

Research on the Construction of China-ASEAN Higher Education Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Community from the Perspective of Synergy Theory

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Abstract

Driven by the "Belt and Road" Initiative and the Vision and Actions for Building a Friendly Home - China-ASEAN Educational Cooperation and Development (2022-2030), constructing a university innovation and entrepreneurship education community has become an important path to enhance regional talent competitiveness. Based on synergy theory, this paper deeply analyzes the dilemmas faced in the current construction of the community, including dynamic imbalance among multiple subjects, barriers to resource flow, fragmented institutional environment, and unsustainable synergy effects. The study proposes specific paths to anchor the collaborative core of multiple subjects, break the barriers to the flow of resource elements, break through the bottleneck of fragmented institutional environment, prevent the stability risks of the collaborative system, and consolidate the supporting system for collaborative development, so as to provide theoretical support and practical paths for solving the fragmented problem of regional education cooperation and constructing a closer regional education community.

Keywords: China-ASEAN, Higher Education Institutions, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education, Community

Introduction

Against the backdrop of profound transformation in the global economic landscape, innovation and entrepreneurship have become not only a core engine driving development but also a top priority in higher education reform, fundamentally impacting regional talent competitiveness. As an important component of cultural exchanges between China and ASEAN, talent serves as vital support for the development of both China and ASEAN countries. Since 2023, the number of students engaged in two-way exchanges between China and ASEAN has exceeded 175,000. Numerous cooperative projects have fostered partnerships between various types and levels of schools and expanded mutual visits, continuously

deepening inter-university cooperation between China and ASEAN (2025). Since the establishment of the China-ASEAN Higher Education Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Alliance, member institutions have continuously expanded areas of exchange and cooperation through the alliance platform. The alliance now comprises 42 universities and institutions, creating a new model for international education cooperation (2023).

From the perspective of synergy theory, innovation and entrepreneurship education itself is a complex system, whose effectiveness enhancement highly depends on deep synergy among educational actors, resource elements, and the institutional environment (2024). Cooperation in innovation and entrepreneurship education between Chinese and ASEAN universities possesses the natural advantage of geographical proximity but also faces practical challenges arising from institutional differences and cultural diversity. At the practical level, many explorations have been undertaken. Liu Yitao proposed building an innovation and entrepreneurship education community in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area from five dimensions: strategic objectives, policy coordination, university alliances, industry alliances, and social support (2024). Wang Jingguo focused on core aspects such as the target system, synergy mechanisms, curriculum, faculty, and evaluation (2021). Scholars like Yang Tirong emphasized aligning needs, positioning structures, expanding fields, and improving systems to promote high-quality development of China-ASEAN education cooperation (2023). Zhu Yaoshun suggested innovating management mechanisms, formulating incentive policies, establishing specialized agencies and funds, and even constructing a higher education community (2016). However, Ren Jiawei also pointed out that current community construction is still constrained by traditional concepts, imperfect operational mechanisms, insufficient policy support, limitations in evaluation standards, and weak corporate practice platforms (2023). An undeniable fact is that innovation and entrepreneurship education within the region's universities remains deeply mired in structural contradictions characterized by resource dispersion, imbalanced development, and weak synergy. On one hand, universities in different countries exhibit significant differences in core elements such as curriculum systems, faculty strength, and practical platforms. On the other hand, existing regional cooperation mostly remains at the level of fragmented projects, lacking a long-term, institutionalized synergistic framework, hindering the efficient flow and optimal allocation of high-quality educational resources within the region.

Overall, existing research predominantly focuses on domestic contexts or single disciplinary fields, lacking systematic explanations for constructing innovation and entrepreneurship education communities against a transnational and cross-cultural backdrop. The introduction of synergy theory provides a powerful analytical tool for addressing the fragmentation problem in regional education cooperation. By analyzing the synergistic dynamics, mechanisms, and performance in the community formation process, it can not only enrich the connotation of internationalization theory in higher education but also expand the theoretical scope of cross-regional synergy in innovation and entrepreneurship education.

Based on this, this paper will focus on two core questions. First, what are the fundamental dilemmas in constructing the China-ASEAN higher education innovation and entrepreneurship education community within the complex system intertwined with multiple stakeholders? Second, how can effective synergistic mechanisms be designed to build a closer

China-ASEAN higher education innovation and entrepreneurship education community? Through researching these questions, this paper aims to provide actionable practical pathways for building the China-ASEAN higher education innovation and entrepreneurship education community, promoting the transformation of regional higher education cooperation from "formal synergy" to "substantive synergy," and laying an educational foundation for building a closer China-ASEAN community with a shared future.

Dilemmas in Constructing the China-ASEAN Higher Education Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Community from the Perspective of Synergy Theory

Synergy theory reveals that the collaborative development of complex systems needs to meet the conditions such as consistent objectives of subjects, close correlation of elements and effective coupling of mechanisms. Looking at the current innovation and entrepreneurship education system in China-ASEAN universities, it is mainly faced with structural dilemmas such as insufficient main body motivation, strict resource barriers and lagging institutional mechanisms.

Imbalance in Synergistic Motivation Caused by Heterogeneity of Multiple Stakeholders

Divergent Stakeholder Objectives Leading to Lack of Synergistic Consensus

The subject composition of innovation and entrepreneurship education in China-ASEAN universities shows significant diversity, including government education departments, university alliances, industry organizations, as well as innovative subjects such as enterprises, incubators and scientific research institutions. However, there are internal conflicts in the objective functions of different subjects. Government departments pay more attention to regional political mutual trust and educational diplomacy objectives, universities focus on improving the quality of talent training and academic reputation, and enterprises take market revenue and technology transformation efficiency as the core demands. For example, when Chinese "Double First-Class" universities participate in the innovation and entrepreneurship education cooperation in ASEAN countries, the construction of joint laboratories, patent sharing and other projects are often hindered due to the conservative attitude of the counterpart universities towards the risks of technology commercialization. This goal discreteness makes the system lack the "order parameter" that can integrate the interests of all parties, and it is difficult to form the core cohesive force for collaborative development.

Stakeholder Capability Gradients Exacerbating Synergy Potential Differences

The capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship education among universities within the region exhibits a distinct "center-periphery" structure. Top universities like the National University of Singapore and Tsinghua University possess mature entrepreneurial ecosystems, while universities in countries like Laos and Cambodia are still in the infrastructure-building stage of innovation and entrepreneurship education, even facing basic issues like faculty shortages and lack of practical platforms. The capability gap leads dominant stakeholders to adopt an "output-oriented" approach in synergy, such as unilaterally dispatching teachers or providing online course resources, while neglecting the cultivation of the local educational ecosystem. Weaker stakeholders tend to fall into "dependent synergy," forming a path dependency on external resources. This asymmetric stakeholder relationship violates the essential requirement of equal interaction in synergy theory, hindering the possibility of the system's self-organizing evolution.

Efficiency Loss in Synergy Due to Fragmentation of Resource Elements*Cognitive Barriers to Cross-Border Flow of Knowledge Elements*

The core knowledge elements of innovation and entrepreneurship education possess significant context dependency. The "Internet+ entrepreneurship" model prevalent in Chinese universities faces localization challenges in less developed ASEAN countries. Myanmar's SMEs have low acceptance of digital technology, while Vietnamese entrepreneurs focus more on incremental innovation in labor-intensive industries, leading to a "lack of adaptability" in knowledge modules exported from China. Deeper cultural differences exacerbate cognitive conflicts. The value tension between the "collectivist" entrepreneurial view of the Confucian cultural sphere and the "family-based entrepreneurship" tradition in Southeast Asia often leads to disagreements over risk preferences and profit distribution when jointly supervising student entrepreneurship projects, unnecessarily increasing synergy costs.

Institutional Segmentation of Physical Resource Allocation

The cross-border allocation of physical resources such as laboratory equipment, incubation space, and venture capital faces multiple institutional constraints. Regarding hardware resources, countries like Thailand and Malaysia impose strict approval procedures for importing scientific research equipment, and entrepreneurship training equipment donated by Chinese universities often cannot be used due to certification standard differences. Regarding financial resources, inconsistent foreign exchange controls and tax policies on cross-border education funding flows among ASEAN countries make it difficult for jointly established venture funds to operate effectively. Differences in intellectual property protection regimes form "invisible barriers" to resource sharing. For example, territorial provisions in Malaysia's Patent Law regarding technology ownership make it difficult to uniformly commercialize results from joint R&D between Chinese and Singaporean universities across ASEAN, undermining the value creation capacity of resource synergy.

Weakening of Synergistic Mechanisms Due to Fragmentation of the Institutional Environment*Insufficient Formal Institutional Supply Leading to Synergy Disorder*

The current institutional framework for China-ASEAN innovation and entrepreneurship education cooperation relies mainly on policy documents like the "China-ASEAN Memorandum of Understanding on Education Cooperation," lacking legally binding synergy rules. In terms of curriculum articulation, a unified credit recognition standard for innovation and entrepreneurship education has not been established. Entrepreneurship management courses from Chinese universities often require re-evaluation for equivalent credit recognition in Indonesian universities. Regarding faculty mobility, ASEAN countries generally have not opened their education services markets. Chinese entrepreneurship mentors need to apply for special work permits to teach at local universities, involving cumbersome and lengthy procedures.

Informal Institutional Frictions Increasing Synergy Resistance

At the level of educational philosophy, Chinese universities emphasize results-oriented entrepreneurship competition achievements, while universities in the Philippines and Thailand focus more on cultivating a process-experiential entrepreneurial culture, leading to disagreements in evaluation standards for jointly organized entrepreneurship competitions.

At the level of social capital, the relational networks of the ethnic Chinese communities in ASEAN and the market-based contractual spirit in China create institutional conflicts in entrepreneurship project matching, increasing transaction costs in cross-cultural business negotiations. These informal institutional frictions act like "entropy-increasing factors" in the synergy system, continuously consuming system energy and hindering the formation of an orderly structure.

Risks to System Stability Triggered by Synergy Effect Attenuation

Vulnerability of the Hub-and-Spoke Synergy Network Model

Current regional innovation and entrepreneurship education cooperation relies on a few top universities as core nodes, forming a unipolar hub-and-spoke network centered on these institutions. While this structure enhances synergy efficiency in the short term, it carries significant "node dependency" risks. When core universities reduce investment due to policy adjustments or internal strategic changes, synergistic activities across the entire network may stall. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, some Chinese universities suspended offline international cooperation projects, forcing courses dependent on their faculty output to be interrupted, exposing the vulnerability of the unipolar network (2021,2022).

Lack of Benefit Distribution Mechanisms Leading to Stakeholder Alienation

The construction of the China-ASEAN innovation and entrepreneurship education community has yet to establish a scientific and reasonable benefit-sharing and cost-sharing mechanism. A technological achievement like the "ASEAN Minor Language Cross-Border E-commerce Platform" jointly developed by Chinese and Thai universities led to disputes over commercialization profits due to the lack of a pre-defined distribution ratio. When a joint venture incubator project between a Malaysian university and a Chinese enterprise incurred losses due to local policy changes, both parties became embroiled in legal disputes over unclear liability division. The absence of an interest coordination mechanism gradually depletes trust capital among stakeholders. Some ASEAN universities have developed reservations about China-led projects, turning instead to bilateral cooperation with Japanese and Korean universities, weakening the integrity of the regional synergy system.

Strategies for Constructing the China-ASEAN Higher Education Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Community from the Perspective of Synergy Theory

Addressing the synergistic dilemmas within the China-ASEAN higher education innovation and entrepreneurship education system requires cultivating core order parameters, constructing adaptive mechanisms, and optimizing the system structure. This approach promotes the evolution of regional education cooperation from low-level coupling to high-level synergy, achieving a spiral improvement through element linkage, mechanism integration, and system evolution.

Anchor the Synergistic Core of Multiple Stakeholders, Build a Benefit-Sharing Order Parameter Cultivation Mechanism

Create a Hierarchical and Categorized Synergy Target System

Guided by the "China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership Vision 2030," establish the cultivation of innovation and entrepreneurship talent with regional competence as the core order parameter of the community. Define three strategic directions: localization of technological innovation, synergy in entrepreneurial practice, and mutual recognition of education

standards. At the action level, establish a Synergy Governance Committee composed of education departments, university alliances, and enterprise representatives from each country. Develop a roadmap for building the innovation and entrepreneurship education community, detailing quantitative indicators such as the proportion of faculty exchange and the number of joint courses developed. At the project level, design differentiated targets for ASEAN countries at varying development stages. For instance, focus on cross-border transformation of scientific and technological achievements with universities in Singapore and Malaysia, while emphasizing basic capacity building in entrepreneurship education with universities in Laos and Cambodia. Form a synergistic system characterized by goal consensus, categorized implementation, and dynamic calibration.

Establish a Multilateral Participation Platform for Interest Integration

At the government level, upgrade the China-ASEAN Education Cooperation Week to a Forum on Synergistic Development of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education. Set up a special fund to support cross-border cooperation projects and explore the establishment of a coordinated mechanism for regional tax incentives in entrepreneurship education. At the market level, introduce third-party organizations like the ASEAN SME Federation and China Venture Capital Alliance. Develop a China-ASEAN Entrepreneurship Resource Trading Platform to enable market-based allocation of elements like technology patents, entrepreneurship mentors, and incubation space. Pilot cross-border entrepreneurial profit-sharing models. At the academic level, leverage the ASEAN University Network (AUN) to establish an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Academic Community. Develop regional quality assessment standards for university entrepreneurship education and implement systems for mutual recognition of faculty titles and joint conferral of student degrees to enhance the identity of the academic community.

Dismantle Barriers to Resource Element Flow, *build* a Cross-Border Integrated Synergistic Ecosystem

Create a Multi-Dimensional Knowledge Synergy Network

Build a knowledge flow matrix integrating "online + offline" and "foundational + cutting-edge" dimensions. At the infrastructure layer, leverage the "China-ASEAN Information Harbor" to build a regional digital sharing platform for innovation and entrepreneurship education. Integrate resources from platforms like China's MOOC platforms and ASEAN Open Educational Resources repositories. Develop multilingual intelligent translation systems to enable seamless course resource articulation. At the application innovation layer, establish an industry-demand-driven knowledge co-creation mechanism. For example, jointly develop virtual simulation courses for cross-border e-commerce entrepreneurship tailored to ASEAN's digital economy development needs, incorporating business culture cases from each country. At the institutional safeguard layer, establish a regional Intellectual Property Sharing Pool for innovation and entrepreneurship education. Develop template agreements for cross-border knowledge transfer, clearly defining ownership rights and benefit distribution mechanisms for jointly developed outcomes to reduce transaction costs for knowledge flow.

Build Physical-Virtual Integrated Resource Hubs

Explore a resource layout strategy driven by dual hubs and multi-polar linkages. Prioritize the construction of two regional entrepreneurship hubs: 1) Relying on the Shenzhen Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Youth DreamWorks to create a "China-ASEAN Technology

Entrepreneurship Incubation Base," focusing on fields like AI and new energy, providing one-stop services including cross-border office space, policy consultation, and investment matching. 2) Develop a "VR Entrepreneurship Sandbox System" simulating the business environments of various ASEAN countries for cross-border entrepreneurial teams to conduct simulated operations. Establish green channels for the cross-border flow of physical resources to enhance allocation efficiency.

Overcome Bottlenecks of Institutional Fragmentation, *build* a Synergistic Rule System Combining Binding and Non-Binding Rules

Advance Standardization of Formal Institutions

At the foundational institutional level, promote the signing of a "Convention on Synergistic Development of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education" among China-ASEAN member states, clarifying core clauses such as the community's legal status, member rights and obligations, and dispute resolution mechanisms. At the specialized institutional level, focus on breakthroughs in three key areas: 1) **Education Standard Mutual Recognition:** Formulate China-ASEAN mutual credit recognition standards for entrepreneurship education, referencing the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), stipulating equivalent conversion rules for innovation and entrepreneurship courses. 2) **Faculty Qualification Mutual Recognition:** Establish a Regional Entrepreneurship Mentor Certification Committee, developing certification standards including indicators like "entrepreneurial practical experience" and "cross-cultural teaching ability," achieving mutual recognition of mentor qualifications among member states. 3) **Entrepreneurship Project Registration Facilitation:** Jointly launch a "China-ASEAN Entrepreneurship Pass" to simplify procedures for business registration, tax filing, etc. At the operational detail level, formulate supporting documents like guidelines for organizing cross-border entrepreneurship competitions to enhance institutional enforceability.

Strengthen Integration and Innovation of Informal Institutions

Regarding cultural integration, document the entrepreneurial values of different countries and integrate them into joint training programs. Introduce mandatory courses on cross-cultural entrepreneurial leadership. Organize ASEAN Entrepreneurial Culture Workshops to promote cognitive mutual trust. Regarding consensus on concepts, advocate the concept of "symbiotic entrepreneurship," emphasizing the contribution of entrepreneurial activities to regional sustainable development. Incorporate social responsibility orientation into entrepreneurship project evaluation systems to guide entrepreneurial practice from pure profit-seeking towards value co-creation. Regarding social capital cultivation, establish a transnational entrepreneurial alumni network. Regularly hold events like the "ASEAN Ethnic Chinese Entrepreneurship Forum" and "Chinese Enterprise ASEAN Entrepreneurship Sharing Sessions." Leverage informal ties such as kinship and professional networks to reduce cooperation costs. For example, utilize Malaysian Chinese chambers of commerce to build China-Malaysia entrepreneurship matching platforms, leveraging their localized networks to enhance project implementation efficiency.

Prevent Stability Risks of the Synergistic System, Build a Dynamically Adaptive Synergistic Evolution Mechanism

Optimize Synergy Network Structure, Cultivate Multi-Polar Synergy Nodes

Focus on supporting research universities to build Regional Centers of Excellence in Entrepreneurship Education, empowering them with core functions like standard-setting and project evaluation. Select application-oriented universities to build "Specialized Entrepreneurship Education Bases," forming differentiated advantages in specific industrial fields. Establish an Entrepreneurship Education Capacity Enhancement Program, using pairing assistance and specialized training to gradually improve the endogenous development capacity of universities in less developed countries. Through this decentralization, form a network structure with multiple interconnected cores and symbiotic nodes, reducing dependency on single nodes and significantly enhancing system resilience. For example, the China-ASEAN Digital Education Alliance launched in 2023 attracted nearly 60 institutions from China, Malaysia, Singapore, and other countries in its first application round.

Establish Synergy Effect Monitoring and Adaptation Mechanisms

Develop a Synergy Maturity Assessment Model, setting core indicators such as stakeholder participation level, resource element flow efficiency, and institutional operational effectiveness. Establish a Regional Adaptability Assessment Mechanism for Entrepreneurial Talent, tracking indicators like graduate entrepreneurship success rate, survival rate of cross-border entrepreneurship projects, and regional impact of technology transfer to evaluate the community's talent cultivation outcomes. Set up a Synergy Risk Early Warning System to monitor indicators like cultural conflict indices, interest imbalance alerts, and institutional friction coefficients in real-time. When an indicator exceeds a threshold, automatically trigger adaptation mechanisms, including intervention by a temporary mediation committee or flexible adjustment of cooperation plans, ensuring system evolution within dynamic equilibrium.

Consolidate the Synergistic Development Support System, Build a Sustainable Capacity Building Mechanism

Build Professional Synergy Governance Teams

Set up a regional entrepreneurship education collaborative research center in universities, cultivate composite doctors with knowledge of pedagogy, international politics and entrepreneurship management, and focus on studying the application paradigm of synergy theory in educational communities; Cooperate with relevant institutions to organize cross-border education project management training courses to cultivate project management personnel who are proficient in international rules and have cross-cultural communication capabilities. Establish a China-ASEAN entrepreneurship education policy expert database, and hold regular policy closed-door seminars to provide top-level design consulting for community construction.

Construct Diversified Funding Safeguard Mechanisms

At the public finance level, secure support from the China-ASEAN Cooperation Fund and special funds from ministries of education to establish a Fund for Building the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Community. At the social capital level, encourage enterprises and foundations to participate through naming laboratories or setting up entrepreneurship scholarships. For instance, Alibaba Group has established a 100 million RMB ASEAN Youth

Entrepreneurship Fund to support cross-border e-commerce projects. At the market operation level, establish a Regional Venture Capital Alliance and develop Education-Industry Integration Investment Funds, focusing on university technology commercialization projects, forming a sustainable funding cycle characterized by "government guidance, social participation, and market drive."

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of profound transformations in the global economic landscape and the accelerated digital transformation of education, building a China-ASEAN higher education innovation and entrepreneurship community stands as a critical pathway for enhancing regional talent competitiveness, deepening cultural exchanges, and advancing the China-ASEAN Community with a Shared Future. Grounded in the theoretical framework of synergy, this study systematically analyzes the deep-seated challenges hindering the construction of such a community and proposes targeted synergistic optimization strategies.

The key findings include: First, heterogeneity among multiple stakeholders leads to imbalanced motivation. Significant differences in the objective functions of governments, universities, enterprises, and other actors, coupled with pronounced disparities in capabilities, result in a lack of consensus and synergy potential, as well as the absence of "order parameters" that integrate diverse interests. Second, fragmentation of resource elements causes efficiency losses. Cross-border flows of knowledge elements face cognitive barriers and localization challenges, while the allocation of physical resources is hindered by institutional fragmentation, creating multiple layers of obstacles to mobility. Third, fragmented institutional environments lead to hollowed-out mechanisms. Insufficient formal institutional support coexists with friction from informal institutions, increasing resistance to collaboration and transaction costs, thereby impeding the formation of an orderly synergistic structure. Fourth, attenuating synergistic effects pose systemic stability risks. The current unipolar, hub-and-spoke network structure, reliant on a few core nodes, is highly vulnerable. The absence of fair benefit-sharing and cost-allocation mechanisms causes stakeholder alienation, weakening systemic integrity and resilience.

Accordingly, this study proposes the following solutions: Anchor the synergistic core of multiple stakeholders by constructing interest-sharing mechanisms that cultivate order parameters. Break down barriers to resource flow by building a cross-border integrated synergistic ecosystem. Overcome institutional fragmentation by establishing a balanced, resilient framework of synergistic rules. Mitigate systemic stability risks through dynamic, adaptive mechanisms for synergistic evolution. Strengthen foundational support systems via sustainable capacity-building mechanisms. Building the China-ASEAN higher education innovation and entrepreneurship community is a systematic and enduring endeavor. Future research could further explore quantitative models for evaluating the community's performance and the empowerment mechanisms of digital technologies on synergy, thereby providing ongoing theoretical support and practical guidance for constructing a more resilient China-ASEAN education community.

Funding Projects

2021 Guangxi Philosophy and Social Science Planning Research Project: "Research on the China-ASEAN Higher Education Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Community under the 'Internet+' Background" (21FGL046).

2024 Guangxi Basic Ability Improvement Project for Young and Middle-aged University Teachers: "Research on the Construction of Community Governance under Multi-party Co-governance" (2024KY0140)

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