Road Initiative”. Some scholars have criticized the western provinces for treating “the Belt and Road Initiative” as an upgraded version of “the great development of the western region” and competing for interests in the strategic map<sup>[3]</sup>. As far as education is concerned, “the Belt and Road Initiative” has indeed brought a precious opportunity for the western provinces to develop and its interest demands are quite reasonable. From the perspective of the community, the western provinces, which are adjacent to Central Asia and Southeast Asia, have natural geographical advantages in economic activities and objective advantages in ethnic composition, living customs and communication language. However, if “the Belt and Road Initiative” joint talent training focuses on artificial intelligence, big data, new energy, language exchange and other fields as predicted by some scholars, it is obvious that universities in the eastern developed regions have more advantages while there are much less opportunities for universities in the western regions to participate. The media has also reported that the provinces along “the road” are not as demanding as “the belt”, showing that there may be a contradiction between objective demand and resource capacity around “the Belt and Road Initiative”: those who have demand have neither resources nor capacity; those who have resources and abilities may not necessarily have that great demand. This requires the state to give appropriate resources and policies while affirming the bridgehead role of the western region, which also implies complicated issues such as how to evaluate “the Belt and Road Initiative” education cooperation construction and how to coordinate short-term benefits and long-term development.

Take non-common languages as an example. Of the eight professional foreign studies colleges and universities in China, there are 94 languages in Beijing Foreign Studies University while there are only generally about 20 in other foreign studies colleges and universities<sup>[4]</sup>. There is still such a big gap among professional foreign studies colleges

and universities, let alone the obvious lack of language teaching and training ability in western colleges and universities with limited overall level. Comparatively speaking, western universities need more support from relevant professional and language talents. While supporting the education development of countries along the Silk Road, it is also needed to invest more resources to western universities. It is reasonable that universities in the eastern developed regions seek overseas education and cooperative training, but the winner-take-all situation must not occur, which will only further worsen the overall structure of Chinese education.

### ***3.2. The enthusiasm of guiding non-governmental participation in education community needs to be improved***

It is very rare that Education Action compares government guidance with non-governmental subjects in the four basic principles of “the Belt and Road Initiative” education cooperation, showing that the Ministry of Education has realized that in addition to top-level design, “the Belt and Road Initiative” education cooperation requires multi-level social participation. Without the participation of the backbone of society, no matter how good the idea is, it can only be idle dream. The non-governmental power should be pluralistic, including both the educational power within the system and the educational power outside the system. Since “the Belt and Road Initiative” is advocated by the Chinese government with a clear national background, educational subjects within the system can naturally participate in it, but the problem is whether and how do educational subjects outside of the system participate? Among them, there are vocational education, non-academic education and various kinds of training that are very dynamic in the society which should be given enough policy space and rule space to realize their potential. It should be noted that for foreign students, they may not attach as much importance to degree certificates as Chinese students do; instead, China’s delicious food, beautiful scenery and social life may be more attractive to them than China’s academic qualifications. A large number of foreign students come to China with the relaxed attitude. Therefore, compared with degree education, which takes several years, short-term education or training with short time and quick results may have more advantages. It is shown in data released by the Ministry of Education that there are 162,700 private education schools in China and 99,000 vocational and technical training institutions nationwide<sup>[5]</sup>. If this part of education is more open to the outside world, what a broad market prospect it will have.

The problem is that in the past, the share of such education lacks the opportunity to apply for projects at the national level, of course, the awareness of participation in this area is lacked. Are the relevant departments preparing enough policy space and rule space to guide them? Fortunately, some schools have begun to make bold attempts. For example, Xi’an Jiaotong University leads the formation of

the Silk Road University Alliance; Ningxia hosts China-Arab States University Presidents Forum to jointly build the Arab Research Institute; Yunnan University establishes China-ASEAN Language Training Center. In addition, Thailand’s “Luban Workshop” is established in Thailand’s Ayutthaya Institute of Technology and Britain’s “Luban Workshop” is officially established in Britain’s University of Chichester. The “Luban Workshop” adopts three construction modes of inter-school cooperation, school-enterprise cooperation and government-relying cooperation. It focuses on technical skills training for local employees and integrates humanistic exchanges to effectively promotes the path and method for Chinese vocational education to “go global”, gradually build a good image of Chinese vocational education and become an international brand of Chinese education. Moreover, Confucius Institute is just like another beautiful business card of Chinese education, which plays a vital role in promoting common feelings and strengthening cultural exchanges. It is shown in the data from the Ministry of Education that by the end of 2018, China has set up 140 Confucius Institutes and 135 Confucius Classrooms in 52 countries along “the Belt and Road Initiative” route. All these achievements not only show the standpoint of the Ministry of Education, but also conform to the social voice and market demand. It can be said that Education Action plan has given all kinds of education and training institutions real “subject” space.

### ***3.3. Internal coordination promoting participation subject must be strengthened***

The importance of Education Action lies in coordinating how the national departments participate in “the Belt and Road Initiative” education project as a whole. At the level of educational units, there is also an embarrassment in internal coordination. Only from the perspective of colleges and universities, it is often the decision makers who are more inclined to seize opportunities and actively participate while thinking of resource projects and public praise. However, it is difficult for middle-level managers and grassroots executives to have sufficient human resources, energy and time to avoid that they are unable to do what they want. Many questions can be discussed. The first one is the form of participation, is scientific research communication conducted around the main area of “the Belt and Road Initiative”, or is cultivation of related talents the main objective, or is language training only provided? The problem is that there is a gap between the single level and the height required by “the Belt and Road Initiative”. The second one is what kind of departments will be arranged by universities to participate mainly? If scientific research institutes and departments are the main participants, and according to the opinions of many scholars, it is necessary to train compound talents with both professional knowledge and language knowledge, then a major structural adjustment is bound to be made in the talent training scheme, which is likely to conflict with the original training scheme, let alone the early stage of language learning requires a lot of time

and effort. Some scholars hold the opinion that more elective courses in non-common languages in colleges and universities can solve this problem, which is totally irresponsible. If departments in charge of foreign affairs in colleges and universities take the lead in participation, in fact, these departments are busy with the foreign exchange and foreign affairs reception, so they cannot guarantee the quality and efficiency of new tasks. Even in universities with all five organs, other levels of educational institutions and private educational institutions may have greater difficulties in organizational system. Therefore, it is necessary to establish an internal coordination mechanism for each participating subject in the top-level design, set up specialized coordination agencies and increase staff to coordinate each participating subject. The smooth operation of Education Action can be ensured and sound achievements can be achieved through sound mechanisms and institutions.

#### **4. COUNTERMEASURES AND SUGGESTIONS ON CONTINUOUS PROMOTION OF EDUCATION ACTION PLAN**

The problems existing in the construction of “the Belt and Road Initiative” education cooperation need to be solved by various parties through multiple ways. One of the countermeasures is to strengthen the think tank education research and comparative education research. They are different in the research object, research method and whether to make value judgment. The former should be accomplished by multi-component think tank analysts and critics, while the latter depends on scholars and academic groups in universities and research institutes.

##### ***4.1. Think tank education research***

In western countries, a representative definition of think tanks is: “think tanks are organizations that carry out policy-oriented research analysis and provide consulting services to promote decision makers and the public to make decisions on public policy issues on the premise of fully understanding the situation”<sup>[5]</sup>. In the United States, think tanks include the following categories: officially established policy research institutions, government contractual policy research institutions, independent policy research institutions and lobbying and marketing policy research institutions. One of the research characteristics of American think tanks is: “emphasis on their own characteristics with strong professionalism and emphasis on the practicality of research results instead of pure theoretical research”<sup>[7]</sup>. In contrast, the British think tank has a wide range of researchers, and the think tank “has a good relationship with the government, universities and enterprises to keep the fresh vitality of the think tank”<sup>[7]</sup>. Relatively speaking, the American think tanks are more independent while British think tanks are more prominent in serving the government.

Currently, Chinese think tanks are closer to British think tanks.

“The Belt and Road Initiative” links all social sectors with strategic significance for China’s future development and it has also received high attention and participation from domestic think tanks; however, it must be admitted that main research areas of Chinese think tanks are economy, international politics and diplomacy while the role in the opening up and cooperation of education is still unclear.

Ge Jianxiong, the famous scholar, reminds the world from a historical point of view that China has not yet been benefited from the Silk Road and maritime trade; therefore, China shall not make invalid output any more in “the Belt and Road Initiative” to be built today<sup>[8]</sup>. Therefore, China’s “the Belt and Road Initiative” education strategy also requires corresponding educational think tank to dedicate its wisdom and strength. It is not advisable to make meaningless efforts. On the other hand, there are few domestic think tanks on researching education and only the 21st Century Institute of Higher Education, chaired by Yang Dongping, has a certain social impact; therefore, China’s educational think tanks may have difficulties and shortages in resources. Similarly, it is not necessary to limit resources of think tanks to domestic think tanks; instead, the relative independence of international think tanks can also provide necessary policy analysis and risk estimation for all kinds of domestic educational entities to participate in “the Belt and Road Initiative”. Those international think tanks can be used as long as they can provide effective policy suggestions and make multiple voices representing public interests and relevant stakeholders.

The problem of internal coordination of “the Belt and Road Initiative” education participation subjects mentioned earlier is also related to the lack of think tank research. Inadequate evaluation of effective educational decisions, or lack of multi-interest demands and multi-voice considerations, can easily lead to the disconnection of decision-making and implementation that policymakers blindly push the project to start without considering the actual situation and the executor lacks a high vision who is satisfied with completing the general work without finding out the value and significance of actively participating in “the Belt and Road Initiative” education strategy. In general, in Chinese universities, it is hard to imagine that schools and departments with the nature of think tanks are willing to stand on the so-called independent stand and make judgments different from the decision-makers in the university; however, once the decision makers make wrong judgement, it is easy to cause waste of resources; therefore, the author suggests that think tank research should consider to adopt the way of different subjects. If a university participates in “the Belt and Road Initiative” education project, it must be estimated and evaluated by a think tank or quasi-think tank composed of personnel from other universities or departments. Western universities participating in “the Belt and Road Initiative” can entrust eastern think tanks to carry out evaluation, and vice versa. In a word, the same university cannot be both a project demonstrator and a participant. It should accommodate as many perspectives and voices as possible through system

design and market rules. At the same time, it is also needed to establish corresponding evaluation mechanism and accountability mechanism.

#### **4.2. Comparative education research**

The value of basic research and theoretical research lies in providing theoretical basis for policy and countermeasure research. If think tanks do not conduct purely theoretical educational research, then such research should be done by educational researchers and educational academic groups engaged in basic research. Since the launch of “the Belt and Road Initiative” education strategy, universities have undoubtedly been the most sensitive educational institutions in China. However, in order to cater to the will of the country, research institutes in many colleges and universities have changed their appearance and become think tanks by putting up a sign. This is not only the disrespect to think tank work, but also an injury to pure academic research.

What needs to be made clear is that the think tank research on education cooperation needs to evaluate the public education policies and estimate the risks of education opening-up. Its action time is relatively short, and it needs to give clear value judgment on specific education behaviors. On the other hand, the academic research around international education focuses on summarizing laws in the specific practice of international educational exchange and cooperation. On the premise of trans-cultures and even trans-civilizations, the academic research can learn from each other and learn from each other’s strong points to offset their weaknesses. Its function takes a longer time to manifest and it is relatively neutral in its value standpoint. The latter is called comparative education research and is an organic part of education research. Even when discussing domestic education, it is needed to adopt a comparative education attitude, so that “we can truly understand our education, explore the laws of educational development and serve the educational development of our country”<sup>[9]</sup>.

Think tank research and comparative education research are closely linked. If the research on educational exchanges and cooperation among countries along “the Belt and Road Initiative” route is a tree, the think tank research is the trunk and leaf, while the comparative education research is root. Only when the root is deeply rooted can the tree flourish. If there is no good comparative education research and no systematic and scientific in-depth understanding of the education situation in the countries along the route, there will be no high-quality think tank assessment and prediction. Therefore, only by strengthening comparative education research, allowing basic research to pay less attention to benefits and base more on the long term, can we truly respect the laws of education and truly serve “the Belt and Road Initiative” education strategy.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The paper is based on the policy backgrounds, main contents and service strategies of Educational Action to clarify the responsibilities and goals of the international cooperation of education, analyze the major measures and implementation effects of Educational Action, propose the main issues and countermeasures, and elaborate on the countermeasures and suggestions for the continued implementations of Educational Action. As an important channel of China’s active involvement in “the Belt and Road Initiative”, Educational Action marks a symbol of China’s deepening reform and further opening-up of higher education. As of now, Educational Action still faces issues of indistinct responsibilities of educational cooperation platform, less active participants, and ineffective internal coordination, etc. One of the future solutions lies in the further studies of think tank and comparative education.

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