

# Current Situation and Discussion of “Going Abroad” in Higher Vocational Colleges Under the Background of the Belt and Road Initiative

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**Abstract:** The Belt and Road Initiative has brought unprecedented development opportunities for domestic higher vocational colleges to “go abroad,” but it has also brought severe challenges. Driven by the Belt and Road Initiative, the development of higher vocational colleges “going abroad” has been confronted with a series of challenges, including the imperfect connection of policies, the lack of internal funds, as well as international standards, which are important factors affecting their development. Therefore, it is necessary to start from three aspects, which are policy guarantee, financing, and docking international standards. Through in-depth study of “going abroad” with the Belt and Road Initiative, we can effectively reduce the adverse impact of “going abroad” and provide a better and more innovative development environment for higher vocational colleges.

**Keywords:** the Belt and Road Initiative; Higher vocational colleges; “Going abroad”; Current situation and discussion

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## 1. Introduction

With the continuous advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, vocational education is actively participating in the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. Vocational education is constantly expanding communication channels with the world, absorbing advanced vocational education concepts in domestic and abroad, and exploring the feasibility of “going abroad,” in order to improve the global competitiveness of China’s vocational education.

## 2. The necessity of “going abroad” of higher vocational colleges with the Belt and Road Initiative

Education is crucial to the development and the prosperity of a country, and it is also the basis for people to obtain happiness and tranquility. Teachers in Chinese vocational colleges continue to work hard to bring their expertise abroad to promote educational exchanges and build a bridge of communication. Higher vocational

education is an important part of Chinese higher education system. It not only covers vocational and technical education, but also includes career planning, vocational skills training and improvement, to cultivate more capable talents for the society. Higher vocational education aims to cultivate professionals with practical skills and familiarity with international rules to meet the needs of social development. Therefore, domestic higher vocational colleges should actively participate in the integration of production and education, take the initiative to meet the needs of overseas companies, help them to improve their skills and competitiveness, so as to solve the problem of talent shortage in overseas companies <sup>[1]</sup>.

### **3. The status quo of “going abroad” of service enterprises in higher vocational colleges**

The Ministry of Education clearly stated in the “Promoting the Joint Construction of the ‘Belt and Road’ Education Action” that in order to better promote the cooperation between China’s high-quality vocational education and high-speed rail, telecommunications operations, and other industries, we should explore various forms of overseas cooperative education, and establish vocational colleges and training centers to cultivate more skilled talents who meet the requirements of “going abroad,” and provide more support for national development <sup>[2]</sup>.

With the development of industries and enterprises, the form of higher vocational education is constantly changing. In 2008, Jiangsu Hongdou Group took the lead in establishing the “Sihanoukville Special Economy Zone” in Cambodia, which marked the beginning of cross-border development of Chinese private enterprises. In May 2010, Hongdou Group and Wuxi Vocational Institute of Commerce jointly built the Nanyang Hongdou College in Cambodia, injecting new vitality into the development of Cambodia. Wuxi Vocational Institute of Commerce has reached an agreement with the “Sihanoukville Special Economy Zone” company, which will help the employees of the “Sihanoukville Special Economy Zone” company to improve their Chinese proficiency by holding Chinese and vocational skills training courses, and it will also invite Cambodian students to come from China. In 2015, Wuxi Vocational Institute of Commerce and Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone jointly invested a large amount of funds to provide the first batch of Cambodian students with three-year study opportunities to promote cultural exchanges between China and Cambodia, and greatly improved the international education level of Wuxi Vocational Institute of Commerce <sup>[3]</sup>. For example, led by China Non-Ferrous Metals Industry Association, the skills training conducted in Zambia in 2015, with the participation of China Non-Ferrous Mining Group and 8 secondary and higher colleges, has provided a new development model for industry enterprises. Another example is a state-owned holding enterprise, AVIC International Complete Equipment Co., Ltd., and 11 vocational colleges jointly carried out teacher training and vocational skills competitions in countries along the “Belt and Road” to improve local vocational skills.

In July 2015, the Ministry of Education and the Tianjin Municipal People’s Government reached a major cooperation agreement to promote the formulation of the “National Modern Vocational Education Reform and Innovation Demonstration Zone” and the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as to promote the globalization of vocational education. Excellent skills and culture can be brought abroad by providing academic education and vocational training. On March 8, 2016, Tianjin Bohai Vocational and Technical College launched the “Luban Workshop” and “Engineering Practice Innovation Project,” which injected new vitality into the career development of Thailand, provided more comprehensive vocational skills training for local professionals, thus greatly improved career development and made important contributions to social development <sup>[4]</sup>.

Luban Workshop aims to provide students with comprehensive skills improvement and teacher support

through skill competitions and technical training. Chinese and Thai expert teams jointly works on bilingual international textbooks to improve students' skills. Luban Workshop's "Mechatronics Major" Teaching Standards were reviewed by experts and recognized by the Thai education administration, providing important support for the provision of high-quality educational content and professional qualification standards, and have been widely recognized and praised. In addition, Luban Workshop has been set up in India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Cambodia, Portugal, Djibouti, and other countries, building a bridge between Tianjin vocational education and the world.

#### **4. Problems in "going abroad" for overseas education**

The problems are as follows:

(1) Lack of policy basis for overseas cooperation in running colleges

In order to achieve the grand vision of the Belt and Road Initiative, government departments have formulated a series of policy measures such as the "Promoting the Joint Construction of the 'Belt and Road' Education Action" and the "Action Plan for the Innovation and Development of Higher Vocational Education," with a vision to building a closer education alliance on the basis of the "Belt and Road" and promoting the "going abroad" of quality education in higher vocational colleges, so as to achieve the final goal of education reform, and to promote the sustainable development of education to provide strong support. Although the "Belt and Road" and "piecemeal" policies have been introduced, due to the lack of effective implementation mechanisms and lack of targeted regional targeting, the promotion and effectiveness of policies in various regions have not reached the expected level. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to vocational education and strengthen research on relevant policies in order to better meet local needs and problems<sup>[5]</sup>.

(2) High financial pressure of overseas cooperative education

Since the implementation of "going abroad" requires a large amount of capital investment, and there is shortage of vocational education resources in our country, many colleges and universities cannot afford the expenses, thus they have to give up or postpone the opening of overseas college branch. With the acceleration of globalization, many colleges and universities face various challenges such as political turmoil and economic downturn when conducting overseas cooperative education. These challenges may have a major impact on the decision-making of the college, making the college unable to bear the high investment cost. After investigation, it is found that many domestic vocational colleges are facing severe financial problems when running colleges overseas. For example, due to the instability of tuition fees in some vocational colleges, many students can only complete their studies by part-time, and some even drop out of college. The overseas education of vocational colleges has been more focused on than ever before, but the required funds are still quite tight, which makes it more difficult for vocational colleges to cooperate in running colleges.

(3) Lack of international standards leads to quality risks

Although vocational colleges have provided academic education and short-term skills training overseas, due to the lack of an effective quality assessment mechanism of overseas college, it is impossible to conduct comprehensive supervision on enrollment, employment, personnel training, and vocational college teacher team construction, which seriously affects the overall quality of education. In view of the significant differences in vocational education in countries along the "Belt and Road," the traditional college quality assessment methods can no longer meet the needs of local social

development. Hence, a set of comprehensive college quality evaluation system should be quickly established to ensure the normative, institutional, and scientific nature of overseas college running <sup>[6]</sup>.

## **5. Countermeasures for higher vocational colleges to “go abroad” to run colleges overseas**

Several countermeasures for higher vocational colleges to run colleges overseas are as follows:

(1) Actively promote exchanges and communication at the government level

In order to solve the problem of insufficient matching between national policy support and regional policies, it is necessary to strengthen the linkage between upstream and downstream to improve the level of policy convergence and guarantee. Thus, it is necessary to improve the college-running plan of “going abroad” from the perspective of the country, accelerate the introduction of policies to encourage and support the opening-up of higher vocational education, and clarify the strategic positioning, purpose, nature, role, and business scope of “going abroad,” and establish a perfect cooperation mechanism between departments to ensure the effective implementation of the policy. The “Belt and Road” Office actively promotes the cooperation of various departments, and makes joint efforts to promote the development of “going abroad” education and achieve common prosperity. In response to the “going abroad” macro policy planning, all localities should take quick actions to transform them into feasible actions, and build a bridge between “going abroad” and “the last meter” to promote the coordinated development of both parties. These actions should include establishing a linkage mechanism between local governments and enterprises, combining local characteristic industries, determining key projects for educational cooperation, reducing the cumbersome steps of overseas assignment approval, decreasing the application fee for higher vocational education, and establishing an incentive mechanism for overseas teachers, so that the macro policy of “going abroad” can be better implemented <sup>[7]</sup>.

(2) Reasonably raise and use college-running funds

In order to better support overseas colleges, a variety of financing methods should be adopted, including government financial allocations, higher vocational colleges’ own expenses, and social donations. In addition, cooperation with local governments, industry associations, and enterprises should be strengthened to seek support from more resources. First of all, the source of funds for running overseas colleges should be clearly determined, and expenditures should be strictly controlled to avoid waste. Secondly, attention should be paid to recruiting excellent talents and cultivating excellent management teams to ensure the normal operation of overseas campuses. Ultimately, we should make full use of local resources, and minimize items imported from abroad, while focusing on energy conservation and environmental protection. In order to fully develop “going abroad” colleges, higher vocational colleges must make full use of their own financial resources, establish a sound budget management system, and ensure the effective use of funds. In addition, in order to further improve the level of “going abroad” education, higher vocational colleges must also strengthen communication with the local government, strive for more financial investment, and seek help from all walks of life <sup>[8]</sup>.

(3) Enhancing quality awareness through docking international standards

By introducing overseas educational institutions, providing overseas training, providing talents and technical support, and holding international competitions, the “going abroad” model is explored to improve the effectiveness of vocational education, provide support for international production capacity cooperation, and cultivate talents with Chinese traditions.

This can cultivate high-quality local talents with knowledge of traditional Chinese culture and technical skills required by Chinese-funded enterprises. “Going abroad” aims to help enterprises to achieve cost savings and maximize benefits, and at the same time provides support for “going abroad” vocational skills job training and vocational qualification certification, so as to continuously improve the level of vocational education in China, to expand cultural exchanges in domestic and abroad, and to improve the international influence of China’s vocational education. The recognition of Chinese vocational education, enterprises, and Chinese culture by the people of the ‘Belt and Road’ countries is strengthened, the connection between people in the “Belt and Road” countries is deepened, and Chinese vocational education wisdom and solutions are provided for the development of the “Belt and Road” countries <sup>[9]</sup>.

By running colleges overseas, we will vigorously promote the “going abroad” development of China’s high-quality vocational education resources, and establish close cooperation with leading “going abroad” companies to meet their actual employment needs. Under the guidance of relevant government departments, experts, and scholars, higher vocational colleges mainly provide vocational training. At the same time, they also offer “Belt and Road” courses to meet the needs of local social and economic development. According to the latest requirements of vocational education in China, combined with the local social and economic environment, a complete set of international teaching standards will be formulated and incorporated into the “going abroad” college education system to provide local technical and skilled talents that meet the national requirements <sup>[10]</sup>.

We are committed to providing high-quality technical skills training for overseas employees, and overseas local employees of “going global” cooperative enterprises, as well as traditional Chinese cultural activities of the “Chinese + Vocational Skills” project, so as to meet the actual needs of enterprises, and provide continuing education for employees of domestic enterprises in China. This also provides more practical opportunities in order to enhance the actual combat ability of employees, and provide more employment opportunities to meet the development needs of enterprises, and accelerate the high-level development of China’s central enterprises in the international market <sup>[11]</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

The proposal of the “Belt and Road Initiative” and “going abroad” has brought important strategic opportunities to China’s higher vocational education. The former has promoted high-level meetings and cooperation forums, thereby promoting policy communication between China’s higher vocational education and neighboring countries. It also helps to realize the development of bilateral economic and technological trade. While the latter promotes the international cooperation among Chinese higher vocational colleges, and provides more possibilities for cultivating talents with multicultural background and cross-cultural ability. There are still many challenges in “going abroad.” Therefore, higher vocational colleges should examine the status quo of “going abroad” from a rational perspective, clarify the development direction, formulate development strategies with a global perspective, and effectively avoid the possible risks of “going abroad.” In addition to the theoretical research of the “Belt and Road,” we should also deeply explore the “going abroad” under the background of education in the new era, in order to find effective practical programs and solutions to promote the international development of higher vocational education.

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## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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