

# *A Comparative Study on the Development of Basic Education in Developing Countries under the Background of the Belt and Road Initiative—Taking China and Thailand as Examples*

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**Abstract:** Implementation of the "Belt and Road Initiatives" is a long-term and systematic project. Countries along the Belt and Road have distinctive educational characteristics, rich resources, strong complementarity and huge space for cooperation. In the new era, China is actively building an education community under the Belt and Road Initiative, an upgraded version of the Belt and Road Initiative. Thailand is an important member of the "Belt and Road" ASEAN line. It has maintained good cooperative relations with China. The two countries have carried out in-depth cooperation in many areas, especially in the field of education. This paper mainly takes the education of China and Thailand as examples, summarizes the common points and future trends of the current reform of basic education in China and Thailand, and makes a comprehensive comparison and analysis of the development of basic education in China and Thailand, so as to provide new reference and inspiration for the development of basic education in developing countries.

## **1. Introduction**

The "the Belt and Road" initiative has greatly improved the breadth and depth of opening up, including education. 2023 marks the tenth anniversary of the creation of the Belt and Road Initiative. At a new stage of development in the new era, we should deepen the opening up of basic education, give play to the role of international basic education in carrying out people to people exchanges, people to people exchanges, enhancing mutual understanding and shaping more ideal external relations. It is necessary to further combine the development of contemporary international education with the national promotion of the "the Belt and Road" construction, Strengthen the systematic theoretical research on international education in countries and regions along the "the Belt and Road", especially think about and establish the future national strategic action lines and priorities for international basic education, and enhance the educational exchanges and cooperation among students in countries and regions along the "the Belt and Road". Therefore, studying the development of basic education in countries along the "the Belt and Road" will play an important role in promoting the sustainable development of basic education in developing countries. This article takes basic education in China and Thailand as an example to analyze this.

## 2. Common ground of basic education reform between China and Thailand

### 2.1 Promoting equity in basic education

Fairness and justice are the foundation of a country, and the pursuit of fairness and justice is also a long-term goal of human struggle and a common value orientation for the continuous development of society.

Since 2012, China has attached great importance to the investment of education funds. Since 2012, the investment of fiscal education funds has accounted for more than 4% of GDP for consecutive years. According to the Ministry of Education's 2021 National Education Funding Statistics Report, the total investment in education funding in 2021 was 5,787.367 billion yuan, an increase of 9.13% from the previous year. Among them, the national fiscal grant for education was 4,583.531 billion yuan, up 6.82% from the previous year. Against the backdrop of sustained and rapid growth in China's gross domestic product, the government's investment in education funds has always maintained a proportion of over 4% of GDP, indicating the strong determination of the country to develop education and promote educational equity in China. Continued increases in education funding can make educational resources, even high-quality ones, more abundant, provide a satisfactory education for every member of society, and promote the ultimate realization of educational equity<sup>[1]</sup>.

The education inequality between urban and rural areas and different regions has always been a major problem in Thailand, and in response to these problems, the Ministry of Education has also provided financial and human support in various aspects, such as improving teaching facilities, equipping excellent teachers, and increasing teacher income. At the same time, encourage cooperation between primary and secondary schools to share advantageous resources. In addition, the Thai government recently approved an increase in per capita subsidies based on basic necessities starting from the fiscal year 2023 (October 2022) to reduce the economic burden on learners and enhance the capacity of educational institutions. At the same time, the government will establish a clear education support framework, education budget, education supervision and education accountability system to ensure the effective, fair and flexible use of educational resources. This is in line with the Paris Declaration: A Global Appeal for investing in Future education, which urges governments to increase domestic education resources, increase investment in education, and improve the recovery rate of education from the COVID-19 epidemic. Thailand is working with stakeholders such as the Fair Education Fund to adopt innovative financing models to ensure that vulnerable groups get adequate funds. Moreover, the government promotes universal education, allowing children without Thai ethnic group to attend schools nearby based on personal history certificates from parents, caregivers, and non-governmental organizations. The government provides financial support to these receiving students to ensure that every eligible child receives the best education<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 2.2 Improving the quality of basic education

In the new era, China's basic education has entered a new stage of high-quality development. The Overall Plan for Deepening the reform of Education Evaluation in the New Era issued by the Central Committee of China and the State Council insists on education as the fundamental task, specifically focusing on the reform of "five subjects", and advocates "improving the outcome evaluation, strengthening process evaluation, exploring value-added evaluation, perfecting the comprehensive evaluation, making full use of information technology, and improving the scientific, professionalism and objectivity of education evaluation". From the perspective of cultivating new talents of the times and the essential qualities required for the comprehensive development of human beings, labor education has been incorporated into the educational policy, and sports and aesthetic education have also received unprecedented attention. Curriculum is an important carrier of education, and the

classroom is the main channel for implementing curriculum teaching. Actively constructing classroom teaching quality evaluation standards from the perspective of disciplinary education and standardizing teachers' disciplinary education behavior can guide teachers to be more proactive in placing "education" at the center of classroom teaching.<sup>[3]</sup>

The Thai Constitution regards education as an important content, including the provision of education for all people, the promotion of lifelong learning, and cooperation between the state, local administrative organizations, and the private sector in education. At the same time, the state has an obligation to provide, implement, supervise, promote, and support education at all levels in accordance with educational regulations and international standards. According to the law and the national education plan, these educational regulations must be reviewed and implemented to ensure compliance with the national education plan. And in Thailand's 20-year national strategy (2018-2037) and national education plan (2017-2036), education has also been recognized as a national priority, serving as a key factor for the development of Chinese citizens and providing necessary strength for the country to achieve sustainable development goals, unleash future development momentum, and support the development of various industries and sectors. The Thai government will support learner centered digital transformation to improve the learning of all learners and prepare them to live in a world characterized by rapid development of technology and change. Our goal is to provide free, inclusive, and fair online education through open source platforms under the supervision of the Ministry of education and relevant institutions. Emphasis will be placed on high-quality e-learning programs, related teacher training, and policies to mainstream digital learning, while ensuring the safe use of digital technology and artificial intelligence<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **3. The Future Development Trends of Basic Education**

#### **3.1 The Development Direction of Basic Education in China: Towards an International Center**

The "the Belt and Road" initiative conforms to the objective needs of building a pattern of education opening up, indicating that China has entered the 2.0 stage of a new pattern of education opening up. Currently, the development of basic education in China has reached a historical high, and the overall level of development has leapt to the ranks of middle-income countries in the world. In response to the new educational requirements for cultivating innovative talents proposed by building an innovative country, China's basic education needs a higher communication platform.

For the past 40 years, China's basic education has adhered to the principle of promoting reform and development through openness. We invite people to come in and go out, and in the process of international exchanges, we learn from each other, continuously improve the level of communication and cooperation, and promote China's basic education to continuously move towards the center of the world. At the beginning of the reform and opening up, China's basic education adhered to the principle of "putting oneself first and serving oneself", and introduced high-quality educational resources from abroad.

In 1977, Deng Xiaoping guided China to introduce 2200 textbooks, of which primary schools accounted for 15%, secondary schools accounted for 20%, and the rest were university textbooks. The introduction of textbooks was beneficial for China to learn from and develop advanced textbooks suitable for reform, opening up, and modernization construction. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, China actively engaged in educational exchange activities with Western countries to promote the reform of basic education in China. In 1985, the "Decision of the Central Committee of China on the Reform of the Education System" proposed under the guidance of the "Three Faces" that "through various possible channels, we can strengthen foreign exchanges and establish our education career on the basis of the achievements of contemporary world civilization". The trend of learning and borrowing from Western educational

theories and teaching models has sparked a wave in the field of basic education, and fully leveraging the advantages of foreign teachers to create an international talent training environment, greatly affecting educational and teaching practices.

After entering the 21st century, China has continuously integrated into the process of economic globalization and played an important role in international multilateral relations. The 2010 Plan Outline proposed to "expand educational openness", strengthen international exchanges and cooperation, carry out multi-level and wide-ranging educational exchanges and cooperation, and improve the internationalization level of China's education. In 2016, the "Several Opinions of the General Office of the Central Committee of China and the General Office of the State Council on Doing a Good Job in Opening up Education to the Outside World in the New Era" were issued, proposing strategic deployments such as "enriching cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, promoting people-to-people communication" and "promoting win-win cooperation in the field of education". Under the comprehensive, multi-level, and wide-ranging opening-up pattern established by the country, practical exchanges in basic education between China and foreign countries are being promoted. Using Confucius Institutes, advanced cultural exchange mechanisms, and friendly cities as platforms, we actively carry out international basic education forums, language and cultural education cooperation, inter school exchanges and visits, and students' overseas research trips, continuously improving the international literacy and abilities of teachers and students.

In recent years, with the deepening of international exchanges, based on China's outstanding performance in programme for international student assessment, more and more countries have explored the basic education in China through various channels. Leaders of education departments from many countries have visited China. Chinese models, Chinese textbooks and Chinese teachers have become a hot word in the world of education, and China's basic education is gradually moving towards the center of the world.

### **3.2 The development direction of basic education in Thailand: inclusive international educational cooperation.**

From the perspective of educational exchanges and cooperation, among the countries along the "the Belt and Road", there are many international organizations located in Thailand, and Thailand's education internationalization is relatively high. The Thai government has actively engaged in educational cooperation with other countries, accumulated rich experience, and gained significant benefits from bilateral cooperation, active participation in education, science, culture, and many other related international and regional organizations and associations. These educational cooperation and exchanges have a significant impact on the development of basic education in Thailand.

The Southeast Asian Organization of Ministers of Education is an intergovernmental organization established in Thailand in 1965. Today, it has 11 member states including Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, East Timor, and Vietnam. There are seven affiliated member countries, namely Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain. Three affiliated members, namely the International Open and Distance Education Association, the University of Tsukuba in Japan, and the British Council.

There are a considerable number of international schools or colleges in Thailand that have a significant impact on education. An international school or college is an institution that provides education to students regardless of nationality, religion, or government nature. It adopts international courses and media that are acceptable to students from all countries, and uses English as the medium for teaching. The establishment of international schools or colleges shall be determined by the Ministry of Education and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in terms of policies, regulations, and standards. Thailand's international education has developed early, with a high demand and abundant

teacher resources. Most foreigners who live and invest in Thailand have a lot of wealth and social status, and they all have educational needs. The Thai aristocrats also hope that their children can receive good international education, so parents spontaneously set up a board of directors and set up international schools. At the same time, Thailand's low consumption and internationalization have also attracted teachers from all over the world to reside in Thailand, ensuring the quality of their school education. At present, schools from 45 countries have joined the Thai International School Association to ensure Thailand's international education standards.

In summary, Thailand plays a positive role in international education cooperation and exchange, and adapts to the changes of globalization.

#### **4. The Enlightenment of the Development of Basic Education between China and Thailand on Basic Education in Developing Countries**

The Belt and Road initiative is an important strategic initiative of the Chinese government to further open up and deepen international exchanges. The "the Belt and Road" community of common destiny calls for the establishment of an education community. The "the Belt and Road" education community can improve the educational competitiveness of countries along the Belt and Road, and promote people's connectivity in the region. In the context of the Belt and Road initiative, it is particularly vital to re-examine the international educational exchanges of developing countries and build an educational community.

China and Thailand actively cooperate and exchange in basic education. In 1871, King Rama V founded the Palace Noble School, marking the origin of modern education in Thailand. In 1908, Thailand emerged from church school education and began to establish secular primary and secondary education. Thailand attaches great importance to primary education and believes that it is an important foundation for national development. Since 1990, Thailand has implemented nine-year compulsory education. While Thailand is vigorously developing basic education domestically, it also values educational exchanges and cooperation with China. In 2016, "Kunming Art School in Yunnan Province established a close relationship and collaborated with the Public ZTE School in Pafu, Thailand. Yunnan Dali No.1 Middle School and Thailand Bodin Middle School have maintained friendly cooperation for many years, sending teacher-student groups to each other for educational and cultural exchanges.

The educational cooperation between China and Thailand has played a good role in communication and demonstration. Countries along the "the Belt and Road" are at the same stage of development and face the same educational needs. Among the countries along the "the Belt and Road", only seven countries, including Singapore, Israel and the Czech Republic, are developed economies as defined by the World Monetary Fund, while the rest are developing countries. Contradiction between economic development and educational development generally exist in countries along the Belt and Road initiative. The imbalance of educational resources and the backwardness of educational infrastructure, especially educational information technology, cannot meet the requirements for high-quality development of education. Countries need to combine international education and industry standards to develop their own curriculum and professional standards, formulate talent incentive policies, and strengthen international cooperation in scientific research. Only by establishing a regional educational community, conducting large-scale educational cooperation, implementing educational openness, and promoting educational innovation, can the existing problems be effectively solved.

The "the Belt and Road" community emphasizes the common idea, which is not yours or mine, but ours, and reflects the ancient Chinese thought of the unity of heaven and man, the common interests of the world, and harmony without uniformity. International cooperation in education must

be based on the basic principles of equality, mutual benefit and respect for sovereignty, and respect for political culture, educational development level and ideological differences among countries. Only in this way can the community have the possibility of harmonious co construction.

Therefore, building an educational community must have an open and inclusive mindset, share educational resources for joint construction, promote talent mobility, draw on advanced educational and teaching experience from other countries, reform domestic education, and raise the level of education and teaching in the country, as well as talent cultivation capabilities. The "the Belt and Road" education community is to share resources and complement advantages on the basis of respecting the differences and characteristics of countries, so as to promote the common development of education and provide support for the interconnection of countries along the Belt and Road.

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