

A Study of Receiving Overseas Students from South and Southeast Asian in Yunnan under the Background of “The Belt and Road” Initiative

—A Case Study of YUFE

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Abstract—In the context of “The Belt and Road” initiative, China's peaceful rise and the accelerated era of education internationalization, as the frontier of educational cooperation and education opening to the outside world, overseas study in China is an important part of achieving communication among people, cultural exchange and talent strategy. Yunnan Province, with its unique geographical advantage in South Asia and Southeast Asia, has carried out educational cooperation and exchange among all levels of overseas students in order to create an international education destination for South and Southeast Asian countries. Although we have made some achievements in the process, we still face many challenges. In this paper, the status quo of receiving overseas students from South and Southeast Asian in Yunnan is analyzed. By taking Yunnan University of Finance and Economics (referred to as “YUFE”) as an example, the problems and challenges faced by overseas students studying in Yunnan are analyzed, and corresponding countermeasures and suggestions are put forward.

Keywords—overseas study in Yunnan; International student; South and Southeast Asian; the Belt and Road Introduction

I. THE SITUATION AND BACKGROUND OF OVERSEAS STUDY IN YUNNAN

A. Policy Support

In the context of deepening overseas study in China, Yunnan Provincial Department of Education worked out Interim Measures for the Management of Foreign Students in May 2003 by drawing upon Regulations for the Admission of Foreign Students in Higher Institutions formulated by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Public Security.

After that, in July 2006, Yunnan province issued Opinions the CPC Yunnan Provincial People's Government of Yunnan Province on Speeding up the “Going out” Strategy and

Improving the Internationalization Level of Higher Education, and it clarified the guiding ideology, objectives and tasks of implementing the strategy of “going out” in colleges and universities in Yunnan [1].

According to the National Medium and Long-term Plan for Education Reform and Development(2010-2020) formulated in July 2010, we needed to expand the opening up of education, and take “The Belt and Road” Initiative as a major strategic vision to further improve the level of opening up to the outside world. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education introduced A Plan to Study in China in September 2010. Under its guidance, Yunnan Province launched the plan of overseas study in Yunnan in 2011, and regarded building international educational bases for overseas students as the most important task. In 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping visited Yunnan, and hoped that Yunnan could take the initiative to serve and integrate the national strategy, strive to build a radiation center for South and Southeast Asia, constantly strengthen the mechanism of regional cultural exchange and cooperation, and further promote the long-term and stable educational cooperation between Yunnan and South and Southeast Asian countries.

In the same year, through strengthening the studying and training of minority languages in South and Southeast Asia, Yunnan issued Suggestions on Promoting the Construction of Yunnan National University. In April 2016, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued Some Opinions on Doing a Good job in Opening up Education in the New Era. As the first programmatic policy to guide the development of China's education to the outside world since the founding of new China, it emphasized that the opening up of education to the outside world is an important part of China's reform and opening up [2]. In July 2016, the Ministry of Education issued a document of Promoting and Building the Education of “The Belt and Road”, which provided historic opportunities and challenges for

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promoting regional education opening-up, communication and integration. In June 2017, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Public Security jointly formulated Measures for the Management of the Enrollment and Training of Foreign Students in universities as the new basis for the management of the foreign students in China.

B. Current Situation

According to the study [3], the number of overseas students from colleges in Yunnan was 4,077 in 2006, and the number has increased to 11,136 in 2015, which was 2.7 times higher than that in 2006. Over the same period, the number of overseas students from South and Southeast Asia increased from 2,924 to 9,640 in Yunnan, which was 3.3 times more than that in 2006. In recent years, the number of overseas students in colleges in Yunnan has increased rapidly to a stable level. Among them, overseas students from South Asia and Southeast Asia remain the largest group, and their share has been maintained at a range of 65% to 86%. From the perspective of internationalization of higher education in China, Guangxi, Guizhou and Yunnan formed homogeneous competition for overseas students from South and Southeast Asia for higher education.

With regard to the discipline distribution, the proportion of long-term literature study (mainly Chinese) from Southeast Asian countries was as high as 62% in 2016, the proportion of short-term students studying in Yunnan for short-term Chinese learning was up to 98.5%, and the proportion of students studying medicine from South Asian countries was 86%. In addition, taking long-term students as an example, overseas students from South and Southeast Asia were mainly in economics (804 people, 12.9%), management (319 people, 5.1%), and education (150 people, 2.4%). In ten years from 2006 to 2015, the number of non-degree students rose from 2,043 to 6,118, and its number increased by 3 times, while the number of degree students rose from 880 to 5,371, and its number increased by 3 times. Thus, the growth rate of degree students was faster than that of non-degree students.

With regard to the funding sources of overseas students from South and Southeast Asian countries in 2015, the vast majority of overseas students studying in Yunnan were self-funded. Among the long-term students, the total number of self-funded students who came to study in Yunnan was 6,449, while the number of self-funded students from South and Southeast Asian countries was 5,704, accounting for 88%. In 2015, 2,106 students with all kinds of scholarships studied in Yunnan, of which the number of students from South and Southeast Asian countries reached 1,860, accounting for 88% of scholarship students. Scholarships rely mainly on the government of China, the Yunnan provincial government and enterprises, while fewer scholarships come from intercollegiate exchanges.

In summary, in recent years, the education of overseas students from South and Southeast Asia in the colleges of Yunnan province has maintained a steady development, the scale of foreign students has increased steadily, the degree

students has increased rapidly and the proportion of self-funded students was relatively high.

II. THE PROBLEMS FACED BY OVERSEAS STUDY IN YUNNAN -- TAKING YUFE AS AN EXAMPLE

A. Basic Situation

Since 1999, YUFE has been enrolling overseas students and it became the recipient of the Chinese government scholarship students in 2008. The number of foreign students in recent years is shown in the table below (Table 1). Over the years, with the growth of the number of overseas students studying in university, YUFE explored and formed a set of corresponding international student management system in practice. According to the actual development of the university and after the adjustment of several departments and the college, at present, the work pattern of unified management by overseas student education management center and the implementation of teaching and daily management by foreign students' colleges and universities is formed.

TABLE I. STATISTICS ON THE NUMBER OF OVERSEAS STUDENTS STUDYING IN YUFE FROM 2006 TO 2016

Year	Long-term students						Short-term students	Total
	PhD s	Masters	Bachelors	Senior advanced student	General advanced student	Language student		
2006	0	6	51	1	6	76	0	140
2007	0	7	128	1	0	242	5	383
2008	0	18	285	0	0	155	14	472
2009	0	40	330	0	0	122	37	529
2010	0	64	364	0	0	109	25	562
2011	0	88	373	0	4	78	118	661
2012	0	89	339	0	5	131	103	667
2013	0	81	230	0	56	97	29	493
2014	0	79	185	0	4	98	1	367
2015	0	88	131	0	55	96	7	377
2016	0	95	116	0	72	137	75	499

Yunnan is an international channel for South and Southeast Asia. Owing to the location of YUFE, most of the overseas students of YUFE mainly come from South and Southeast Asian countries. For example, in 2016, as of December 31, 2016, there were 337 overseas students studying in YUFE, of which 278 came from Asia and neighboring countries, accounting for 82.5%. Among them, 105 were from Thailand, being a majority, accounting for 31.2% of the total; 81 came from Laos, accounting for 24% of the total; 26 came from Vietnam, accounting for 7.7%, so Vietnam, Thailand and Laos were the main source countries. In addition, some students came from Kampuchea, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, etc.

Among overseas students studying in YUFE, there are a large proportion of degree students. According to the data in Table 1, degree students have become the main group of YUFE since 2008. The main reasons are as follows: first, YUFE is a university of finance and management. The practical and professional characteristics of different colleges for the needs

of society and market are obvious. In this regard, the unique advantages of the university is attractive to foreign students. Second, scholarships provided by YUFE for overseas students are mainly for degree students, and this ensures the stable source of students at YUFE. In the past few years, the number of postgraduate students has remained stable. In 2012, the number of postgraduate candidates reached 22, which was the largest number in recent years. Since 2014, the university has begun to recruit Ph.D. students. Currently, there are 4 PhD candidates. However, since 2013, the number of undergraduate students in overseas students has been decreasing due to the unitary structure of students. At present, the structure of the students in YUFE has improved, and the number of students in the university is gradually rising.

Since YUFE became the receiving university of the Chinese government scholarship in 2008, the increase in the enrollment of overseas students has been obvious and the Chinese government scholarship has become the main source of funding for students of YUFE, but compared to the scale of public expenditure, the growth of self-funded students was even greater. From 2006 to 2012, the number of overseas students at their own expense increased by 3 times. In recent years, self-funded students still maintain a relatively high proportion compared with government-supported students. This is mainly due to the advantages of the financial and management specialty of YUFE, and the rich experience accumulated in the training and teaching of Chinese. Compared with other universities in the province, the advantages of discipline are obvious, so it attracts a large number of students studying abroad at their own expense.

Over the years, YUFE has actively carried out international exchanges and cooperation and strove to expand the overseas student market. At present, it has established a solid cooperative relationship with 15 countries, and has signed bilateral cooperation agreements with many foreign educational institutions or colleges abroad. In 2016, overseas students from YUFE came from 40 countries. In addition to long-term cooperation and good cooperation with other countries such as Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, in recent years, with the acceleration and promotion of "The Belt and Road" initiative, students from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Indonesia and Mongolia have also been increasing, and the markets of Kampuchea and Burma are continuing to develop and have achieved some results. Therefore, source countries are diversified, and the potential source can be foreseen.

B. The Characteristics of the Overseas Students' Work

1) Develop overseas schools and recruit overseas students

In April 16, 2013, YUFE signed a cooperation agreement with Rangsit University (Thailand) and jointly established the "YUFE-Bangkok Business School". In December 31, 2013, YUFE-Bangkok Business School was approved by the Ministry of Education. Bangkok Business School is not only the first overseas college set up abroad by a college in Yunnan, but also the first institution of education for academic degrees opened by Chinese institution in Thailand. At present, more than 100 non-Chinese students are studying in this school.

2) Build a state-level training base and cultivate international high-end talents

In early 2014, the General Office of the Ministry of Commerce has agreed to set up a training base for foreign aid programs of the Ministry of Commerce at YUFE. This base is the fifth and the only training base of foreign aid officials in the border provinces of the country, so it has opened up an innovative mode of cooperation between universities and governments to set up research bases. The research base is mainly responsible for the Ministry of Commerce's foreign aid training program for foreign officials. Since its establishment, it has undertaken 32 training programs for foreign aid officials in the Ministry of Commerce and Yunnan Province, with more than 720 officials from more than 40 countries participating in the training program. In addition, since 2015, the base has established a master's degree education program for the project management. It aimed to recruit students from countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia and Africa and to cultivate senior business and management talents for developing countries. Up to now, there are 43 students.

3) Build a "think tank", "information bank" and "talent tank" of research in Indian Ocean region, and attract students and scholars from neighboring countries

YUFE established the Research Institute for Indian Ocean Economies (RIIO) in August 2011. In 2015, it was selected as the governing unit of the think tank cooperation alliance of "The Belt and Road" formed by the external liaison department of the CPC Central Committee. In 2017, it became the first source think tank of the Chinese think tank index (CTTI). The research institute aims at serving the strategic needs of the country and the development of the local economy, taking the construction of a new type of think tank as an opportunity to strengthen the research on the regional and country problems of the India Ocean and paying close attention to the hot issues such as geopolitics, geopolitical economy, trade and investment, traditional and non-traditional security in the region.

Since its establishment, it has produced a number of high - level and influential theoretical and practical research results, and attracted many students and scholars from surrounding countries to study and exchange.

C. The problems in the Work of Overseas study in YUFE

University is not fully aware of its roles and the atmosphere of internationalization needs to be improved

Based on the former research, it is clear that education for overseas students of "The Belt and Road" is an important pillar of the country's overall strategy [4]. In 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed in an important instruction to the National Conference on overseas study that "the work of overseas study should be adapted to the development of the country and the overall work of the party and the state." This has established a basic position for the education of overseas students in China in the new era. According to the study, "The Belt and Road" initiative is in urgent need of talents of governments and

international organizations, talents of economic and trade cooperation, talents related to the development and application of engineering technology, and talents in educational science and culture [5]. However, colleges and universities in China generally do not attach importance to the support of social forces for the education of overseas students in China. In the development of overseas students, YUFE also faces some problems. For example, the international consciousness is difficult to carry out to the grass-roots and social linkage departments, the daily and teaching management of foreign students faces problems, China has basically adopted the isolation mode or "isolated island" mode, and the space for international development has been restricted.

D. The quality of students is uneven and the teaching mechanism needs to be improved

Public opinion of China's "The Belt and Road" in the countries along the line of "The Belt and Road" is weak. The line of "The Belt and Road" covers a variety of national cultures, so they are not only places where many ethnic groups are mixed, but also places where many religions converge, so there are complex contradictions [6]. Furthermore, since the history of the training of foreign students in China is not long and there is not a set of scientific and rational evaluation system of enrollment, many colleges pay more attention to the expansion of the scale of foreign students, lower the requirements and reduce the threshold, thus forming a vicious competition among colleges. Especially, most of the educated students come from the developing countries. For a variety of reasons, the basic education level of students in these countries is not very high [4]. Besides, the choice of subjects for overseas students in China is more concentrated on Chinese language and culture, while colleges in developed countries have thousands of specialties for overseas students, so they can choose in a wide range of specialties. Moreover, the curriculum system design is unreasonable and lacks competitiveness. The opportunities for international students' practice and practice are insufficient. Teaching methods and teaching contents are lack of pertinence, etc. [6]. In China's colleges and universities, there is still a low level of internationalization in curriculum system and teaching. This is not only a weakness for the training of overseas students, but also a weakness for the training of internationalized talents in colleges [5]. YUFE is also faced with problems such as low entry threshold, lax graduation examination and imperfect teaching and teaching evaluation mechanism.

E. The total number of scholarships is small and the structure is uneven

The enthusiasm of overseas students to apply for scholarships is very high. The Chinese government scholarship only allows YUFE to have two autonomous enrollment projects: "Degree Study in Border Provinces Program" and "Cooperative Program with Provinces and Autonomous Regions". More than 100 international students apply for Chinese government scholarships every

year, but the annual enrollment quota of these two projects is only about 10 people, which cannot meet the needs of YUFE to attract excellent overseas students. In addition, provincial awards established by Yunnan province are different from the local scholarships offered by the developed countries in terms of scale and category.

III. COUNTERMEASURES AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Strengthen Top-level Design and International Awareness of the Education of Overseas Students

We should change the outdated idea that the strategy of "The Belt and Road" was incompatible with studying in China for the countries along the line, grasp the opportunity brought by Yunnan's geopolitical advantage and regard overseas education in China as a scientific planning and careful design.

First, we should strengthen top-level design at national level, develop long-term plans for the development of overseas students of "The Belt and Road", make relevant arrangements for the development of the education of overseas students from the countries along "The Belt and Road", clear the overall objectives and stage steps to clarify the responsibilities and tasks of the national ministries, local governments at all levels and colleges in the development of the education for overseas students in China, and establish a coordination mechanism [4].

Second, we should perfect the policies and regulations, the policies on visa, taking part-time job, internship, employment, medical security, and application of scientific research fund for education of overseas students in China [6].

Third, we should establish a quality evaluation system for overseas students in China, enhance their core competitiveness, formulate educational standards for overseas students in China, cultivate professional, independent and authoritative educational evaluation institutions, and strengthen the supervision of the government in education.

Fourth, we should improve the scholarship system for overseas students in China. While actively seeking financial support from our superiors, we should change the status of government scholarships at all levels, and fully mobilize the strength of colleges, enterprises and all walks of life to form a diversified and stable financial aid system for overseas students in China, such as government, colleges and enterprises. For example, we can add various special scholarships such as scholarships for countries along "The Belt and Road", ASEAN scholarships to form a variety of scholarship system for overseas study in China. In addition, we should give full play to the advantages of YUFE in finance and management, and develop advanced international management talents in finance and investment. In this respect, we can establish a special postgraduate scholarship in finance and investment for "adjacent and peripheral countries" at university level.

B. Highlight the Geographical Advantage and Build Characteristic Teaching System

The unique culture of Yunnan is inborn with the natural connection with Southeast Asia by mountains and rivers and culture as well. In order to achieve better strategic results of

"going out", universities in Yunnan must give full play to the Southeast Asian characteristics of the universities, set up a special plan for training talents in South and Southeast Asia in order to train outstanding international talents.

In addition, the preparatory education can be used as a transition and connection between foreign basic education and national higher education to improve the number and level of students who have reached the standard of higher education. At present, the educational development for the countries along "The Belt and Road" is uneven, so improving preparatory education is one of the means to make up for this shortcoming.

Furthermore, we should continue to broaden and make innovations in terms of education channels for overseas students. On the basis of existing "overseas branches" and "training bases for foreign aid program", colleges can provide orderly training for the government and enterprises, and strive to build brand professional courses in colleges of "The Belt and Road" construction according to the needs of the government and enterprises in order to make students become all-around talents who not only master the professional knowledge required in the construction of "The Belt and Road", but also understand Chinese language, culture and public opinions[7].

C. Perfect the Management Mechanism

On the basis of improving the existing service level of overseas students and improving the degree of internationalization of the management level of the campus, it is necessary to fit in with the development of colleges and gradually establish a system of "assimilation training" and "characteristic service". In terms of interdepartmental responsibility and power, we should strengthen the top-level design and coordination, and make timely adjustments and optimization according to the development and changes of colleges. In addition, we should train a group of overseas student management personnel with high quality, strong ability and excellent business skills, and this has important and practical significance for our country to continue to promote "The Belt and Road" initiative. Currently, the management team of overseas students has two main problems: First, the structure is complex and aging is serious, and the sense of professional identity and belonging is insufficient. Second, overseas student managerial personnel lack corresponding vocational training after entering the office, the path of career

promotion is not clear, and the assessment system is imperfect [7].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Overseas education in China is an important component of the soft power implemented by "The Belt and Road" Initiative. Today, with the growing global pattern of overseas study in China, colleges in Yunnan should seize the opportunity to improve the work of overseas study in Yunnan and accelerate the integration into the cause of serving the construction of "The Belt and Road".

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