

# Research on Pathways for Vocational Education Cooperation in Building a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future

Mengyao Yan<sup>1\*</sup>, Xinghua Hao<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Marxism, Shenzhen Polytechnic University, Shenzhen, China

<sup>2</sup>School of Undergraduate Education, Shenzhen Polytechnic University, Shenzhen, China

Email: \*yanmyhopefree@163.com, 614544149@qq.com

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## Abstract

Driven by the implementation of the \*Vision 2030 for China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership\* and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP), vocational education cooperation has become a crucial pathway in building a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future. The theoretical dimension of this pathway lies in the fact that Marx's concept of the "free association of individuals", humanistic economics in the new era, and the vision of a global community of shared future together form a theoretical foundation spanning ultimate values, mid-level methodologies, and macro-level strategies. At the practical level, while China-ASEAN vocational education cooperation has achieved significant results in supporting connectivity, cultivating talent, and promoting people-to-people bonds, it also faces structural challenges such as an incomplete benefit-sharing mechanism, insufficient internal drivers for industry-education integration, the digital divide, and systemic disparities. To address these, it is essential to follow a vocational education cooperation pathway characterized by "digital empowerment-institutional innovation-integrated symbiosis-pluralistic co-governance" to build a closer China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future.

## Keywords

China-ASEAN, Community with a Shared Future, Vocational Education Cooperation, Humanistic Economics, Industry-Education Integration

## 1. Introduction

With the full implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partner-

ship Agreement (RCEP) and the launch of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0, bilateral relations have entered a new stage of all-round and high-quality development. Building a closer China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future requires not only the “hard connectivity” of economic and trade cooperation but also the “soft connectivity” of cultural exchanges and people-to-people bonds. Vocational education, which directly serves economic development and the improvement of people’s livelihoods, combines the dual attributes of imparting “hard skills” and integrating “soft cultural elements”. It has thus become a key area in nourishing the Community with a Shared Future.

Currently, from the “Luban Workshop” to the China-ASEAN Vocational Education Cloud Platform, promoting the construction of the China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future through vocational education cooperation has formed a multi-level and broad-based framework. However, existing research has largely focused on describing the current state of cooperation, elucidating policy implications, or analyzing specific country case studies, while systematic theoretical exploration of why vocational education cooperation is possible, necessary, and how it can be deepened remains insufficient. Has vocational education cooperation remained at the superficial level of “resource export and project transplantation”, or has it advanced to the deeper stage of “system co-building and value co-creation”? What are the theoretical foundations, practical drivers, and structural constraints behind it? This paper seeks to address these questions. It aims to construct an integrated analytical framework to systematically elucidate the theoretical foundations, practical achievements, and challenges of vocational education cooperation in building the China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future. Based on this, it proposes innovative pathways toward deeper vocational education cooperation, with the goal of providing academic reference and practical guidance for deepening the bilateral strategic partnership.

## **2. The Theoretical Logic of Building a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future through Vocational Education Cooperation**

Vocational education cooperation is not merely technical collaboration; it embodies a comprehensive theoretical logic that spans from value orientation and methodological bridges to strategic vision. Marx’s concept of the “free association of individuals”, humanistic economics in the new era, and the vision of a Community with a Shared Future for mankind together form an interlinked and progressively structured theoretical system. This framework ensures that China-ASEAN vocational education cooperation remains grounded, serving the immediate needs of industries and people’s livelihoods, while also striving to cultivate well-rounded individuals and foster a shared, prosperous regional future.

### **2.1. Value Orientation: The Philosophical Foundation of Marx’s “Free Association of Individuals” Thought**

Marx’s exposition on the “free association of individuals” lays a philosophical

foundation for vocational education that transcends instrumental rationality. Marx pointed out that “the free development of each individual is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx & Engels, 2009a: p. 53). He further stated that the future society will be built upon “the free individuality based on the universal development of individuals and on the subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth” (Marx & Engels, 2009b: p. 52). This line of thought critiques the “one-sided development” and alienated labor caused by the old division of labor, advocating that education should transform individuals from “fragmented beings” into “freely and comprehensively developed persons”. This theoretical framework provides value-oriented guidance for promoting the construction of a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future through vocational education cooperation.

First, Reorienting the Value Objectives of Vocational Education. The ultimate purpose of vocational education cooperation is not merely to cultivate “skilled individuals” tailored to industrial chains, but to foster the growth of youth from both sides into “whole persons” equipped with professional competencies, critical thinking, and a sense of social responsibility. This entails a shift from “producing tools” to “nurturing people”. Vocational education should transcend the purely “functional” tendency of serving economic systems and the logic of capital. Its higher mission lies in the liberation and free development of human beings. This means that vocational education must not only impart skills for “making a living” but also inspire the wisdom to “create a life”, thereby promoting the free and comprehensive development of individuals.

Second, Innovating the Content and Methods of Vocational Education. To cultivate “whole persons” rather than “fragmented individuals”, it is essential to integrate humanities literacy, innovation and entrepreneurship education, and education for sustainable development. In order to overcome the “one-sided development” caused by the old division of labor and alienated labor, vocational education cooperation must break down the dichotomy between knowledge and skills, mental and manual labor in both content and methodology. It should promote the integration of theoretical education with production practice, construct an integrated competence framework, and emphasize the cultivation of humanities literacy, critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility. This approach resonates with Marx’s vision of the “free and comprehensive development of human beings”.

Third, Clarifying the Value Orientation of Vocational Education. The concept of the “free association of individuals” emphasizes cultivating a sense of citizenship in advance for the formation of a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future through educational practices that embody equality and collaboration. This establishes a noble value orientation for cooperation—“cultivating people” rather than merely “producing tools”. Achieving Freedom Through Association.

The “free association of individuals” highlights the unity of individual freedom and communal development, fostering students’ autonomy, collaborative spirit,

and sense of community. By practicing equal, democratic, and cooperative interactions in the educational process, it lays the foundation for students to establish “free associations” in broader social contexts in the future.

In summary, vocational education is a form of education directly oriented toward people, aiming to develop practical skills and professional competencies. It stands as one of the most direct and widespread pathways to promoting the “comprehensive development of human beings”. Through vocational education cooperation, enhancing the capabilities of the vast workforce in China and ASEAN countries is, in itself, a practice of this core philosophy.

## **2.2. Methodological Bridge: The Integrative Perspective of Humanistic Economics in the New Era**

Humanistic economics in the new era emphasizes the trinity and mutual reinforcement of “people” (human well-being), “culture” (cultural education), and “economy” (economic development), providing a crucial methodological approach for translating Marx’s lofty ideals into concrete pathways for regional cooperation. This theory asserts that economic development must return to a human scale, with cultural exchanges and educational cooperation serving as engines to achieve sustainable prosperity.

First, Driving Endogenous Growth in the China-ASEAN Region Through Joint Investment in Human Capital. Humanistic economics in the new era places people at the center of development, with its primary practical focus being strategic investment in human capital. On one hand, as both China and most ASEAN countries are developing nations with abundant human resources yet untapped human capital potential, investing in education and health—as emphasized by Theodore W. Schultz—is key to building human capital. Such investments can significantly enhance individual productivity and national economic growth rates (Schultz, 1990: p. 70). From the perspective of vocational education cooperation in building a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future, this entails joint investment in the “human capital” of China and ASEAN through collaborative vocational education efforts. The goal is to transform the potential “demographic dividend” into tangible “talent dividends”, thereby injecting the most enduring momentum into regional economic growth.

On the other hand, as China’s economic structure upgrades, certain industries will shift to ASEAN countries with lower labor costs. This process requires a corresponding supply of skilled talent for support. Vocational education cooperation can facilitate “demand-driven” talent cultivation within the region, aligned with the needs of industrial chain division of labor. This ensures the smooth transfer of industries and prevents developmental gaps caused by skill mismatches, ultimately achieving “seamless integration” and synergistic development of industrial chains between China and ASEAN.

Second, Promoting the Progressive Deepening of the China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future Through the Spillover Effects of Functional Coopera-

tion. Humanistic economics in the new era emphasizes the generative and expansive nature of collaborative processes, which resonates deeply with functionalist theory. Functionalist scholar David Mitran argued that international cooperation can begin in technical, non-political areas (such as vocational education, environmental protection, and public health) to foster habits and institutions of international collaboration. Such cooperation generates a “spillover” effect, gradually extending to broader political and economic domains (China Ocean Development Research Center, 2020).

Vocational education, with its close ties to people’s livelihoods and low political sensitivity, serves as an ideal “pioneering field” and “trust-building mechanism” in the process of constructing a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future. Through practical cooperation in specific areas such as curriculum development, teacher training, and qualification certification, both sides can establish operational and verifiable cooperative processes and institutional norms. The mutual trust built on shared interests and professional standards constitutes invaluable “social capital”.

The spillover effects of this cooperation are reflected in the following ways: the mature mechanisms and positive atmosphere cultivated through vocational education collaboration can lay the groundwork for subsequent dialogue and consultation in higher-stakes, more sensitive areas. These include trade facilitation, digital economy regulations, cross-border financial supervision, and even non-traditional security issues. Such foundational trust and accumulated experience enable more advanced and complex cooperation to evolve progressively.

Third, Consolidating the Social Foundation of the China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future Through Social Network Embeddedness. Humanistic economics in the new era embodies a profound systemic perspective, emphasizing the networked symbiosis of multiple actors and multidimensional connections. As Robert Keohane pointed out, states are interconnected through diverse channels (including unofficial and non-governmental ones), and military power is no longer the sole dominant factor in international relations (Keohane & Hegemony, 2011: p. 67).

Vocational education cooperation serves as a vital channel for building “inter-societal interdependence”. It extends beyond intergovernmental agreements, stimulating extensive and routine transnational interactions and connections among schools, enterprises, teachers, students, and other stakeholders. The resulting dense social network comprises nodes such as institutional alliances, school-enterprise cooperation projects, academic exchange groups, and joint research centers. This network deeply “weaves together” the civil societies of China and ASEAN, fostering shared knowledge, collaborative projects, and even a common professional culture.

Such organically generated interdependence and mutual identification at the societal level are more profound and enduring than mere political declarations or economic exchanges. They solidify the social reality and psychological perception

of “shared destiny” at the very foundation of the Community with a Shared Future.

### **2.3. Strategic Guidance: The Macro Framework of the Vision for a Global Community of Shared Future**

The vision for a global community of shared future provides fundamental value guidance and a cooperative framework for vocational education collaboration from the strategic perspective of global governance and regional development. It signifies that the cooperation between the two sides transcends short-term, localized interests and elevates to a shared endeavor of creating a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable future. It also means that vocational education cooperation is not merely about transferring knowledge and skills but about fostering comprehensive human development and mutual understanding, thereby collectively cultivating the future of sustainable regional development.

The vision advocates for vocational education collaboration to shift from a “unidirectional flow” to “bidirectional co-construction”. Unlike simple financial aid, vocational education “teaches people how to fish” by equipping individuals and nations with the capacity for self-development. This is reflected in specific cooperative mechanisms that emphasize the principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits. Flagship projects like China’s “Luban Workshops” rely heavily on deep collaboration with partner institutions in ASEAN countries—from the joint design of professional standards and curriculum systems to shared investment in training facilities, and mutual training of faculty and collaborative management of teaching processes. Such deeply embedded cooperative models are not only more readily accepted but also better demonstrate China’s sincerity as a responsible major country, winning the hearts and minds of people in ASEAN nations. This ensures the equality and sustainability of collaboration, transforming it into a genuinely shared undertaking.

The vision further promotes vocational education collaboration to evolve from “skill transplantation” to “value co-creation”. Emphasizing concepts such as “harmony in diversity” “win-win cooperation” and “a world of shared prosperity”, vocational education collaboration is not about one-way knowledge export or skill imposition but about bidirectional exchanges and mutual learning, ultimately achieving value co-creation. China respects the national conditions and educational characteristics of ASEAN countries, pursuing “each appreciating their own beauty while sharing beauty with others” in cooperation. Guided by this philosophy, collaborative practices go beyond purely technical or project-based levels. Both sides must deeply understand and align with the development strategies and livelihood needs of ASEAN countries, such as Thailand’s “Eastern Economic Corridor” plan or Indonesia’s “Golden Indonesia 2045” vision. Together, they explore how to deeply integrate vocational education with local industrial structures, cultural contexts, and employment markets, thereby creating educational models and content that truly serve the common interests of the region and seek the greatest

common ground for development.

### **3. The Realistic Logic of Building a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future through Vocational Education Cooperation**

Driven by the implementation of the \*Vision 2030 for China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership\* and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP), China-ASEAN vocational education cooperation has achieved substantial progress and emerged as one of the most dynamic areas in bilateral relations. However, beneath this dynamic surface, deep-seated structural challenges are gradually emerging, constraining the advancement of cooperation to a higher level.

#### **3.1. Major Achievements and Drivers of Cooperation**

In recent years, vocational education cooperation has injected strong momentum into the construction of the China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future. Its achievements are primarily reflected in three dimensions:

##### **3.1.1. Supporting Regional Connectivity and Industrial Upgrading**

Vocational education cooperation has provided solid talent and technical support for infrastructure connectivity and industrial chain integration between China and ASEAN. Through initiatives such as the “Luban Workshops” and the “China-ASEAN Vocational Education Cloud Platform”, clusters of training projects closely aligned with the needs of industries such as high-speed rail, new energy, and digital economy have been established. For example, Chinese vocational colleges and Thai technical institutions have jointly cultivated a large number of skilled professionals in areas such as rail transit and electronic information, directly supporting the implementation of major projects under Thailand’s “Eastern Economic Corridor” plan.

“The more turbulent the international landscape becomes, the more we must steady the helm of cooperation and jointly build a path to shared success.” (CCTV News Client, 2025) Against the backdrop of profound adjustments in the global landscape and accelerated regional integration, building a close-knit China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future is a core strategic priority for both sides. As the world’s fifth-largest economy and a pivotal hub, ASEAN’s advocacy of multilateral cooperation has made China-ASEAN relations a model for regional collaboration in the Asia-Pacific. For many consecutive years, the two sides have remained each other’s largest trading partners, with bilateral trade reaching over 6.99 trillion yuan in 2024 and maintaining steady growth momentum. As negotiations for the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 advance and the RCEP deepens its implementation (Beijing Municipal Sub-Center News, 2025), digital economy and supply chain connectivity have become focal points of cooperation, significantly elevating the institutional level of regional economic and trade collabora-

tion. In this process, vocational education, through systematic synergy, has provided direct and crucial talent and capacity support for regional connectivity and industrial upgrading.

First, vocational education cooperation has precisely addressed the urgent talent demands of ASEAN countries for industrialization and infrastructure construction. Countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and the Philippines are in a phase of rapid development, facing significant shortages of skilled professionals in fields like engineering technology, modern manufacturing, and smart logistics. China possesses a mature vocational education system and extensive practical experience in relevant applied technologies, enabling it to quickly cultivate skilled workers who meet project requirements through cooperative education, standard dissemination, and teacher training. This not only directly ensures the construction and operation of major projects such as the China-Laos Railway and cross-border economic cooperation zones, reducing reliance on external high-skilled technicians, but also helps ASEAN countries enhance the modernization level and practical effectiveness of their vocational education systems through the localized implementation of models such as “school-enterprise cooperation and industry-education integration”. This achieves a transition from “external assistance” to “self-sustaining capacity”.

Secondly, vocational education cooperation serves as a crucial engine for driving the synergistic upgrading of regional industries. As China optimizes its industrial structure and restructures regional supply chains, certain production capacities and collaborative processes are extending to ASEAN countries. Vocational education collaboration can align with industrial chain layouts to carry out “demand-driven” and “complementary” talent cultivation, ensuring that skill supply keeps pace with the relocation of industries. This effectively prevents industrial gaps or efficiency losses caused by skill mismatches, promoting the “seamless integration” of regional industrial chains and enhancing overall competitiveness. This process involves not only the transfer of technology but also the sharing of industrial development models and human capital development experiences.

Furthermore, vocational education holds profound social significance in promoting youth employment, maintaining social stability, and unleashing the “demographic dividend” in ASEAN. The ASEAN region has a high proportion of young people, yet issues such as youth unemployment and underemployment remain prominent. High-quality vocational education can swiftly and effectively enhance the employability and entrepreneurial skills of young people, transforming them into tangible “talent dividends”. This, in turn, helps alleviate social pressures, reduce poverty, and strengthen the endogenous resilience of economic development and social stability.

### **3.1.2. Promoting the Cultivation of Internationalized Technical and Skilled Talent**

First, by establishing a China-ASEAN education community, it serves the Belt and Road Initiative and ensures the implementation of cooperative projects. Chinese

enterprises operating in ASEAN (such as those in infrastructure, communications, and manufacturing) have long faced challenges related to localized operations and labor shortages. However, the China-ASEAN education community can cultivate skilled talent who are proficient in Chinese technical standards while also being familiar with local cultures and languages. This significantly reduces the operational costs and communication barriers for enterprises, provides stable talent supply for Chinese companies expanding overseas, ensures the smooth implementation and long-term operation of cooperative projects, and deepens international production capacity cooperation.

Second, it facilitates the “going global” of China’s vocational education standards and models. By promoting China’s vocational technical standards, teaching resources, and vocational qualification certifications in fields where it holds advantages—such as high-speed rail, new energy, 5G, and e-commerce—to ASEAN countries, the discourse power and influence of Chinese vocational education on the international stage can be enhanced. This represents an upgrade from “product export” to “standard export” and “model export”, thereby building the international brand of “Chinese Vocational Education”.

### **3.1.3. Establishing Multi-Level Cooperation Platforms and Exchange Networks**

Cooperation with ASEAN institutions has driven the enhancement of the internationalization of Chinese vocational colleges. This is reflected in the development of bilingual curricula, the cultivation of teachers with global perspectives, the enrollment of ASEAN international students, and the optimization of the student source structure. These efforts have invigorated the dynamism and competitiveness of China’s vocational education, gradually forming a positive interactive mechanism characterized by “domestic-driven internationalization and internationally-driven domestic enhancement”.

First, it promotes regional economic integration and industrial chain synergy. With the deepening implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP), industrial and supply chains within the region are becoming increasingly integrated. Establishing a unified and efficient skilled talent system facilitates the smooth flow and optimal allocation of human resources across the region, thereby supporting the stability and upgrading of industrial chains, breaking down barriers to talent mobility, strengthening the intellectual foundation of regional economic integration, and enhancing East Asia’s global competitiveness.

Second, it builds a solid bridge for people-to-people connectivity. Vocational education, directly linked to employment and livelihoods, is a grassroots initiative that resonates with the public. Through skills training, young people in ASEAN gain the ability to transform their own development prospects, while simultaneously experiencing and understanding Chinese technology and culture firsthand. This form of “people-to-people connectivity”, grounded in tangible benefits and emotional resonance, is more robust and profound than mere propaganda. It ef-

fectively consolidates the social foundation of China-ASEAN friendship, enhances mutual trust, and reduces misunderstandings and differences at their source.

Third, it enables joint responses to future challenges. In the face of global trends such as digital transformation and the green economy, China and ASEAN can collaborate through a vocational education community to develop training programs in emerging fields like artificial intelligence, big data, and renewable energy. By jointly cultivating a future-ready workforce, both sides can seize opportunities for future development. Cooperation with ASEAN institutions also encourages Chinese vocational colleges to enhance their internationalization efforts—developing bilingual curricula, training teachers with a global perspective, attracting ASEAN students, and optimizing student demographics. This injects vitality and competitiveness into China’s vocational education, creating a virtuous cycle of “domestic-driven internationalization and internationally-driven domestic enhancement”.

### **3.2. Realistic Issues and Challenges**

Although the construction of the China-ASEAN vocational education community has achieved phase-specific outcomes, it still faces numerous deep-seated challenges in practice. These challenges not only affect the quality of vocational education cooperation itself but also directly influence the overarching goal of using vocational education as a fulcrum to drive synergistic development across economic, cultural, ecological, and other domains. Consequently, they bear on the formation of cohesion within the Community with a Shared Future.

#### **3.2.1. The Mechanism for Benefit Sharing and Strategic Mutual Trust Needs Further Development**

Currently, the mechanism for fostering benefit sharing across economic, cultural, ecological, and other fields through vocational education cooperation remains underdeveloped. Due to differences in economic development stages, industrial structures, and education systems between the two sides, expectations and benefit evaluations of cooperative projects often vary. Without the establishment of a clear and equitable mechanism for benefit sharing and cost allocation, cooperation can easily become superficial or lead to friction, undermining strategic mutual trust. This essentially reflects the classic challenges of “Collective Action” and “Benefit Distribution” in international cooperation.

Specifically, there are divergences in cooperative philosophies among different countries. For instance, cooperation with educationally advanced nations such as Singapore and Malaysia focuses on learning from their higher vocational education experiences and introducing high-quality resources. With educationally developing countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, cooperation should prioritize two-way resource exchanges at the higher vocational and college levels. Meanwhile, cooperation with educationally less developed countries such as Myanmar and Laos tends to emphasize the export of Chinese resources, models, and sec-

ondary vocational training. Without coordinated planning, these differences can result in superficial cooperation, making it difficult to form deeply integrated teaching and research communities.

### **3.2.2. Insufficient Endogenous Drivers and Transnational Synergy in Industry-Education Integration**

Industry-education integration serves as the core driver for the development of vocational education. However, in a transnational context, its endogenous drivers face significant challenges. A prominent issue is the misalignment of goals between schools and enterprises: educational institutions prioritize talent cultivation and internationalization metrics, Chinese enterprises focus on investment returns and the immediate usability of talent, while local ASEAN companies may be concerned about technology spillovers and market competition (Dai, 2025: p. 188). The lack of an effective incentive compatibility mechanism results in limited willingness among enterprises to engage deeply, leading to a “mismatch” between talent cultivation and industrial needs.

The ideal “industry-academia-research” chain—where research, teaching, and production practices are interwoven—has yet to be effectively established at the transnational level. The talent cultivated by schools often does not align well with the actual needs of enterprises, and the supply of high-quality internationalized talent falls short both in quantity and quality, making it difficult to meet the practical demands of regional industrial upgrading.

### **3.2.3. Uneven Digital Collaboration Capacity and the “Digital Divide”**

Digitalization is a key factor in deepening the community, yet there is a significant gap between vocational institutions on both sides in terms of infrastructure, teachers’ digital literacy, and the ability to develop high-quality resources. This digital divide may lead to cooperation becoming merely a one-way resource transfer, placing the disadvantaged party at a disadvantage in terms of “access, utilization, and creation”, thereby hindering the achievement of genuine co-construction and sharing. Although platforms such as the “China-ASEAN Vocational Education Digital Capacity Building Center” have been established to build a regional digital cooperation network, the overall capacity building for digital collaboration remains a formidable and long-term task.

### **3.2.4. Persistent Institutional Barriers**

Systematic breakthroughs have yet to be achieved in key institutional areas such as the mutual recognition of academic qualifications, alignment of vocational qualification standards, and credit transfer systems. This significantly hinders the free flow of skilled talent within the region, restricts the formation of a regional vocational education common market, and has become the primary institutional obstacle to deepening collaboration. Moreover, in practical cooperation, some projects still rely on past experiences and lack internationally oriented digital innovations. Certain collaborative initiatives progress slowly and lack depth, thereby impacting the overall effectiveness of cooperation.

## **4. The Practical Logic of Building a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future through Vocational Education Cooperation**

To address the aforementioned challenges and promote the upgrading of China-ASEAN vocational education cooperation from a “project-based cooperation paradigm” to a “system-integrated paradigm”, it is imperative to proceed along the path of “digital empowerment, system co-building, and pluralistic co-governance” for systematic design and innovative practice.

### **4.1. Digital Empowerment: Building a Smart, Inclusive, Interconnected, and Shared Vocational Education Community**

Amid today’s global wave of digitalization, leveraging information technology to break through physical boundaries and promote resource sharing is a prerequisite for the large-scale and in-depth development of vocational education cooperation. The core of digital empowerment lies in “interconnection” and “sharing”, aiming to build an educational ecosystem that transcends geographical barriers, remains perpetually accessible, and evolves through collaboration.

First, co-build and share a new-generation “China-ASEAN” smart vocational education platform. The construction and launch of projects such as the China-ASEAN Vocational Education Cloud Platform and the China-ASEAN Information Port mark the entry of collaboration into the era of “cloud-based sharing”. The core function of such platforms is integration and distribution. They can aggregate high-quality resources from top vocational institutions, leading enterprises, and training organizations across China and ASEAN countries, converting them into various formats like audio, video, virtual simulation experiments, and digital teaching materials, providing “one-stop” multilingual services. For example, focusing on fields urgently needed for development in ASEAN countries—such as the digital economy, green energy, and smart manufacturing—standardized “vocational education resource packages” can be jointly developed. These packages would contain a complete digital suite ranging from theoretical courses and practical guides to skill certifications. This not only significantly enriches the breadth and cutting-edge nature of teaching content but, more crucially, enables students in remote or resource-limited areas to access high-quality education equitably. This fundamentally promotes educational fairness and lays the groundwork for enhancing the region’s overall human capital.

Second, promoting transnational distance teaching and collaborative teaching research is a core application. The value of digital platforms lies in activating the flow of resources. Through stable distance teaching systems, Chinese technical experts can provide real-time instruction and answer questions for students in ASEAN countries, while skilled artisans from ASEAN can also demonstrate their unique techniques online. More profoundly, teachers from both sides can use the platform to conduct joint lesson preparation, collaborative curriculum develop-

ment, and teaching methodology discussions, jointly addressing common problems encountered in teaching. This sustained, routine professional interaction fosters the integration and innovation of teaching philosophies and methods, enabling the rapid dissemination and localized adaptation of “best practices”, thereby jointly enhancing the overall teaching quality of regional vocational education.

Finally, establishing a dynamically updated digital resource ecosystem is the sustainable safeguard. With technology advancing rapidly and industries accelerating their transformation, digital educational resources must avoid becoming obsolete after “one-time development”. This requires establishing a sustainable update and collaboration mechanism. All parties should jointly form an expert committee to regularly review, update, and supplement platform resources based on global technological frontiers and regional industrial development needs. Teachers and corporate engineers should be encouraged to upload original micro-courses and document typical work cases, fostering a virtuous cycle of “co-creation, sharing, feedback, and optimization”. Such a vibrant digital ecosystem will become the knowledge source and innovation engine for the China-ASEAN vocational education community.

#### **4.2. System Co-building: Promoting Standards Alignment, Industry-Education Collaboration, and Cultural Exchanges and Mutual Learning**

With the support of a digital foundation, China-ASEAN vocational education cooperation needs to achieve a leap from “formal connectivity” to “substantive integration,” systematically advancing around institutional co-construction, resource sharing, industry-education integration, and people-to-people exchanges.

First, improve the institutional framework and standards system to facilitate key aspects of talent mobility. Promote the establishment of a dedicated, regular vocational education working group to coordinate policies—such as curriculum alignment, joint development of quality assurance systems, and mutual recognition of teacher qualifications—under high-level dialogue mechanisms. Focus on implementing mutual recognition agreements for academic degrees and diplomas, and explore the establishment of a regional credit bank to enable credits to be depositable, transferable, and accumulable, providing institutional support for the free flow of talent and lifelong learning. Simultaneously, collaborate with leading industry enterprises to jointly develop internationally applicable vocational and teaching standards, and use these as a foundation to co-build curriculum and certification systems, thereby enhancing the regional adaptability and employability of cultivated talent.

Second, deepen industry-education integration and resource co-creation to serve regional industrial development needs. The ultimate goal of vocational education cooperation is to serve regional economic and social development. It is imperative to promote the deep transnational integration of “enterprises, educa-

tional institutions, and research institutes”. This can be achieved by jointly establishing transnational joint laboratories or industrial innovation centers focused on shared challenges such as AI applications, modernization of tropical agriculture, and public health, to conduct technology R&D and transformation. Vocational institutions from both sides should be encouraged to collaborate with Chinese companies expanding overseas and leading local ASEAN enterprises in establishing “demand-driven” training programs or modern industrial colleges. By extending classrooms to overseas production bases and R&D centers, students can learn through practice, while enterprises can obtain tailor-made talent through their participation. This approach truly achieves the organic linkage of the education chain, talent chain, industrial chain, and innovation chain.

Third, strengthen cultural and people-to-people exchanges and mutual learning among youth to solidify the social foundation of the community. The transfer of technical skills, if lacking cultural understanding and emotional resonance, makes sustained and in-depth cooperation difficult. It is essential to treat cultural exchanges as both a “lubricant” and a “binding agent” (Cui et al., 2025: p. 184). On one hand, efforts should be made to expand compound programs such as “Chinese Language + Vocational Skills” and “ASEAN Languages + Industrial Knowledge”, cultivating bridge-building talents who are proficient in both technology and culture. On the other hand, branded initiatives such as the “China-ASEAN Youth Leadership Program”, “Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competitions”, and “Digital Study Tours on Cultural Heritage” should be designed and implemented to provide platforms for in-depth dialogue and mutual growth among youth from both sides. As demonstrated by programs such as the “Greater Bay Area–ASEAN Study Support Initiative”, these face-to-face exchanges can deeply instill a sense of community—marked by solidarity, mutual assistance, and shared benefits—in the hearts of the next generation. This will solidify the social foundation of the Community with a Shared Future, making it as steadfast as a rock.

### **4.3. Pluralistic Co-Governance: Fostering an Efficient and Sustainable Vocational Education Cooperation Network**

The construction of a vocational education community is a systematic project that cannot be accomplished by the education sector alone. It requires the participation of multiple stakeholders, including governments, educational institutions, enterprises, industry organizations, and even individual teachers and students, each clarifying their roles, fulfilling their responsibilities, and working together to form a cohesive force.

Governments and policymakers act as “guides and safeguards”. Their core tasks involve top-level design and creating a conducive environment. This includes establishing the “China-ASEAN Educational Synergy Development Fund” to provide seed and matching funds for key collaborative projects; optimizing policies for international student scholarships, internships, and entrepreneurship to build

a more attractive “Study in China” brand; and shifting educational assistance from hardware provision to capacity-building focused on “teaching how to fish”, such as systematically training school principals, academic administrators, and specialized teachers for ASEAN partners.

Higher education institutions and vocational colleges serve as the “primary implementers” and “engines of innovation” in this collaboration. At the institutional level, proactive efforts are essential to actively develop a multi-level cooperative network, ranging from flagship projects such as the Luban Workshops and Confucius Institutes to “small yet impactful” initiatives like short-term exchanges and faculty workshops. It is crucial to innovate teaching methodologies, jointly develop specialized courses on topics such as regional economies and cross-cultural management, and promote project-based learning. Simultaneously, the substantive operation of university alliances like the China-ASEAN Vocational Education Alliance should be strengthened, fostering a cluster effect in areas such as joint degree programs, faculty exchanges, and collaborative research initiatives.

Teachers and students are the “micro-level carriers” and “source of vitality” in the construction of the community. Teachers should transcend their singular role as knowledge transmitters and strive to become envoys of cultural exchange and bridges for teaching collaboration. Students, in turn, should shift from being passive participants to proactive contributors, actively engaging in cross-cultural environments and leveraging social media to share authentic and positive stories of exchange, thereby serving as “people-to-people ambassadors” who foster friendship and deepen mutual understanding.

Enterprises and social forces serve as indispensable “demand-side stakeholders” and “supporters”. The deep involvement of enterprises ensures that education remains aligned with industrial realities. Companies can integrate the latest technical standards and talent requirements directly into the training process through initiatives such as establishing scholarships, donating equipment, providing internships, and participating in curriculum design. Various foundations and non-governmental organizations, leveraging their flexibility, can support grassroots cultural exchanges and academic research projects, providing valuable supplements to official cooperation and injecting diverse social capital into the ecosystem.

In summary, further advancing the construction of a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future through vocational education cooperation represents a multidimensional practical process. This process leverages digital technology as its wings to achieve extensive connectivity, deepens collaboration across domains as its core to solidify key pillars, and relies on pluralistic co-governance as its foundation to ensure systematic implementation. It profoundly reflects an evolution in paradigms: from “project-based cooperation” to “system integration”, from “skill transplantation” to “value co-creation”, and from “bilateral interaction” to “multilateral networks”. Through persistent efforts, vocational education is poised to become a solid bridge connecting the aspirations of the peoples of China and

ASEAN. It will cultivate a continuous stream of builders for a path of peace, prosperity, openness, innovation, and shared civilization, allowing the consciousness of a Community with a Shared Future to take root, flourish, and thrive in the hearts of people across the region.

## 5. Conclusion

As a crucial link between economic development and cultural exchange, vocational education plays an irreplaceable strategic role in the grand process of building a China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future. Through the construction of a systematic analytical framework, this paper clarifies the profound theoretical logic underlying this collaborative practice: it is anchored in the “free association of individuals” as its core value, guided by humanistic economics in the new era as its practical methodology, and unfolds within the strategic vision of a global community of shared future. In practice, vocational education cooperation has achieved notable successes in supporting regional development, cultivating talent, and fostering people-to-people connectivity. However, it also faces deep-seated challenges such as benefit-sharing mechanisms, industry-education integration, the digital divide, and institutional barriers.

To address these challenges, future cooperation must undergo a paradigm shift—from fragmented project-based collaboration to the systematic co-construction of an integrated ecosystem. This entails: enabling broader connectivity and inclusivity through digital means; breaking the core bottlenecks of talent mobility through institutional innovation; strengthening the foundations of collaboration through deep industry-education integration and cultural exchanges; ensuring the sustainability of cooperation through a pluralistic co-governance network. Only through such an approach can vocational education cooperation effectively advance the construction of the China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future. This study is primarily based on macro-level policy and project analysis.

Future research could further explore micro-level empirical investigations, such as tracking surveys of students, teachers, and enterprises participating in collaborative programs. This would allow for a more precise assessment of the effectiveness and impact mechanisms of cooperation, providing finer-grained evidence for policy optimization.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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