



The Historical Process and Deep Influence of Sino-Thai Educational Intermingling—A Case Study on Yunnan Context

Xu Peng¹ and Li Yinsheng²

¹College of Chinese Studies, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, Bangkok, Thailand

²School of Literal Arts, Guangxi University, China

¹E-mail: 405848760@qq.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6889-6929>

²E-mail: lys31199@126.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0722-6734>

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Abstract

Background and Aims: As China's radiation center faces South and Southeast Asia and the forefront of the "the Belt and Road" construction, Yunnan's unique geographical location and rich cultural heritage provide valuable opportunities for educational exchanges between the two countries. Therefore, to further analyze the profound impact of cultural exchange between the two countries on China. This article aims to explore the future direction and possibilities of education cooperation between China and Thailand, taking Yunnan as an example. From a more comprehensive and profound perspective, it provides feasible ways to further strengthen the relationship between the two countries and deepen cooperation.

Methodology: By using the methods of historical records, policy analysis, and comparative study, this paper examines the evolution of educational exchanges between China and Thailand and its impact on the educational policies of the two countries. This paper first reviews the historical evolution of educational exchanges between China and Thailand, and analyzes the cooperation mechanism and contents of cooperation between the two countries in the field of education. Then, this paper compares the characteristics of the internationalization of higher education between China and Thailand, as well as the cooperation between the two countries in personnel training, teaching method improvement, and education quality assurance. Finally, this paper discusses the impact of Sino-Thai educational exchanges on the economic, cultural, and educational changes of the two countries, as well as the experiences and feelings of students in educational exchanges between the two countries.

Results: the educational cooperation between China and Thailand has developed from the early language and cultural exchanges to a deeper level of educational cooperation, including degree education and professional training. This paper finds that the driving force of Sino-Thai educational cooperation mainly comes from the political, economic, and cultural interdependence of the two countries, as well as the interest and curiosity of the students of the two countries. This paper also finds that the effect of Sino-Thai educational cooperation is mainly reflected in the improvement of the knowledge, skills, and literacy of the students of the two countries, as well as the enhancement of cross-cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication ability of the students of the two countries.

Conclusion: The educational exchanges between China and Thailand have not only enriched the learning experience of the students of the two countries but also promoted friendly cooperation and exchanges between the two countries in the field of education. This paper holds that the educational exchange between China and Thailand is not only an important way for cultural exchange between the two countries but also an important basis for the friendly relations between the two countries. This paper suggests that the future Sino-Thai educational cooperation model should pay more attention to the actual needs of the market and society, as well as the development of high-level cooperative education. This paper also suggests that the two countries should strengthen the supervision and evaluation of educational exchanges to ensure the quality and effectiveness of education.

Keywords: Sino-Thai Education; Historical Process; Deep Influence; Yunnan



Introduction

In the past forty years or so, in the field of education, Yunnan and Thailand have deepened their cooperation and exchanges, which not only embodies the collision and integration of academics but also further reveals the mutual understanding and respect between cultures. The journey from 1978 to 2018 shows the economic, cultural, and educational changes and advances that have taken place between this ancient oriental nation and its neighbors in Southeast Asia. This is not just a period of pure educational exchange, but an in-depth dialog across cultures and generations. In this dialog, Yunnan, with its extensive geographical and cultural background, has served as a splendid canvas to record every wonderful moment of this history. The purpose of this paper is to discuss this journey in depth, while prospecting the blueprint for future cooperation between China and Thailand, with the hope of presenting readers with a more detailed and multifaceted picture of the mingling.

Language is the key link between culture and communication, and the purpose of most Thai students studying in China is to learn Chinese. The research of Li Yue (2021) focuses on the evolution of Chinese education policy in Thailand and makes a comparative analysis with Chinese international education in China. She examined in detail the history, policy formulation, and implementation of Chinese education in Thailand, and discussed the development and reform of Chinese international education in China. Dao & Li. (2015) analyzed the characteristics of the internationalization of higher education between China and Thailand from the perspective of international cooperation. and summed up the reference to Thailand's higher education in the aspects of the localization of international cooperation in higher education, the training of talents facing the international market, and the establishment of brand awareness of international colleges and universities, to expand the international vision of China's higher education and promote its internationalization process. To meet the needs of students from both sides, both countries need to formulate appropriate language education strategies, improve teaching methods, and ensure a high quality of education according to their own actual situation. Jiang (2020), an assistant professor at Xiamen University, paid attention to the latest developments in the field of cooperation in Chinese education between China and Thailand in recent years, stressed the great potential of both sides in this area, and put forward suggestions to solve the current problems. In addition, with the rapid development of digital technology, how to use advanced educational technology to optimize language teaching has become the focus of scholars' research. Cui Yanan et al of Tsinghua University (2022) used a mixed research method to analyze the exchange and cooperation of higher education between China and Thailand. They believe that although the two countries have made a lot of progress in higher education cooperation, there is still huge room for cooperation in the fields of humanities and social sciences.

With the deepening of global economic integration and the steady growth of China's economy, the cooperation between China and other countries in the world is becoming closer and closer, especially in the field of higher education. The flow of educational resources around the world is also accelerating. This has promoted the continuous growth of the number of transnational students, international academic exchanges and cooperation programs have shown a steady growth trend, and the education of foreign students has been widely promoted and fully developed. More and more young people are attracted by the broad market prospects and high-quality employment prospects, and turn their attention to China one after another. They have a strong interest in Chinese culture and are eager to experience and learn deeply to meet their career planning, life vision, or personal enthusiasm. This trend has led to a continuous rise in the number of students studying in China, including more and more Thai students.





What they pursue is not only high-quality educational resources but also the exploration and understanding of China's profound culture and society (Fan, 2023a). This exchange has not only enriched their life experiences but also further promoted the friendly cooperation and exchanges between China and Thailand in the field of education.

The objective of this paper is to delve into the historical process and profound impact of Sino-Thai educational intermingling, with a focus on the Yunnan context. It aims to explore the economic, cultural, and educational transformations that have occurred between China and Thailand from 1978 to 2018, highlighting the academic, cultural, and generational dialogues that have shaped these changes. The scope encompasses the examination of the initial exchanges during the early years of China's Reform and Opening Up, the active expansion phase marked by policy enhancements and increased student mobility, and the deep integration phase characterized by strengthened educational cooperation. By analyzing the evolution of educational exchanges and their implications, the paper seeks to present a comprehensive and multifaceted narrative of the interplay between these two nations, ultimately prospecting future blueprints for Sino-Thai educational collaboration.

Historical Background of Sino-Thai Educational Integration

Thailand and China have a long history of friendly relations. As early as the Tang and Song dynasties, both countries carried out economic and cultural exchanges through the ancient Silk Road. In 1371 AD, the first group of foreign exchange students sent by Siam, consisting of officials, came to the Ming Dynasty, which symbolized the beginning of official educational exchanges between the two countries. They studied Chinese at the famous Guozijian Academy of the Ming Dynasty to deepen their knowledge of Chinese culture (Fan, 2023b). In the fifth year of Yongle's reign, to promote friendly exchanges and cooperation with foreign countries, the government set up the "Si Yi Pavilion" to teach foreign languages to students at the Guozijian Academy, at which time Thai teachers were invited to lecture, thus sowing the seeds of language and educational exchange between China and Thailand. According to historical records, the earliest Thais who really came to China to study should be a group of international students in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among them, Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore, and Phuket Nerun, the Prince of the Royal Family of Thailand, were outstanding figures who studied in China during this era. They chose southern China, such as Guangzhou and Fujian, to study Chinese culture and language. Their experience of studying in China not only laid the cornerstone of deep friendship between China and Thailand but also brought fresh thoughts of development and novel opportunities for both countries. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, sporadic Thai students came to China via Myanmar to pursue education, but this phenomenon was temporarily interrupted by China's Cultural Revolution and the closure of colleges and universities. In the 1960s, Princess Sirindhorn, for example, studied in China along with the descendants of other friendly country leaders, who received the kind attention of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai.





Table 1 Scale of International Students from Certain Countries Accepted by China, 1954-1965 Unit: Persons

Country/Year	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
Soviet Union	18	4	3	80	10	21	0	21	20	0	13	18
India	0	1	9	5	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pakistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	5
Thailand	0	0	1	4	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	2
Malaysia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

Source: Li Tao. (2000). History of Chinese Education Abroad: After 1949[M]. Beijing: Higher Education Press,2000:286.

In 1973, China reopened its gates welcoming foreign students to study in China. After 1975, with the establishment of formal Sino-Thai bilateral relations, educational exchanges between the two countries started moving on the fast track. With the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the threshold for educational cooperation was greatly decreased, and it became much more convenient and feasible. In addition, China's reform and opening-up policy in 1978 injected stronger dynamism into this trend, enabling greater space for cooperation and deeper interaction in educational, cultural, and social exchanges between the two countries. In this context, Yunnan Province, with its unique geographical location, rich cultural heritage, and deep historical origins, is gradually becoming an ideal choice for Thai students to study abroad.

Despite the long history of study abroad education between China and Thailand, frequent educational exchanges and cooperation intensified only after China's reform and opening up. This trend may be more pronounced, especially for Thai students coming to study in Yunnan Province. Early Sino-Thai educational exchanges do not exactly match our modern conception of study abroad, which tends to be more in the realm of legal history research. Therefore, to ensure the completeness and coherence of this research, this paper focuses on Thai students studying in Yunnan Province during the forty years from the beginning of the Reform and Opening Up to 2018. These forty years coincided with a period of profound economic and social changes in China, in which significant impacts on Thai students were observed.

The above historical data also lays the foundation for further research in the following text. This not only ensures the coherence of the article but also provides a more detailed explanation of the development of Yunnan and Thailand from multiple perspectives.

The Historical Process and Deep Influence of Thai Students in Yunnan Province

Combining Chinese economic growth, education policy reforms, the improvement of students' education level, and Yunnan's geographical and cultural advantages, the paper will discuss the journey of Thai students studying abroad in China into three main phases according to major events and period characteristics:

1. Initial germination phase (1978-1992)

Taking Chinese international educational exchange policy and the number of international students coming to China as stage-oriented, the period from the Reform and Opening up to 1992 is divided into the period of initial budding educational exchanges between China and Thailand. During this period, Reform and Opening up brought unprecedented development to Chinese international educational



exchanges. For both China and Thailand, significant growth and intensification in personnel, cultural, and educational exchanges have occurred in this period compared to the past.

1.1 Overview of Sino-Thai Educational Cooperation

In 1978, along with Chinese Reform and Opening up, the door of international exchange was reopened, bringing new opportunities for international student education. At that time, due to political and economic considerations, the national focus was more on sending foreign students abroad to learn advanced experiences from other countries and support foreign policy at the same time. China and Thailand also signed an agreement to send international students mutually, and the establishment of international student exchanges with other countries became an important symbol of Reform and Opening up. Between 1978 and 1979, China sent a large number of international students to 33 countries, mainly to Western developed countries, to study natural sciences, engineering and technology, etc. Within just two years, the number of international students sent has grown significantly, which positively impacts both at home and abroad.

In the early 1980s, foreign students gradually came to Yunnan to study Chinese, and during this period, a few colleges and universities, such as Yunnan University and Yunnan Minzu University, were pioneers in opening their doors to foreign students. At that time, these universities did not set up special management departments for foreign students, instead, they were managed and handled by the "Foreign Affairs Offices" of their respective universities. To ensure the quality of education, these schools assigned teachers who specialized in standard Mandarin to teach Chinese language courses, known collectively as "Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language". In 1982, Yunnan University, Yunnan Minzu College, Yunnan College of Chinese Medicine, and Kunming College of Technology accepted 241 foreign students in total. In 1989, the Ministry of Education adjusted the policy of approving international students, giving provinces and even universities the right to decide the number of international students on their own, which greatly promoted the recruitment of Thai students in Yunnan. In 1990, Yunnan University took the lead in establishing the "Center for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language", which focused on the teaching and management of Chinese for international students and became the first management organization for international students in Yunnan.

1.2 Sino-Thai Student Exchange Based on Government Agreement

After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Thailand on July 1, 1975, both countries began to cooperate more closely at various levels. In the field of education, with the signing of the "Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand" by China and Thailand in 1978, the two countries began official student exchange and cooperation. This was not only based on governmental guidance but also benefited from Thailand's increasing emphasis on Chinese education.

The data in Table 2 show that the number of Thai students going to China has been increasing yearly since 1981, which is mainly attributed to the educational diplomacy strategy and the principle of equal treatment based on intergovernmental agreements between China and Thailand. Especially in the 1980s, the Thai government supported its remote area students to study in Yunnan, China, in which Kunming University of Science and Technology, Yunnan Normal University, and Kunming Medical College served as the main receiving universities, cultivating a large number of talents in engineering, medicine, and Chinese. At the same time, Thailand has set up Chinese lessons in areas neighboring China and subsidized students to learn Chinese as well as Chinese culture to prepare them for further studies or work in China in the future.



Table 2 Scale of international students from five countries along the "One Belt and One Road" within the National Education Commission's program, 1978-1992 Unit: persons

Year / Country	Soviet Union/Russia	India	Pakistan	Thailand	Malaysia
1978	0	2	7	0	0
1979	0	1	7	0	0
1980	0	2	5	0	0
1981	0	0	11	12	0
1982	0	6	10	11	1
1983	10	5	13	8	0
1984	69	5	13	13	0
1985	124	1	8	11	0
1986	157	9	15	2	0
1987	163	0	9	16	0
1988	259	2	9	5	0
1989	309	11	23	7	0
1990	256	11	18	6	0
1991	226	3	7	7	0
1992	129	15	15	8	0
Total	1702	73	170	106	1

Source: Li Tao. (2000). History of Chinese Education Abroad: After 1949[M]. Beijing: Higher Education Press,2000:286.

In the early 1990s, China enhanced its international student exchanges with Thailand. In March 1990, the State Education Commission of China issued an official notification of its plan to send postgraduate students to the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Thailand for master's degrees, beginning in 1991, using scholarship opportunities offered by the AIT. According to this notification, the State Education Commission requested the education departments, including Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Hunan, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Regions, to recommend 15-20 qualified candidates to participate in this graduate program. These candidates should be professionals who have already graduated from universities and have worked for at least two years. To ensure the effectiveness of this group of students in Thailand, the Shanghai College of Foreign Languages has set up a special English test for cultivation and selection. On the whole, it seems that this phase of Sino-Thai educational exchange not only strengthens academic cooperation but also consolidates the humanistic exchanges and deep friendship between the two countries, laying a solid foundation for future cooperation in many fields.

1.3 Features of Yunnan-Thai Education Cooperation

The total number of international students in Yunnan at this stage is not large, but it shows a gradually rising trend. For example, the number of international students at Yunnan College of Nationalities has increased from zero to more than 400 in 14 years, and the number of international students at Yunnan University is also increasing annually. The majority of Thai international students are self-funded students on short-term, non-degree programs, with the main goal of learning Chinese, especially elementary listening, reading, and writing skills. This is different from the modern academic



education model, which favors non-systematic learning to meet specific demands. In response to the needs of Thai students, Yunnan's higher education institutions offer a variety of short and long Chinese language courses with content tailored to students at different levels. For example, Yunnan University offers a variety of short-term and long-term courses in Chinese language and culture, while Yunnan Minzu College offers beginner, intermediate, and advanced classes according to the student's level of Chinese proficiency. Taking into account the special requirements and differences of students, many of these programs implemented small class sizes or even one-on-one teaching modes to ensure the effectiveness of the teaching. The promotion of the HSK in 1990 had a far-reaching influence at this stage, providing Thai students with official certification of their Chinese language proficiency, and at the same time facilitating the improvement of the quality and standards of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Yunnan colleges and universities. Overall, Yunnan-Thai education and cooperation in the budding period was dominated by Chinese language learning, with short-term, non-academic programs. The promotion of HSK provided international students with clearer learning goals and motivation, further strengthening Thai students' motivation to study Chinese in China.

2. Active Expansion Phase (1993-2009)

Since 1993, the Chinese government has issued a series of education policies and regulations successively, all of these policies have emphasized the importance of education internalization in different aspects, which has created a favorable policy environment for Sino-Thai education cooperation.

2.1 Overview of Thailand International Student Development in China

In the 21st century, cooperation and exchanges between China and Thailand in the field of education have become more active than ever before. Cooperation and exchanges took place at various levels, from centralized policy promotion and local strategic response to bilateral cooperation agreements and educational exchange practices in actual practice.

In 1993, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the "Outline of China's Educational Reform and Development", indicating the strategic role of education in international competition in the 21st century, and gradually carried out international educational exchange and cooperation. 1997, the "China Higher Education Law" was enacted and implemented, which systematically stipulated, for the first time, the principles of higher education, establishment and management of schools, student rights and interests, etc. It provided a legal basis for international cooperation and exchange. In 1999, China and Thailand signed the "Joint Declaration of the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Thailand on the Twenty-first Century Cooperation Program" in Bangkok, which laid a solid foundation for cooperation and exchanges between the two countries in many fields. 2000, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued the "Regulations on the Administration of Acceptance of Foreign Students by Institutions of Higher Learning", which established a more complete set of rules and regulations on the acceptance of foreign students by institutions of higher learning. In 2001, "Regulations on the Work of Bachelor's Degrees in Full-time Ordinary Institutions of Higher Education" was promulgated to further regulate the awarding of bachelor's degrees in higher education and provide further details on the awarding of degrees to foreign students. 2002, the two governments reached the "Agreement on Educational Cooperation between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand", which established the direction of cooperation between the two countries in the field of education. In 2002, the two governments reached the "Agreement on Educational Cooperation between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the



Government of the Kingdom of Thailand", which established the direction and focus of cooperation between the two sides in the field of education. In 2006, the "Outline of the Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2006-2020)" was implemented, which guided the medium and long-term development planning of education in China, and explicitly mentioned the need to strengthen international exchanges and cooperation, to improve the level of internationalization of education. The pattern of opening up Chinese education to the outside world basically took shape during this period. The signing of the Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Academic Degrees between China and Thailand in 2007 was an important milestone in China-Thailand educational cooperation. It not only provides legal and international protection for the academic degrees obtained by Thai students in China but also further deepens the academic exchanges and cooperation between the two countries. In terms of foreign education practices. From the data in Table 3, it can be seen that between 2000 and 2009, this trend is particularly obvious, with the number of Thai students studying in China showing a nearly 17-fold increase, from 667 in 2000 to 11,379 in 2009. In 2007, Thailand became one of the top five countries to study in China. Compared with Germany and France in Europe, the increase in the number of international students from Thailand and other Asian countries such as India is significant. This not only reflects the strong interest of Thai students in Chinese education and culture but also reflects the profound changes in the distribution pattern of international students' source countries since the Reform and Opening Up.

Table 3 Scale of International Students Studying in China from Five Countries Along the "One Belt and One Road" from 2000 to 2009 Unit: persons

Country/Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Russia	703	1056	1492	1224	2288	3535	5035	7261	8939	10596
Thailand	667	860	1737	1554	2371	3594	5522	5494	8476	11379
India	54	45	68	132	765	3295	5634	7190	8145	8468
Pakistan	314	344	439	598	894	1900	3308	4125	5666	5738
Malaysia	490	632	840	841	1241	1589	1743	1908	2114	1990

Source: Based on "Concise Statistics on Study in China" published by the Department of International Cooperation and Exchanges of the Ministry of Education.¹

Notably, Thai students' structure of studying in China has also changed significantly during this period. According to the data on the change in the structure of Thai academic and non-academic students from 2001 to 2009 in Table 4, the majority of Thai students came to China mainly for non-academic education, such as short-term Chinese language study. For example, in 2009, although the total number of Thai students studying in China exceeded 10,000, academic students accounted for only 28.3% of the total. This phenomenon reflects the huge demand for Chinese language education in Thailand. With the Thai government's positive attitude towards Chinese language education and the continuous rise of "Chinese language fever", Thai educational institutions from elementary schools to

¹ Refer to the Department of International Cooperation and Exchanges of the Ministry of Education: Concise Statistics on Study in China, website of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, <http://so.moe.gov.cn/s?siteCode=bm05000001&tab=all&qt=%E6%9D%A5%E5%8D%8E%E7%95%99%E5%AD%A6%E7%AE%80%E6%98%8E%E7%BB%9F%E8%AE%A1>, Accessed on August 10, 2023.



universities have started to offer Chinese language courses. In addition, the sharp increase in the number of Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand has made Chinese-speaking tour guides a popular profession in Thailand, which has also attracted a large number of Thai students to go to China for short-term Chinese language learning.

Table 4 Structural changes in Thai academic and non-academic students, 2001-2009 Unit: persons

Type/Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Academic Student	162	177	199	357	693	1344	1812	2348	3217
Non-academic Student	698	1560	1355	2014	2901	4178	5494	6128	8162
Total	860	1737	1554	2371	3594	5522	7306	8476	11379
Percentage of academic student	18.8%	10.2%	12.8%	15.1%	19.3%	24.3%	24.8%	27.7%	28.3%

Source: Based on "Concise Statistics on Studying in China" published by the Department of International Cooperation and Exchanges, Ministry of Education.

2.2 Policy Responses and Practices in Yunnan

2.2.1 Response Strategies of Yunnan Province

The government of Yunnan Province has gradually formulated local regulations and measures corresponding to the national policies, aiming to strengthen educational exchange with neighboring countries such as Thailand. In 2006 and 2008, for the internationalization of higher education and the internationalization of education in Yunnan, Yunnan Province successively issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Implementation of the "Going Global" Strategy by Higher Education Institutions to Improve the Internationalization of Higher Education" and the "Implementing Opinions on Accelerating the Internationalization of Education in Yunnan". The introduction of these policies indicates a major shift in the foreign education business of Chinese education in Yunnan from "Bringing in students" to "Going out" of colleges and universities, which not only points out the direction of the policy but also supports and encourages the colleges and universities to carry out foreign educational exchange and academic cooperation in the field of higher education in terms of funding. The program not only indicates the direction in terms of policy but also financially supports and encourages universities to carry out foreign higher education exchanges and academic cooperation.

2.2.2 Practice of Internationalized Education in Yunnan

In 2001, the Chinese Education Ministry and the National Office of Chinese Language selected 10 institutions of higher education to focus on teaching Chinese to neighboring countries. Among these 10 institutions, Yunnan Province has two outstanding representatives: Yunnan University and Yunnan Normal University. To this end, Yunnan Normal University reorganized its Chinese Culture Training Center for Chinese as a Foreign Language on November 19, 2001, and upgraded it to a School of International Languages and Cultures. In the following years, Yunnan's higher education institutions continued to enhance their efforts to teach Chinese as a foreign language, and in 2005, Yunnan University upgraded its International Academic and Educational Exchange Center to an International Students College, which focuses on international Chinese language education. In the following years, Honghe College, Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, and Kunming University of Science and Technology established international colleges or specialized international student education



departments to cope with the increasing number of foreign students. By 2009, 16 universities in Yunnan Province could accommodate foreign students. It is worth mentioning that Yunnan Normal University has become the first in Southwest China and the 20th teacher training base for the international promotion of the Chinese language in the country, making great contributions to attracting international students to Yunnan.

Under this background, academic interactions between Yunnan and Thailand have begun to be frequent. In 2006, Yunnan Normal University (YNU) joined hands with Chiang Mai University (CMU) to establish the Confucius Institute at CMU, which not only serves the Chinese language teaching in Northern Thailand but also promotes the popularization of Chinese culture and the HSK Chinese Proficiency Test. Subsequently, the cooperation between universities in Yunnan and Thailand has become more and more intensive. 1995 was a landmark year, when Yunnan Normal University and Royal Lampang College of Thailand agreed on the cultivation of Thai students, while Kunming College in Yunnan also cooperated with Thonburi University of Thailand, building a bridge for Thai students to study in China. Student exchange activities are also becoming more active. Not only Yunnan University and Kunming University of Science and Technology have started to accept Thai students one after another, but Chiang Mai University and Bangkok University in Thailand warmly welcome Yunnan students to study in Thailand. Southwest Forestry University has even established a student exchange program with the Agricultural University of Thailand, allowing students to experience a different educational culture. Of course, academic exchanges are another important area of cooperation between Yunnan and Thailand. Many universities in Yunnan have signed cooperation agreements with renowned institutions in Thailand to promote dialog and cooperation among scholars. This cooperation is not only limited to academics but also extends to joint research projects and exploring broader research areas. And on the cultural level, Yunnan-Thai educational cooperation has shown its unique charm. Various forms of cultural exchange activities, such as cultural festivals and art exhibitions, have provided strong support for enhancing cultural understanding and deepening friendship between the two countries.

2.2.3 Scholarships and Support Strategies for Foreign Education in Yunnan

Since 1996, China has vigorously promoted international cooperation and exchanges for study abroad, and the establishment of the China Scholarship Council marked the formalization and standardization of the scholarship system for study abroad in China. In addition, since 1997, the committee has implemented an annual evaluation system for international students coming to China to ensure that the scholarships are given to students with real value and potential, and to improve the effectiveness of the use of the scholarships. Among the various types of scholarships, the Scholarships for Foreign Students, Great Wall Scholarships, Winner Scholarships, and Short-term Research Scholarships for Foreign Chinese Language Teachers all provide material assistance to international students, further attracting students from all over the world to study in China. It is particularly noteworthy that Yunnan Province took the lead in setting up the first local scholarship for foreign students, the Yunnan Provincial Government Scholarship, in 2004, and the funding has been continuously increased in the past few years since then, indicating the importance and support of local governments for international students. This demonstrates the importance and support local governments attach to international students.

As can be seen from Table 5, the Chinese government's scholarship support for foreign students has shown continuous growth. This is especially true for Thai students, whose number of





awards in 2009 was sixfolds of that in 2006, largely due to the deepening exchanges and cooperation between China and Thailand.

Table 5 Scale of International students receiving Chinese government scholarships in the five countries along the "One Belt and One Road" from 2000 to 2009 Unit: persons

Country/Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Russia	196	217	245	234	218	226	286	331	614	879
Thailand	26	37	42	41	46	44	60	69	200	367
India	31	29	36	32	37	40	40	56	79	129
Pakistan	38	39	58	70	78	89	119	148	253	473
Malaysia	11	16	25	26	35	44	47	63	78	152

Source: Organized according to the "Concise Statistics on Study Abroad in China" of the past years

Besides national and local government scholarships, large corporations such as China Development Bank and PetroChina have begun to set up corporate scholarships, further expanding the sources of funding for international students. These scholarship systems not only provide financial support for international students but also motivate them to pursue higher achievements in their studies.

3. Deep integration phase (2010-2022)

3.1 Deepening Sino-Thai Educational Cooperation

Since 2010, the Chinese government has frequently introduced policies in the field of education to provide more study opportunities for international students coming to China, as well as to strengthen educational exchange and cooperation with other countries. In 2010, the Chinese Education Ministry put forward the "Study in China Program", which aims to expand the scale of education open to the outside world, setting a goal of bringing the number of international students coming to China to reach 500,000 by 2020. This program includes not only degree programs but also non-degree programs, providing more choices for international students to study (Feng & Liu, 2008). Action Plan for Study Abroad 2015-2017, a short-term action plan, emphasizes improving the management mechanism for study abroad, strengthening educational exchanges and cooperation with other countries, and providing a better learning and living environment for international students coming to China. the "Action Plan for Promoting the Construction of One Belt and One Road" in 2016 further strengthens cooperation and exchanges in the field of education with countries along the route.

Table 6 details the number of Thai students coming to China from 2010 to 2018. According to statistics, the number of Thai students coming to China to study has continued to grow from 2010 to 2018. In 2018, the total number of Thai students reached 28,608, which is an increase of 117.1% compared to 2010, making Thailand securely sit in the position of one of the fastest-growing Asian countries in terms of the number of international students coming to China (Li, 2000).



Table 6 Thailand's International Students in China, 2010-2018, Unit: Persons

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	总计
Total Students	13,177	14,145	16,675	20,106	21,296	19,976	23,044	27884	28608	128,419
Chinese Government Scholarships	561	744	952	1,215	1,435	1,555	1,746	1923	1932	8,208
Percentage of scholarships	4.3%	5.3%	5.7%	6.0%	6.7%	7.8%	7.6%	6.9%	6.8%	6.4%

3.2 Further Integration of Yunnan-Thai Educational Cooperation

3.2.1 Policy Response

To counteract this national trend and formulate its development strategy, Yunnan Province has issued the "Outline of the Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan of Yunnan Province (2010-2020)". The Outline identifies the central position of international educational exchange and cooperation. To meet the context of internationalization, and in particular to meet the demand of foreign students from regions such as Southeast Asia and South Asia, in 2012, Yunnan Province specifically awarded 13 schools the title of "Yunnan Chinese Language Education Base". This measure aims to improve the quality of education and teaching in these schools and attract more foreign students to study in Yunnan (Liu, 2009). The rapid development of the education market has also led to the rise of private education institutions. To better align with the country's "One Belt, One Road" initiative, the Education Ministry and the Yunnan Provincial Government signed the "Memorandum of International Cooperation to Carry Out the "One Belt, One Road" Educational Initiative" in 2016, which provides policy and financial support for international educational exchanges in Yunnan.

3.2.2 Overview of International Students

According to data provided by the Yunnan Provincial Education Department, the number of foreign students in Yunnan Province has also achieved significant growth, from 5,721 in 2007 to more than 18,000 in 2018. Thai students, in particular, have shown a growing preference for Yunnan as a study destination, which has made Yunnan a popular destination of choice for Thai students in China (Li, 2000). The data also shows that the number of Thai students hosted in Yunnan has increased more than ten-fold since 2000, demonstrating the growing educational exchange between Yunnan Province and Thailand (Lu et al., 2013).

To better attract talented international students, both central and local governments have gradually increased the number and funding of scholarships. Yunnan, in particular, received 20.03 million yuan in funding for provincial government scholarships in 2016, up 68 percent from 11.925 million yuan in 2015, while 576 foreign students from 28 universities benefited. Despite the impact of the epidemic in recent years on the number of international students, it is foreseeable that as the epidemic is controlled and subsides, educational exchange and cooperation between China and Thailand will continue to grow and lay a solid foundation for cultural exchange and mutual understanding between the two countries.

3.2.3 Educational Practices

Educational cooperation between Yunnan and Thailand has shown a growing trend. Currently, there are more than 62 cooperation projects covering various academic and research fields,



demonstrating the breadth and effectiveness of in-depth cooperation between the two places. Yunnan's higher education institutions have created a series of important cooperation platforms with their Thai partners. For example, Yunnan Normal University has strengthened its cooperation with Thailand by successfully creating the Chiang Rai Yunhua Vocational College, which serves mainly Chinese language teachers and provides correspondence higher education opportunities. The cooperation between Yunnan University of Finance and Economics and Thailand's Lansdowne University has made substantial progress, with the two sides establishing the YUFE Business School in Bangkok. Meanwhile, Yunnan College of Transportation Vocational and Technical Sciences cooperated with Thailand's Bangpakong Institute of Industrial and Community Education to set up a branch campus in Bangpakong, Thailand, to meet the demand for transportation professionals. The cooperation between Kunming Medical University and Mahidol University in Thailand is also vibrant, with the undergraduate nursing program jointly launched by the two sides becoming the first medical program in Yunnan to cooperate with a foreign country. On June 15, 2017, marking yet another milestone in cooperation, Dali University and the Royal University of Panakkorn in Thailand successfully created the "Maritime Silk Road - Confucius Institute at the Royal University of Panakkorn", after a year of preparation, the Confucius Institute was officially established, adding a touch of color to the educational exchange between the two sides. To continuously promote Yunnan-Thai educational exchange, Yunnan and Thailand held the 3rd Yunnan-Thai Educational Exchange Conference in Kunming in June 2018 and announced the establishment of the "Yunnan-Thai University Alliance". The alliance promotes cooperation between the two sides in the fields of linguistics, tourism, health services, medicine and health, agriculture, and digital technology. In this context, the Yunnan Provincial Department of Education and the Royal Thai Consulate General in Kunming have made continuous efforts to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the field of education between the two sides. The two sides promote the cooperation process by organizing the "Yunnan-Thai Education Cooperation Forum" regularly in the hope of better serving the education cause of the two places. In addition, academic research and exchanges are also regarded as a core part of the cooperation, and through the organization of various academic activities and seminars, the two sides have not only enhanced their educational standards but also further strengthened the close ties and deep friendship between Yunnan and Thailand in the field of education (Ruan, 2009).

3.2.4 Yunnan's Foreign Education in the Epidemic

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought unprecedented impact on the global study abroad business, and international student education in Yunnan is no exception. In the face of this severe situation, Yunnan universities and colleges have taken prompt measures to cope with the situation. On the one hand, the schools actively adopted online teaching mode to ensure the continuation of the teaching program; on the other hand, to maintain the mental and physical health of international students, the schools provided a series of psychological counseling services and health advice.

Despite these positive efforts, the epidemic has had an impact on the number of international students in Yunnan. In 2021, for example, the number of international students from Thailand in Yunnan universities decreased to 1,392 due to the pandemic and various related travel restrictions. However, Yunnan universities remain steadfast in providing high-quality education services to international students and firmly believe that international student education can gradually recover and prosper after the epidemic (Yi et al., 2007).





4. Constructing Future Educational Cooperation Models between China and Thailand

4.1 The issue of educational exchange and cooperation

Although the number of international students from Yunnan to Thailand and Thailand to Yunnan is increasing year by year, and the Yunnan government has also formulated corresponding measures, the overall level of higher education exchange and cooperation between Yunnan and Thailand still needs to be improved. Due to the accumulation of history, our higher education emphasizes government orientation and planning orientation, and therefore cannot better approach the actual demand for talent in the market and society. Secondly, there has been some progress in traditional advantageous subjects such as Chinese, traditional Chinese medicine, and teaching Chinese as a foreign language between Yunnan universities and Thai higher education. However, the level or scope of communication is not yet broad, and there has not been a significant improvement (Zhang, 2020). There has been no breakthrough in high-level cooperative education between Yunnan and Thailand, which is limited to joint education of vocational and undergraduate programs, lacking cooperation and training for graduate and doctoral students. Finally, regarding the Thai side, as the Thai government has not yet formulated a long-term plan for higher Chinese language education in Thailand, learning Chinese is not as easily supported and funded by the government as European and American languages such as German or French. This greatly restricts the cultivation of advanced Chinese language talents and further affects the supply of advanced Chinese language talents.

Next, we will analyze the existing problems mentioned above, and the author believes that efforts should be made mainly from the following aspects, promote exchanges and cooperation in higher education between both sides.

4.2 Construction Concept of "Chinese + Polytechnic" Education

Currently, humanities and social sciences majors dominate the international students in China and Thailand, while there is a lack of science and technology majors. In terms of professional structure, economics, management, and language disciplines occupy a majority of cross-border higher education cooperation, while information technology, biochemistry, medicine and finance, agriculture, and forestry technology, are of great importance to the upgrading of the economic structure, and are seldom involved. Universities have serious homogenization of majors, too frequent and overlapping settings, lack of long-term planning, too large enrollment scale, and failure to combine the advantageous disciplines of universities with the Chinese language. This kind of single-structure mode of cultivation of international students will inevitably bring obstacles to further cooperation between China and Thailand. For this reason, the concept of "Chinese + Polytechnic" should be established for the cultivation of international students, and guidance should be given to the selection of specialties. According to the advantageous specialties of the universities themselves, they should set up Chinese language learning oriented to the specialties of science and technology, such as Chinese language + agricultural technology, Chinese language + mechanical engineering, Chinese language + information engineering, etc., to break the dilemma of imperfect integration of Chinese language and specialties and lack of international students' professional ability at the present stage. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the scientific and technological cooperation between the two countries in science and technology, application, and innovation. Universities should set up joint research projects, deepen exchanges and cooperation in scientific and technological majors, establish a perfect teaching system, and cultivate high-tech talents together with a result-oriented approach.



4.3 Construction of Talents Cooperation System

Talent cooperation is one of the core elements for strengthening economic and social cooperation between the two countries. Promoting the development of education cooperation between China and Thailand requires a large number of specialized and complex talents with technical skills and knowledge of the languages of the two countries as support. Firstly, we should strengthen the construction of universities, promote academic exchanges between universities, establish cooperative programs, including joint research, teacher exchange, and student exchange programs, and promote close ties between universities on both sides to cultivate common talents. The second is to carry out dual-degree programs or cooperative courses so that students can obtain degrees from universities in both countries, increase interoperability between students from both countries and cultivate talents with cross-cultural backgrounds. The third is to set up joint research centers or laboratories to encourage joint research, especially in areas that are difficult for both sides to tackle, to cultivate research talents with high levels of competence through high-level cooperation. Fourthly, in the field of employment, promote cooperation between universities and industry, combining education with practical application and cultivation of talents to meet market demand. At the same time, training programs will be carried out to provide skills training to meet the needs of the job market in both countries and increase the talent pool of both countries (Zhu et al., 2017).

4.4 Construction of Educational Resources Cooperation Model

A sine qua non for building a regional education radiation center for South Asia and Southeast Asia is to strengthen cooperation in educational resources between the two countries. Firstly, we should increase the availability of educational resources for students in both countries, encourage faculty members from universities on both sides to participate in transnational cooperative research projects, co-advise students, provide professional knowledge and skills training, and improve the quality and internationalization of education. Meanwhile, online courses and distance education programs are conducted to allow students to access educational resources across national borders, increasing flexibility and accessibility for students. Secondly, we will increase the sharing of research resources, set up joint research centers to research common issues and problem areas, share laboratories and research equipment, and improve the level of research and innovation between the two countries in basic and applied scientific research. Thirdly, establish an educational exchange fund to provide financial support for student and faculty exchanges, or set up scholarships to attract more international students to study at universities in both countries. Fourthly, exchange activities should be carried out to increase the availability of educational resources, and international conferences and seminars should be organized to attract scholars and professionals from both countries to promote academic exchanges and cooperation.

Conclusions

The history of cooperation between Yunnan and Thailand in the education of international students can be regarded as a microcosm of Sino-Thai cultural integration and friendly cooperation. Since 1978, the historical process of Thai students coming to China reflects the steady development and advancement of Sino-Thai relations in the field of education. We can divide this journey into three phases: firstly, the budding of initial exchanges (1978-1992). At the beginning of the Reform and Opening up of China, although the number of Thai students in Yunnan was not large, this phase laid an important foundation for subsequent cooperation and exchanges. Based on the cooperation agreement



between the Chinese and Thai governments, international student exchange activities gradually began. The second is the leap of active expansion (1993-2009). With the gradual improvement of Chinese education policies, Yunnan-Thailand education cooperation became active, resulting in a significant increase in the number of international students. Thirdly, the integration of deep cooperation (2010-2022). Both sides attach great importance to this cooperation and have actively responded to relevant policies to jointly promote Yunnan-Thai educational practices. The frequent exchanges and cooperation between Yunnan and Thailand will lay a solid foundation for education cooperation, especially in higher education, and the prospects for cooperation and development are promising. At the same time, with the increasing economic, political, and cultural exchanges and cooperation between China and Southeast Asian countries, the study experience of Thai students in China will also provide more opportunities for their future career development.

Discussion

The exchange of higher education between China and Thailand is an inevitable trend in strengthening mutual understanding, exchange, and cooperation between international cultures and education in the context of economic and trade globalization. It is also an inevitable trend in the development of a modern information society and knowledge economy. The profound meaning behind the educational exchanges between China and Thailand is not only purely academic interaction but also a reflection of the deep friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

In recent years, with the rise of China on the international stage, its influence on the outside world has been increasing. Steady economic growth, continued policy support, and friendly relations with foreign countries have created a favorable environment for studying in China. At the same time, China's rising economic and cultural influence provides Thai students with a broader space for future development. As the radiation center and important transportation hub between China and Southeast Asian countries, Yunnan's geographical location makes it an ideal choice for Thai students. The "One Belt, One Road" strategy has brought new opportunities for China-Thailand cooperation in various fields such as infrastructure, economy, and trade. To better promote such cooperation, it is imperative to strengthen cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries. Cooperation between Yunnan and Thailand in the field of education can not only promote the common development of the two countries but also build a bridge of friendship and mutual understanding among the people of the two countries.

It is expected that in the future, with the further depth of Sino-Thai relations and the continued advancement of educational cooperation, the two sides will continue to expand their educational exchanges and cooperation in the field of education and bring more cooperation opportunities and development potential to both sides as well as to the whole Southeast Asian region. It is expected that both countries can work hand in hand to make greater contributions to the peace, stability, and prosperity of the region.

Suggestions on Sino-Thai Education

1. Cooperation at the government level

The Chinese and Thai governments should continue to strengthen cooperation in the field of education and formulate more bilateral agreements and projects to promote academic exchanges and personnel training between the two countries. For example, a Sino-Thai educational cooperation





committee can be established to hold regular meetings to discuss the direction and objectives of educational cooperation, formulate plans and measures for educational cooperation, evaluate the effects and problems of educational cooperation, and put forward improvements and suggestions for educational cooperation. In addition, we can increase educational assistance and funding between the two countries, support educational institutions and individuals in the two countries to carry out educational activities and projects and improve the quality and standard of education in the two countries.

2. Optimization of professional structure

According to their advantageous disciplines, colleges, and universities of the two countries should offer courses in "Chinese + professional technology", such as "Chinese + agricultural technology" and "Chinese + mechanical engineering", to train Chinese talents with a professional and technical background. These courses can help students improve their Chinese proficiency, acquire professional and technical knowledge and skills, and provide talent support for the economic development and technological innovation of the two countries. These courses can also increase the employment opportunities and competitiveness of students from both countries and contribute to the social stability and well-being of the people of the two countries.

3. Construction of Talent Cooperation System

Strengthen academic exchanges among colleges and universities and establish cooperative programs, including joint research, teacher exchange, and student exchange programs, to jointly train talents with cross-cultural backgrounds. These projects can promote mutual learning and exchanges between teachers and students of the two countries, enhance cultural understanding and friendship between the two countries, and stimulate innovative thinking and a spirit of cooperation between the two countries. These projects can also enhance the international influence and reputation of education in the two countries, and provide reference and reference for the development and reform of education in the two countries.

4. Cooperation model of educational resources

Strengthen cooperation in educational resources between the two countries, improve students' access to educational resources, encourage teachers to participate in transnational cooperative research projects, share laboratories and research equipment, and improve the level of research and innovation in the field of basic and applied scientific research between the two countries. This cooperation can make full use of the educational resources of the two countries, expand the educational coverage and beneficiary groups of the two countries, and improve the efficiency and quality of education in the two countries. These cooperation can also promote scientific and technological progress and industrial transformation of the two countries, and provide technical support and guarantee for the sustainable development and green development of the two countries.

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