

A Study on the Current Status of Southeast Asian International Student Cultivation at Pu'er University under the "Belt and Road" Initiative

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Abstract This study conducts a comprehensive and in-depth investigation into the current status of Southeast Asian international student cultivation at Pu'er University through multiple methods, including questionnaires, interviews, and literature research. The findings reveal that Pu'er University has achieved remarkable results in cultivating Southeast Asian international students, attracting a significant number of students from Southeast Asian countries while providing them with high-quality educational resources and a conducive learning environment. During their academic journey at Pu'er University, international students have not only acquired professional knowledge but also gained a profound understanding of Chinese culture and history, actively contributing to cultural exchanges and collaboration between China and Southeast Asia. Additionally, the study identifies existing challenges, including the need for improvement in curriculum design, faculty capacity, and cultural exchange initiatives. To address these issues, this paper proposes targeted strategies and recommendations, aiming to serve as a reference for Pu'er University and similar institutions in optimizing Southeast Asian international student cultivation.

Key words Belt and Road Initiative, Southeast Asian international students, Current status, Challenges

0 Introduction

As China's global influence continues to grow under the context of globalization, the education of Southeast Asian international students, as a vital component of China's educational openness, holds significant importance for enhancing the international competitiveness and influence of Chinese education. Pu'er University, a higher education institution located in China's southwestern frontier, has actively responded to national policies by expanding educational exchanges and cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. Against this backdrop, the increasing number of Southeast Asian students studying at the university has enriched its cultural diversity and educational resources. However, alongside the rapid development of international student education, certain challenges have emerged. Currently, Pu'er University faces challenges such as a monotonous educational model, an incomplete curriculum system, and insufficient cultural adaptability, necessitating comprehensive reforms to improve educational quality and meet the diversified demands of international student education in a globalized context. This study focuses on Pu'er University to analyze the current status and challenges faced by Southeast Asian international students, exploring measures such as innovative educational models, optimized curriculum systems, and enhanced cultural adaptability to improve education quality, foster cultural exchange and integration, and contribute to the sustainable development of international student education at Pu'er University and other institutions

in the whole country.

1 Research background and significance

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized: "We must prioritize educational development, achieve self-reliance in science and technology, and drive progress through talent cultivation; accelerate the construction of an education powerhouse, a sci-tech powerhouse, and a talent powerhouse; adhere to nurturing talents for the Party and the nation, comprehensively improve the quality of independent talent cultivation, focus on fostering top-tier innovators, and attract outstanding talents worldwide." The report also called for "persisting in high-level opening-up." On May 29, 2023, during the fifth collective study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, General Secretary Xi Jinping reiterated: "We must actively participate in global educational governance, vigorously promote the 'Study in China' brand, effectively communicate China's stories, disseminate China's experiences, amplify China's voice, and strengthen the international influence and discourse power of Chinese education." To fully implement the spirit of the 20th Party Congress and accelerate the high-quality development of education in Yunnan, the *Three-Year Action Plan for High-Quality Education Development in Yunnan Province* (2023 – 2025) proposes expanding the enrollment of international students, improving the quality of their education, and building the "Study in China · Learn in Yunnan" brand. Against this background, international student education in the new era has been entrusted with new missions: serving national foreign relations and international strategies, providing talent support for enterprise development, and advancing the internationalization of higher education. During the COVID-19

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pandemic, international student education faced unprecedented challenges. The autumn semester of 2023 marked a new phase of post-pandemic international student enrollment, with universities across provinces (municipalities and autonomous regions) swiftly adapting to the new normal and successfully restarting international student education. Amidst the accelerating global changes unseen in a century and the new journey toward high-quality education, international student education holds immense potential, particularly in global talent recruitment.

As a border university, Pu'er University strategically focuses on Southeast Asia, aiming to cultivate outstanding innovative talents with profound expertise and a global perspective. Leveraging Yunnan's unique geographical location and cultural resources, the university provides a multicultural platform for international students through educational collaborations with Southeast Asian countries. Here, students not only gain access to cutting-edge scientific knowledge but also immerse themselves in Chinese culture, experiencing the convergence and interaction of diverse cultures. In this context, deepening research on comprehensive reforms in Southeast Asian international student education is both urgent and critical.

2 Overview of the research purpose and content

This research aims to comprehensively understand the current status of Southeast Asian international student cultivation at Pu'er University, analyze existing challenges, and propose corresponding strategies and recommendations. The research content includes the following aspects: first, a statistical analysis of the basic information of Southeast Asian international students at Pu'er University, including nationality, age, gender, and major distribution; second, an in-depth investigation into students' academic and daily life experiences, covering curriculum learning, faculty qualifications, practical training, and cultural exchanges; third, through questionnaires and interviews, collecting students' evaluations and feedback on educational quality, as well as their expectations and needs for future academic and career development; finally, based on the university's actual conditions and trends in international education, targeted reform measures and suggestions are proposed to comprehensively enhance the quality of Southeast Asian international student cultivation at Pu'er University.

3 Research methods and data sources

This study employs a combination of research methods to ensure the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the data. Specifically, the primary methods include questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, and literature research. Regarding data sources, in addition to primary data collected through questionnaires and interviews, the study also utilizes existing international student management records and publicly available literature to ensure data diversity and reliability.

4 Achievements in talent cultivation for Southeast Asian international students at Pu'er University

4.1 Continuous expansion of enrollment scale Leveraging its strengths as a border university, Pu'er University achieved improvements in both quality and efficiency in international student recruitment in 2024. As of September 2024, the university hosted 281 international students from five Lancang – Mekong River countries: Laos (245 students), Thailand (11 students), Myanmar (12 students), Cambodia (8 students), and Vietnam (5 students).

4.2 Continuous improvement in educational facilities Pu'er University spans an area of 136.93 ha, with a construction area of 262 800 m². The total fixed assets amount to 719 million yuan, including teaching and research equipment valued at 107 million yuan. The library houses 1.141 million physical books and 1.45 million digital resources, including 270 000 e-books. The university has established 197 off-campus practical training bases and 105 on-campus laboratories, including the Rare Woodcut Art Museum, Pu'er Biodiversity Science Education Center, Belt and Road Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Base, and Mandarin Testing Center. Among these, four are provincial-level experimental platforms. Additionally, the university provides dedicated international student dormitories, continuously enhancing internship and training facilities to meet the needs of applied talent cultivation.

4.3 Continuous optimization of academic programs Pu'er University actively responds to the needs of Southeast Asian international student cultivation by continuously optimizing and adjusting its disciplinary structure. Currently, the university's 11 secondary colleges offer 37 undergraduate programs for international students, covering disciplines such as literature, science, engineering, agriculture, economics, management, education, and arts. Specifically tailored to Southeast Asian needs, the university offers specialized programs in Thai, Burmese, and Vietnamese languages, providing students with diverse and practical learning options. Furthermore, the university aligns with international standards by adopting advanced educational concepts and teaching methods, thereby improving teaching quality and delivering enhanced educational services to international students.

In teaching, Pu'er University emphasizes the integration of theory and practice, encouraging international students to actively participate in diverse practical activities, including social practice, cultural exchanges, and volunteer services, to enhance their comprehensive competencies and practical skills. Additionally, the university actively collaborates with higher education institutions and enterprises in Southeast Asia to provide students with internship training, career development, and entrepreneurial opportunities, facilitating their adaptation to future professional endeavors. Leveraging its geographical advantages, the university vigorously promotes open education initiatives and has established part-

nerships with over 20 domestic and international universities and research institutions. In collaboration with prestigious institutions such as Capital University of Economics and Business, Yunnan University, Minzu University of China, Yunnan Minzu University, Hunan Agricultural University, Guangdong University of Finance and Economics, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Kunming University of Science and Technology, Kunming Branch of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden (Chinese Academy of Sciences), the university jointly cultivates master's and doctoral-level international students.

4.4 Continuous strengthening of faculty resources Pu'er University has consistently prioritized the strategy of strengthening the institution through talent cultivation. Since its upgrade to a bachelor's degree-granting institution, the university has accelerated the recruitment and development of high-level talents, resulting in quantitative and qualitative improvements in its faculty. The university currently employs 724 faculty members, including 207 with senior professional titles and 34 doctoral degree holders. Academician Liu Zhonghua serves as the honorary dean. Over 30 faculty members hold national and provincial talent titles, such as the National High-Level Talent Program, Yunnan's "Xingdian Talent Program", and recognition as mid-career academic and technical leaders. Additionally, 190 teachers are certified as "dual-qualified" professionals with both academic and practical expertise.

5 Survey and analysis of talent cultivation quality for Southeast Asian international students at Pu'er University

The evaluation of talent cultivation quality encompasses curriculum design, practical teaching, and faculty development—factors that directly impact international students' academic performance and personal growth. To gain an in-depth understanding of the actual outcomes of Southeast Asian international student cultivation at Pu'er University, this study conducted a comprehensive survey and analysis. By collecting and analyzing data on students' learning competencies, course satisfaction, and participation in practical activities, this study aims to objectively identify the strengths and weaknesses of the university's Southeast Asian international student education. Additionally, extensive feedback and suggestions from international students were gathered to refine educational services, enhance personalization, and improve their learning experiences and satisfaction.

5.1 Learning ability Learning competence among international students is a critical indicator for assessing the quality of talent cultivation. The survey results reveal a polarized trend in the overall learning competencies of Southeast Asian students at Pu'er University. Some students have strong language proficiency and comprehension, enabling them to adapt quickly to the university's aca-

demetic environment. However, others face challenges in language communication and subject comprehension, requiring additional tutoring and support. Notably, since the enrollment expansion in 2024, the overall learning competencies of international students have declined, likely due to uneven student qualifications. Statistics indicate that some students failed to reach HSK Level 4 (equivalent to intermediate proficiency) upon completing Chinese preparatory courses, posing significant challenges for their subsequent specialized studies. In response, the university should strengthen admission testing and screening procedures to ensure all students possess the necessary academic and adaptive capabilities. For students with weaker competencies, the university should offer enhanced support, such as language workshops, subject-specific tutoring, and extracurricular language clubs, to facilitate their adaptation and academic improvement. Additionally, faculty training should be intensified to elevate teaching standards and better address the learning needs of international students.

5.2 Course satisfaction Course satisfaction is a vital indicator of teaching quality and student learning experiences. Through surveys and interviews, most Southeast Asian students expressed satisfaction with Pu'er University's curriculum, praising its rich content, practicality, and alignment with their academic needs. For instance, the School of Economics and Management introduced specialized courses in 2024, such as *International Trade Theory and Practice*, *International Financial Management*, *International Accounting*, and *Chinese Accounting Systems and Practices*, designed to strengthen students' global business knowledge and practical skills. Adhering to a "student-centered" philosophy, the school's leadership actively communicates with international students to understand their needs and interests, continuously refining the curriculum to enhance relevance and effectiveness. Additionally, the School of Humanities offers cultural courses like *Introduction to Chinese Culture and Appreciation of Chinese Literary Classics* to deepen students' understanding of Chinese culture and improve their cross-cultural communication skills. These courses have enriched students' learning experiences and increased their satisfaction with the university's educational quality.

However, a minority of students noted that some courses are overly theoretical, lacking practical components, which diminishes engagement. They recommended incorporating more hands-on courses, case studies, and supplementary learning resources. Particularly in STEM fields, students reported that course content is dry and excessively theoretical, with complex Chinese characters contributing to frustration. They emphasized the need for targeted academic support.

5.3 Participation in practical activities The survey found that Southeast Asian international students at Pu'er University generally exhibit high participation in practical activities such as academic lectures, cultural exchanges, and volunteer services, likely attributed to their outgoing personalities and enthusiasm for cultur-

al and recreational activities. These activities not only enrich students' extracurricular life but also enhance their comprehensive competencies. Notably, through international exchange programs organized by the university, such as the Lancang – Mekong Education Cooperation (Pu'er) Forum and the 2024 International Symposium on Clean Energy and Green Development in South and Southeast Asia, students have opportunities to interact face-to-face with domestic and international experts, broadening their global perspectives and strengthening cross-cultural communication skills. Additionally, students actively participate in campus celebrations like the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, engaging in activities such as making traditional Chinese cuisine and performing ethnic dances, which deepen their understanding of Chinese culture and foster cultural identity. Such participation enriches students' cultural experiences, promotes Sino-foreign cultural exchange and integration, and lays a solid foundation for their future cross-cultural careers and lives. However, some students noted that the content and formats of these activities require further enrichment and innovation to meet their diverse needs. Others reported limited participation due to language barriers or academic pressures.

6 Existing problems and challenges

6.1 Shortcomings in curriculum system and teaching methodologies Despite offering diverse courses for Southeast Asian international students, Pu'er University faces challenges in aligning some courses with students' practical needs during implementation. Some courses are overly theoretical, lacking practical case studies linked to local economic and social development, which reduces student engagement and enthusiasm. Additionally, teaching methods remain relatively monotonous, dominated by traditional lectures that lack interactivity, participation, and practicality, failing to meet students' demands for diversified learning approaches.

6.2 Challenges in faculty development Faculty quality is the cornerstone of higher education. In Southeast Asian international student education, Pu'er University faces multiple challenges in faculty development. On the one hand, geographical location, economic development levels, and uneven resource distribution hinder the university's ability to attract and retain high-caliber international faculty. A limited proportion of current faculty have overseas academic backgrounds or cross-cultural teaching experience, constraining the internationalization of international student education. On the other hand, uneven professional and pedagogical competencies among faculty result in a lack of targeted and effective teaching, failing to address students' individualized learning needs. Furthermore, language and cultural barriers impede communication between some faculty and international students, negatively impacting teaching outcomes and learning experiences. Therefore, strengthening faculty development and enhancing internationalization and teaching competencies are critical to improving

the quality of Southeast Asian international student education at Pu'er University.

6.3 Challenges in cultivating students' comprehensive competencies International students from diverse regions and cultural backgrounds bring varied educational experiences, leading to disparities in their comprehensive competencies. Some students face challenges in language proficiency, academic foundations, and learning strategies, complicating their adaptation and academic performance. Given the unique nature of international education, the university requires greater innovation and effort in cultivating students' comprehensive competencies. Key issues include fostering cross-cultural communication skills, teamwork, innovative thinking, and practical abilities. Thus, the university should intensify research and practices in competency cultivation, exploring educational models and teaching methods tailored to international students' needs to support their holistic development.

6.4 Limitations of international cooperation and exchange While Pu'er University has achieved some progress in international cooperation and exchange, certain limitations persist. On the one hand, collaborations with internationally renowned universities and research institutions remain superficial, with limited forms and scopes, hindering the full integration of advanced global educational concepts and resources. On the other hand, geographical remoteness and constraints in funding and resources pose challenges in expanding and implementing international exchange programs. Furthermore, international academic exchanges, student exchange programs, and joint degree initiatives require further strengthening to enhance the global influence and competitiveness of international student education. Therefore, expanding international collaboration channels and deepening partnerships with top-tier global institutions are critical pathways for Pu'er University to elevate the quality of Southeast Asian international student education.

7 Improvement suggestions and strategies

7.1 Optimizing curriculum and teaching methods To address the aforementioned issues, Pu'er University should further refine its curriculum system to enhance practicality and relevance. Aligning with global trends, the university should strengthen ties with enterprises and communities, integrating practical case studies linked to local economic and social development to better meet students' needs. Additionally, the university should explore diversified teaching methodologies, such as case-based learning, project-based learning, and flipped classrooms, to encourage active participation in discussions and hands-on activities, thereby boosting engagement.

Furthermore, elective or specialized courses tailored to students' interests and needs should be introduced to support personalized learning.

7.2 Strengthening faculty development and training To enhance faculty internationalization and pedagogical competence,

Pu'er University should increase investment in faculty development. On the one hand, competitive compensation and a supportive work environment can attract faculty with overseas academic backgrounds or cross-cultural teaching experience. On the other hand, existing faculty should receive targeted training to improve their professional expertise and teaching skills. Regular participation in international conferences, workshops, and overseas academic visits should be organized to broaden faculty's global perspectives and cross-cultural teaching capabilities. Additionally, platforms for faculty collaboration and knowledge-sharing should be established to foster collective growth. Language and cultural training programs should also be offered to faculty to address communication barriers with international students.

7.3 Enhancing students' comprehensive competencies To holistically develop students' competencies, Pu'er University should prioritize cultivating cross-cultural communication skills, teamwork, innovative thinking, and practical abilities. Dedicated cultural exchange courses and activities, such as cultural festivals and workshops, can deepen students' understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. Encouraging participation in team projects and practical initiatives will strengthen students' collaborative and hands-on skills. Innovation labs or entrepreneurship incubators could provide platforms for students to explore creativity and entrepreneurial ventures. These measures will support students' holistic development and prepare them for future cross-cultural careers and life experiences.

7.4 Expanding international cooperation and exchange channels To broaden international collaboration, Pu'er University should actively pursue partnerships with globally recognized colleges and research institutions. Collaborative academic research, talent development programs, and joint scientific projects with international partners can drive academic innovation. At the same time, it should expand cooperation areas, not only in the field of education, but also in many aspects such as economy, culture, science and technology to achieve all-round exchanges and cooperation. In addition, it can actively seek financial support for international projects, strengthen cooperation with international organizations, participate in international aid projects and international education cooperation projects, and enhance the university's international popularity and influence. These efforts will enhance the global competitiveness of Southeast Asian international student education at Pu'er University, offering students broader opportunities for growth.

8 Conclusions

8.1 Research summary This study conducted an in-depth analysis of enhancing the quality of Southeast Asian international student education at Pu'er University, focusing on four dimensions: curriculum systems and teaching methodologies, faculty development, student competency cultivation, and international cooperation and exchange. The research revealed that while the uni-

versity has achieved notable progress in international student education, certain challenges and shortcomings persist. To address these issues, the study proposed targeted recommendations and strategies to serve as valuable references for improving the quality of Southeast Asian international student education at Pu'er University. By implementing measures such as curriculum optimization, faculty training, competency enhancement, and expanded international collaboration, Pu'er University can elevate the quality of its international student education and provide stronger support for students' holistic development. These efforts will also advance the university's internationalization, boosting its global influence and competitiveness.

8.2 Prospects for future development As globalization accelerates and international exchanges intensify, the university should uphold its open education philosophy and deepen collaboration with the global community. On the one hand, partnerships with world-renowned universities and research institutions should be strengthened to cultivate globally minded, cross-culturally competent talents. On the other hand, expanding the international student market to attract diverse global learners will foster multi-cultural integration and exchange. Concurrently, the university must prioritize enhancing educational quality, faculty development, and curriculum innovation to offer superior resources and broader opportunities for international students. Through these efforts, Pu'er University will be well on the way to becoming a prestigious institution in international education, contributing significantly to nurturing globally competitive talents.

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