

# The Characteristics, Bottlenecks and Countermeasures of the Development of International Students' Education in Yunnan Province

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## ABSTRACT

The development of international students' education in Yunnan is an important part of the opening up and development of border areas and it is a bridge to promote the cultural integration and people's heart communication between China and border countries (regions). The demand of Yunnan's development and opening-up, the development of Yunnan's geographical advantages, and the practical needs of Yunnan's higher education development jointly promote the development of international students' education in Yunnan. The international students' education in Yunnan has formed its unique characteristics in terms of school running scale, source country, specialty setting and education fund structure. At the same time, it also faces some bottlenecks, such as the limited international school running ability of colleges and universities, slow development of international students' education in vocational colleges, the lower level of teachers and the lack of regional and functional advantages. Therefore, it is necessary to promote the capacity-building of Yunnan higher education, provide financial support for the education of international students in Yunnan, and strengthen the top-level design and institutional innovation.

**Keywords:** *International students' education in Yunnan, Development characteristics, Bottleneck, Countermeasures.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Yunnan is located in the southwest of China, bordering on Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar. It has many years of friendly communication tradition with Southeast Asian countries, and has unique geographical and cultural advantages in developing international students' education. Since 2011, Yunnan launched the Study-in-Yunnan Program, and the scale of international students in Colleges and universities in Yunnan Province has been expanding. In recent years, the number of international students going to Yunnan for further study, especially those from Southeast Asian countries and regions, has steadily increased, from 7213 in 2011 to 19311 in 2018, an increase of nearly 1.68 times. Compared with other provinces in China, Yunnan's colleges and universities started to recruit international students late, and the education and management mechanism of international students is not mature. However, with the vigorous development of

Yunnan economy, especially relying on the policy background, Yunnan's unique geographical advantages and discipline setting characteristics will attract more and more international students to study in Yunnan. These international students have complex cultural background and diverse living habits, which makes the situation in the actual international students' management more and more complex. This paper sums up the promotion factors of the development of international students' education in Yunnan, summarizes the development characteristics of international students' education in Yunnan, analyzes the bottleneck of the development of international students' education in Yunnan, and puts forward the countermeasures to promote the sustainable development of international students' education in Yunnan.

## **2. THE PROMOTING FACTORS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EDUCATION IN YUNNAN**

### ***2.1. The Demand of Yunnan's Development and Opening Up***

Yunnan is located in Southwest of China, which is the forefront of China's opening-up and development. In March 2015, The National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce jointly issued Vision and Action of Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which designed the orientation of Yunnan's open development. The Belt and Road Initiative construction work conference was launched to promote the construction of the six international economic corridors. Yunnan has become the frontier of China's opening up and development. In May 2017, China held The Belt and Road International Cooperation Summit Forum, which put forward higher requirements for Yunnan's opening up and development. The development and opening-up policy along the border and the unique geographical advantages have expanded the progress, depth and content of Yunnan's opening-up and provided historical opportunities for it. As an important part of Yunnan's open development, the international students' education in Yunnan can not only expand the influence and competitiveness of China's education, expand the international education market, spread China's educational ideas and standards, and form China's education brand, but also promote the cultural integration and people's communication between China and the border countries (regions).

### ***2.2. Yunnan's Geographical Advantages need the Support of International Talents***

Yunnan Province, with its unique geographical advantages, is one of the Frontier Channels and the most dynamic border provinces for China's opening up to five major regions including South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, southern Europe and Africa. In order to give full play to the geographical advantages of Yunnan Province and promote the mutually beneficial cooperation between Yunnan Province and its neighboring countries, the National Development and Reform Commission issued the policies and measures to support Yunnan Province to speed up the construction of radiation center for South and Southeast Asia, vigorously supported the cooperation in education, science, technology, culture and medical treatment, and stressed that Yunnan Province should play a leading role in the Lancang-Mekong cooperation mechanism and the Greater Mekong River regional economic cooperation mechanism. The geographical advantages

of Yunnan Province have brought unique development opportunities for the local economic and social development, but also put forward urgent requirements for the cultivation of international talents to support its open development. How to cultivate excellent international talents who can not only understand Chinese, but also understand professional knowledge and skills, can promote long-term good neighborly friendship between China and neighboring countries (regions), and promote the social and economic development of China and surrounding countries (regions), has become an important task for the development of higher education in Yunnan Province. Therefore, Yunnan Province has brought international students' education into the development and opening-up strategy along the border, encouraged the universities of Yunnan Province to carry out international students' education in combination with the discipline advantages of their own and the development needs of economic and trade exchanges between Yunnan Province and neighboring countries (regions), and further expand the cooperation fields, excavate more cultural ties and cultural ties between Yunnan and neighboring countries (regions), so as to build a community of interests and shared destiny of China and its neighboring countries.

### ***2.3. The Practical needs of the Development of Higher Education in Yunnan Province***

According to the statistics of education in different regions in 2020 released by the Ministry of Education, the number of ordinary colleges and universities and adult colleges in Yunnan Province is less than the national average. The number of teaching staff and full-time teachers are lower than the national average, full-time teachers with doctor's degree account for 16% of the total number of full-time teachers in Colleges and universities, which is 11.1 percentage points lower than that in colleges and universities in China. The number of full-time teachers with master's degree or above accounted for 53.11% of the total number of full-time teachers in colleges and universities, which was 10.64 percentage points lower than that of full-time teachers with master's and doctor's degrees (63.75%). Compared with the national average level, the development scale of colleges and universities in Yunnan Province is relatively low, with more emphasis on teaching, less attention on scientific research and direct service to the society, and the professional and technical level, ability and education background of full-time teachers still need to be strengthened. How to flatten and surpass the existing gap and realize leapfrog development has become a practical problem that Yunnan higher education needs to strive to break through. On the one hand, Yunnan Province should strengthen the strategic cooperation and co construction between local universities and domestic high-level universities; on the other hand, it should actively seek the development path

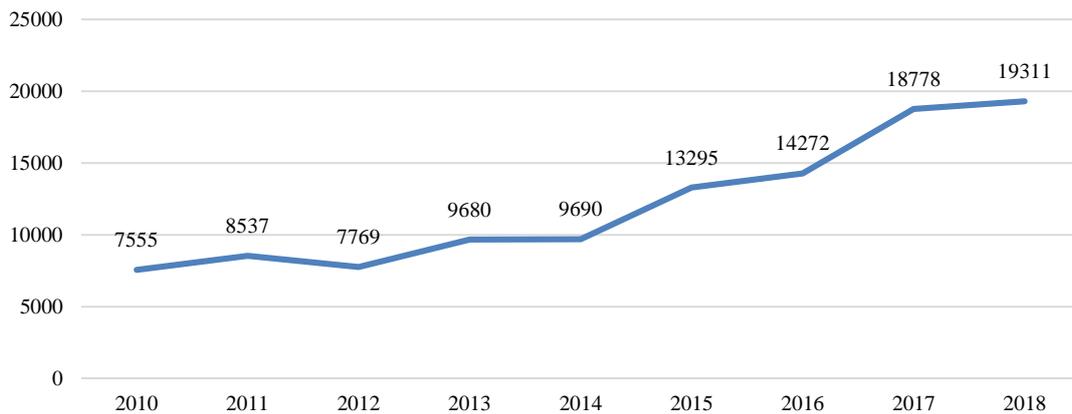
of attraction by taking advantage of geographical advantages to promote the construction of higher education capacity. From 2011 to 2015, the provincial finance coordinated the development of higher education with a special fund of 172.05 million yuan to support international educational exchange. The International students' education is an important way for Yunnan Province to build a radiation center of higher education in South and Southeast Asia. It is also an important starting point for Yunnan Province to build a strong province of higher education and realize the modernization of education.

### 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EDUCATION IN YUNNAN PROVINCE

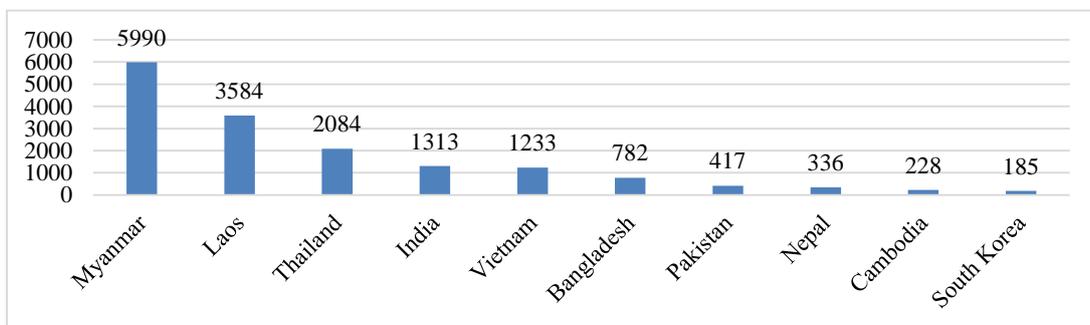
#### 3.1. Characteristics of School Scale

The international students' education in Yunnan Province is in the forefront of the country in terms of quantity, and colleges and universities are the main

body of the education. Nearly 70 universities in Yunnan Province have carried out educational exchanges and cooperation with South and Southeast Asian countries, and have established educational cooperation relations with more than 50 countries, regions and educational organizations. Since the first batch of international student enrollment qualifications were announced in 1997, as of the end of 2019, there are 59 universities and schools in Yunnan University, including Yunnan University, which have the qualification to recruit foreign students, and have carried out the teaching work of international students enrollment in China. Among them, there are 29 undergraduate universities, 19 junior colleges and 11 private language training schools. Taking the past decade as an example, after many years of development, the number of overseas students increased from 7555 in 2010 to 19311 in 2018. The data shows that international students' education in Colleges and universities in Yunnan Province is high-speed and stable, sustained and healthy, and the scale of international students is gradually expanding. The specific data are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Number of international students in Yunnan from 2010 to 2018. Data source: According to the statistics of international students published by the Ministry of Education



**Figure 2** The top ten international students' countries of origin in Yunnan in 2018. Data source: According to the statistics of international students published by the Ministry of Education

### ***3.2. Distribution of International Students' Countries of Origin***

The Belt and Road initiative is actively applied to the development of foreign students' Education in Yunnan's universities. According to national statistics, in 2018, foreign students in Yunnan Province came from 148 countries around the world, and the top 10 countries were: 5990 from Myanmar, 3584 from Laos, 2084 from Thailand, 1313 from India, 1233 from Vietnam, 782 from Bangladesh, 417 from Pakistan, 336 from Nepal, 228 from Cambodia and 185 from South Korea. Students from South and Southeast Asian countries account for 85% of the total number of overseas students. Because of its similar geographical advantages with South and Southeast Asia, Yunnan has gradually become one of the preferred destinations for overseas students in South and Southeast Asian countries. With the promotion of the Belt and Road initiative, Yunnan will further develop its advantages and the enrollment scale will increase year by year.

### ***3.3. Characteristics of Disciplines and Specialties***

At present, 59 colleges and universities in Yunnan accept international students in 11 first-level disciplines, including engineering, management, economics, art and design, and language, etc. The distribution of disciplines shows that international students in Yunnan have a wide choice of majors, with engineering and language being the most popular, followed by management and economics. To a certain extent, it shows that the international students' countries of origin in Yunnan colleges and universities have a high demand for academic education in engineering and economics and management, and there is always a strong demand for non-academic education such as language training. Because the neighboring countries generally have the problems of insufficient medical education resources and high entrance threshold to medical schools, there is a shortage of medical and nursing personnel and a large employment space. The fact that Yunnan Province enjoys the geographical advantage of being adjacent to South and Southeast Asia, the superior climate, the increasing education level, the favorable study policy, the relatively low study fees and the convenient transportation conditions, which are all important factors, attracts students from South and Southeast Asia to study medicine in Yunnan.

### ***3.4. Characteristics of Educational Funding Structure***

In terms of funding sources for international students, there are a complete range of scholarships, which are funded by the Chinese government scholarship, local Chinese government scholarship,

Chinese schools scholarship, scholarship provided by Chinese government departments and Chinese enterprises, as well as are funded by foreign governments, foreign enterprises, foreign foundations, foreign schools, and inter-school exchanges. Eight colleges and universities in Yunnan Province are qualified to enroll Chinese government scholarship students: Yunnan University, Kunming University of Science and Technology, Yunnan Normal University, Kunming Medical University, Yunnan Minzu University, Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, Yunnan Agricultural University, and Dali University. 222 Chinese government scholarship students were enrolled in the 2018-2019 academic year, all of whom are doctoral and master's students. Yunnan Provincial People's Government established the provincial government scholarship in 2004 to encourage colleges and universities to recruit international students from neighboring countries to study in Yunnan. In 2018, the scholarship amounted to RMB 21 million, and 603 students were recruited to study in Yunnan, an increase of 28 students compared with 2017. In general, all funding channels have a tendency to increase year by year. It is easy to see that the proportion of international students receiving government funding in Yunnan universities is relatively high, which is mainly related to the economic development of the countries from which international students come. The action that they can receive funding from the Chinese government or their own governments largely determines whether they can study abroad. It can be said that the establishment of Yunnan government scholarships has played an active role in attracting international students from Southeast and South Asian countries.

## **4. BOTTLENECKS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EDUCATION IN YUNNAN**

### ***4.1. Limitation of Internationalized Education in Yunnan Colleges and Universities***

The cornerstone, which is healthy and sustainable development for international student education in Yunnan colleges and universities, is the higher education capacity of the region and the internationalization level of the hosting colleges and universities. As of June 2020, there are 81 colleges and universities in Yunnan, accounting for 3% of the total number in China, among which, 1 university is affiliated with the central department, 32 local undergraduate colleges and universities and 49 higher vocational (specialist) colleges and universities, accounting for 0.8%, 2.52% and 3.4% of the total number of centrally-owned colleges and universities, local undergraduate colleges and universities and higher vocational (specialist) colleges and universities in China,

respectively. There are 2 higher adult educations, accounting for 0.7% of the total number in China. Although Yunnan universities have unique advantages to carry out international student education, the scale of higher education in Yunnan is lower than the national average, while the number of international students is higher than the national average, which poses a lot of challenges for Yunnan universities to carry out international student education. In addition, the international student education in Yunnan is low and the disciplines are relatively single, which puts forward higher requirements on the internationalization of the relevant disciplines for the colleges and universities. However, some Yunnan colleges and universities do not have any short-term and long-term development plans for the specialties of international student education, and they lack scientific research on the educational needs of international students' countries of origin. As a consequence, in order to maintain the sustainable operation of international student education, some colleges and universities have to operate their international student education as language training or short-term cooperation programs, which on the one hand increases the burden of colleges and universities, and on the other hand damages the reputation of China's education.

#### ***4.2. Development Space of International Students' Education in Vocational Colleges***

With the implementation of the Belt and Road initiative and a number of policies along the border, the cultivation of technically skilled international talents has become an important breakthrough point to promote cooperation between Yunnan and neighboring countries. Therefore, there is an urgent need for Yunnan's higher vocational colleges and enterprises to "bundle" and export China's vocational skills, standards, and talent training models to countries with which Yunnan has built economic and trade relations, so as to cultivate highly skilled talents who can promote the economic and social development of Yunnan and neighboring countries. However, the potential of Yunnan vocational institutions in internationalized education has not yet been fully realized. The number of international students in Yunnan higher vocational (specialist) colleges accounts for a low proportion of the total number in Yunnan Province. So, Yunnan higher vocational (specialist) colleges should make use of their geographical advantages, strengthen the dialogue and connection with enterprises, and explore the path of joint enterprise cultivation of international students.

#### ***4.3. The Level of Teachers needs to be Improved***

Internationalized teachers are the intellectual support for the sustainable development of international

students' education. But the lack of internationalized teachers in Yunnan colleges and universities largely limits the sustainable development of their international students' education. As of June 2020, full-time teachers in Yunnan colleges and universities accounted for 73.2% of their total teaching staff, 16.01% of full-time teachers with doctoral degrees in Yunnan accounted for the total number of full-time teachers in colleges and universities in the region, and the number of full-time teachers with master's and doctoral degrees accounted for 53.15% of the total number of full-time teachers in Yunnan colleges and universities, both of which are lower than the national average ratio. Therefore, the professional skills and academic qualifications of full-time teachers in Yunnan still need to be greatly enhanced. In addition, the language of international students' education is mostly English, which requires highly comprehensive quality of teachers. Also, teachers need to have higher political quality, psychological quality, professional level and stronger intercultural communication ability. But the quantity and quality of such internationalized teachers in Yunnan universities are still far from meeting the demand of international students' education.

#### ***4.4. Inadequate Utilization of Yunnan's Regional and Functional Advantages***

Yunnan and the neighboring countries have both similarities and differences in social culture, customs, higher education vision, models, systems and quality standards. How to cultivate skilled workers and management talents who understand the management culture, professional knowledge and skills of Chinese enterprises, but can also promote the economic development of Yunnan and neighboring countries (regions) is one of the problems to be solved in international students' education in Yunnan. However, in practice, the matching degree between international students' education in Yunnan universities and the education needs of international students' own countries is not high, so as to the exchange and integration between international students' education in Yunnan and international students' own countries are not deep enough, the supply of specific talents for international students' education is limited, and the international brand influence is not strong.

### **5. STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EDUCATION IN YUNNAN PROVINCE**

China's open development policy along the border areas is gradual improvement and deepening, which both provide important development opportunities for international students' education in Yunnan. In view of this, the following aspects need to be focused on.

### ***5.1. Strengthening the Capacity Building of Higher Education in Yunnan***

International students' education in Yunnan universities is a specific form of dialogue and exchange between education in China and other countries (regions). Also, it is a complex system and an important platform to show China's educational strength. The Yunnan colleges and universities are vital in a number of ways including integrating into national and local open development strategies, giving full play to their basic and pioneering role, and vigorously developing international students' education by guidance of government. They should build quality standards and supervision system and teaching quality supervision standards for international students education in Yunnan based on guidance of the government, so as to form a perfect quality system for international students education; Also, they should join other related universities, enterprises, industry associations and research institutes to play synergistic advantages to jointly develop disciplines, majors and courses that meet the needs of talents in the countries of origin, and cultivate the internationalized talents to serve the needs of economic and social development of China and neighboring countries.

### ***5.2. Providing Financial Support for International Students' Education in Yunnan***

Due to much consumption, the education of international students requires certain financial support from the country. Firstly, it is necessary to clarify the rights and responsibilities among governments at all levels. International students' education is an important way to enhance the competitiveness of our country's higher education and build our country's education brand. Also, it has a bearing on the international image and strength of our country's educational development. So, governments at all levels incorporate international students' education into the development strategy plan, and give guidance and support for international students' education. Secondly, it is necessary to build a standardized funding system for international students' education. The government, universities and other departments related to international students' education should give pragmatic support according to the nature and structure of international students' education.

International students' education also needs colleges and universities to give full play to their autonomy in running schools and raise funds from various sources. First of all, Yunnan colleges and universities should select international students' education majors according to the national development strategy and their own advantages, and take the initiative to serve the national development strategy. In recent years, with the continuous acceleration of industrial transformation and

upgrading in Yunnan, more and more enterprises go to China's neighboring countries to develop business. So, Yunnan colleges and universities should combine their own needs and those of enterprises to run schools jointly, so that Chinese technology, Chinese equipment and Chinese standards can radiate to neighboring countries. Secondly, Yunnan colleges and universities should coordinate the use of various resources and focus on expanding the path of holding international students' education under the existing conditions. There are some ways to act: inviting relevant enterprises to participate in the formulation of talent cultivation program, curriculum development and teaching process; jointly establishing the standard management and fund use methods for international students' education with relevant enterprises, which can participate in the whole process of international students' education. Again, Yunnan universities should develop ideas, actively raise resources for international students' education, and take advantage of existing resources such as national foreign aid projects and enterprise training fully to improve the effectiveness of international students' education.

### ***5.3. Strengthening Top-level Design and Institutional Innovation***

Although Yunnan and its neighboring countries have similarities in terms of geography, language environment, cultural environment and economic development, with the reason that the development of higher education in these countries (regions) is different, it is impossible to implement a uniform model of international students' education. Therefore, this requires our country and Yunnan to combine strengthening top-level design and institutional innovation to enhance the adaptability of international students' education in Yunnan.

Firstly, fulfill the top-level design of international students' education. The sustainable development of international students' education in Yunnan largely depends on whether the colleges and universities have a good long-term strategic planning and top-level design. Yunnan has its own unique location advantages and characteristic culture, and Yunnan colleges and universities have formed different advantageous fields according to different local economic and social development. Thus, our country and Yunnan education administration departments should make a good analysis of supply and demand of both sides according to the economic and social development of China and neighboring countries. Based on the regional characteristics of Yunnan, they should guide Yunnan colleges and universities to make a good feasibility analysis of international students' education according to their own advantages and characteristics, and properly formulate international students' education plan.

Secondly, innovate moderately in institution. There are differences embodying in every Education Service for the international student and its specific cultivation mode. So, this requires to innovate moderately in institution. The education of international student in Yunnan colleges and universities has obvious regional advantages. But in order to realize the coexistence of regional and functional advantages, more flexible and integrated institution needs to be created based on the national unified plan. For example, according to the demand for international talents in the construction of trail zone, the country can give certain institution support in terms of funding, foreign exchange and immigration. Therefore, our country can provide more support for the construction of colleges and universities, and give flexible institution support for the management personnel who visit foreign countries with official purpose. Furthermore, our country should also learn from the experience practiced in international education and management to international student, and act institutional innovation in these aspects: quality assurance of international students' education, student management, teacher recruitment, academic degree awarding and certification.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Yunnan has unique geographical advantages in the international students' education especially facing South and Southeast Asian countries, but its geographical advantages need to be supported by its functional advantages. At present, Yunnan's geographical advantages are obvious, but its functional advantages are insufficient. International talents are the intellectual support of Yunnan's open development. International students' education is not only an important way to cultivate international talents, but also an important embodiment of China's educational competitiveness and influence. It is also one of the important ways for China to actively participate in global education governance and deeply participate in the formulation of international education rules, standards and evaluation system. However, this function is based on the overall development level and quality of higher education in Yunnan Province, especially needs targeted policy and financial support from the central and local governments. In addition, after many years of development, the scale of international students' education in Yunnan has been steadily expanded, the education management system has been gradually standardized, the quality of education has been

significantly improved, and the professional structure and hierarchical structure have been gradually optimized. However, compared with the developed areas in China, there is still a gap. In the future, international students' education in Yunnan needs to make up for its shortcomings, and it also needs to do more research and exploration on itself and its supporting elements.

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