

## Research Paper

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# A Study on the Construction Path of the SCO Vocational Education Community Under the Concept of “Sense of Gain”: A Case Study of Luban Workshop

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**Abstract:** As an important vehicle for the internationalization of China’s vocational education, the Luban Workshop has gradually formed a prototype of large-scale deployment and institutionalized cooperation among the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states. It has become a key pivot for promoting the construction of a regional vocational education community. Guided by the concept of “Sense of Gain”, this paper systematically analyzes the practical logic and operational effectiveness of Luban Workshops in SCO countries. In practice, Luban Workshop enhances the participants’ tangible and perceivable benefits from three dimensions – sense of gain from skills education, sense of gain from career development, and sense of gain from cultural identity – through curriculum localization, industry-education integration, and intercultural exchange platforms. It has gradually established a discourse system centered on joint consultation, co-construction and sharing, as well as empowerment through vocational education. However, challenges remain, such as insufficient local integration, weak school-enterprise cooperation mechanisms, limited discourse communication and cultural identity, and a lack of coordination among multiple actors. To address these issues, efforts should be made to strengthen platform capacity building, optimize value communication, and improve governance mechanisms. The study shows that the Luban Workshop

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is not only a forefront platform for the “going global” of China’s vocational education, but also an important carrier for constructing the SCO vocational education community.

**Keywords:** sense of gain; Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states; Luban Workshop; vocational education community

## 1 Introduction: The Practical Foundations and Value Orientation for Constructing the SCO Vocational Education Community

At present, the global industrial structure is undergoing accelerated adjustment, and the demand for coordinated regional economic development is becoming increasingly urgent. As one of the most representative multilateral cooperation mechanisms surrounding China, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) faces common challenges among its member states in both industrial transformation and youth employment. The shortage of technical and skilled personnel has become a shared bottleneck restricting high-quality economic and social development across the region. Consequently, promoting regional vocational education cooperation, achieving resource complementarity, and fostering collaborative talent cultivation have become common aspirations of SCO member states.

Against this backdrop, the SCO has, in recent years, continuously deepened cooperation in education and cultural exchange. Owing to its direct connection with industrial needs and its role in improving people’s livelihoods, vocational education has become a focal area of attention among member states. China has long been actively implementing the Global Development Initiative. In August 2022, President Xi Jinping, in his congratulatory letter to the World Vocational and Technical Education Development Conference, emphasized that vocational education “plays an important role in promoting employment and entrepreneurship, facilitating economic and social development, and improving people’s well-being”. He also called for countries worldwide to “enhance mutual learning, jointly build and share achievements, and work together to implement the Global Development Initiative”, thus contributing to the realization of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Xinhua News 2022).

In September 2024, at the National Education Conference, it was further clarified that China would “build an integrated vocational education system that connects general and vocational education and promotes industry-education

integration” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China 2024). This provides a clear strategic direction for the international cooperation of vocational education and injects new momentum into vocational education collaboration among SCO member states.

In the practice of regional vocational education cooperation, the concept of “Sense of Gain” has become a key value orientation for enhancing cooperation effectiveness and strengthening mutual recognition. Originating from Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the core of the “Sense of Gain” concept lies in ensuring that the fruits of development genuinely benefit the people and remain tangible and perceptible. When extended from the field of domestic governance to that of international cooperation, this concept has become an important criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of external cooperation.

In the field of vocational education, the “Sense of Gain” is not merely reflected in material outcomes such as the improvement of skills and the increase of employment opportunities; it also encompasses spiritual feedback, including recognition of cooperative models and resonance with shared cultural values. President Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized that international cooperation should enable participating countries to “continually enjoy concrete and genuine sense of gain”. This requirement represents an extension and deepening of the principle of “joint consultation, co-construction, and sharing” within the domain of people-to-people and cultural exchanges.

As one of the key strategic pivots of the Belt and Road Initiative, SCO can further advance its vocational education cooperation by adopting the “Sense of Gain” as a guiding principle. Such an approach not only helps alleviate the shortage of skilled personnel in member states through training programs, but also enables local communities to genuinely experience the development dividends brought by cooperation. In this way, it consolidates public support for regional collaboration and provides conceptual underpinning for building the SCO vocational education community.

The Luban Workshop is an important brand platform for the internationalization of China’s vocational education. Jointly established by China and overseas partners, it is designed with the core objective of cultivating technical and skilled talent who can meet the economic and social development needs of partner countries. Integrating academic education, technical training, and standard dissemination, the Luban Workshop serves as a major vehicle that embodies the “Sense of Gain” concept in international vocational education cooperation, reflecting China’s philosophy of promoting development through education. It represents a flagship project of China’s vocational education as part of its effort to go global.

At the national level, the Luban Workshop is regarded as a “shining name card” that demonstrates the standards and institutional strengths of China’s vocational education. It also symbolizes China’s governance capacity and value orientation in global vocational education cooperation. President Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the significance of the Luban Workshop on international occasions, noting its crucial role in promoting youth employment, improving skill levels, and deepening people-to-people and cultural exchanges. The construction of Luban Workshops reflects China’s strategic vision of combining educational cooperation with people-to-people connectivity, and effectively implements the principle of “joint consultation, co-construction, and sharing” in the field of education.

Therefore, selecting the Luban Workshop as a case study for exploring the construction of the SCO vocational education community under the guidance of the “Sense of Gain” concept is justified both by its representativeness in national policy systems and its typicality in practice across SCO member states. Through pathways such as curriculum localization, faculty collaboration, and employment alignment, the Luban Workshop organically integrates skills education, cultural identity, and social trust, becoming a key pivot for advancing the development of the SCO vocational education community.

Based on this, this paper takes the concept of “Sense of Gain” as its value-oriented guidance and selects the cooperative practices of the Luban Workshop in SCO member states as the research focus. It aims to explore how such practices enhance the effectiveness of vocational education cooperation and strengthen public recognition, thereby advancing the construction of a regional vocational education community.

This paper focuses on three core questions: first, it clarifies the theoretical foundations and policy evolution of the “Sense of Gain” concept, as well as its adaptation logic in vocational education cooperation; second, drawing upon the Luban Workshop’s cooperative practices in education and training, employment promotion, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges, it analyzes the specific pathways through which the “Sense of Gain” is strengthened and the supporting mechanisms that contribute to community building; third, it summarizes the key challenges observed in practice and proposes pathways for optimizing cooperation effectiveness, improving institutional coordination, and enhancing sustainability.

Through this research, this paper seeks to provide theoretical insights and practical references for constructing a more systematic, sustainable, and widely recognized vocational education community under the SCO framework.

## 2 The Connotation of the “Sense of Gain” Concept and the Construction Logic of the SCO Vocational Education Community

### 2.1 The Formation and Development of the “Sense of Gain” Concept

The “Sense of Gain” is an important component of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, emphasizing that the ultimate goal of development is to ensure that the people genuinely share the fruits of progress. This concept runs throughout China’s domestic governance practice and has gradually extended to become a value orientation guiding China’s participation in international cooperation. The origin of this concept can be traced back to the tenth meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform in 2015, at which President Xi Jinping clearly pointed out the need to “enable the people to have a greater sense of gain” (Xi Jinping 2017a). He stressed that both policy design and governance practice should bring macro-level strategic decisions closer to people’s real experiences, so that development outcomes can be transformed into visible, tangible improvements in people’s livelihoods, thus laying a domestic, practical foundation for the “Sense of Gain” concept.

As China’s external cooperation deepened, the “Sense of Gain” concept gradually extended from a national development strategy to the sphere of international cooperation, especially in the field of people-to-people and cultural exchanges such as vocational education, becoming an important expression of China’s distinctive diplomatic philosophy. In 2016, at the Symposium on Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, President Xi Jinping explicitly introduced the “Sense of Gain” into the context of external cooperation, proposing to “enable relevant countries to continuously enjoy a tangible and genuine sense of gain” (Xi Jinping 2017b). He thus expanded the concept from a domestic governance objective into an important criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of international cooperation, providing a value orientation centered on “benefiting the people” for international cooperation. In 2019, at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, President Xi Jinping further deepened this idea, emphasizing that “we should adopt a people-centered approach to development, focusing on poverty eradication, job creation, and improvement of people’s livelihood, so that the joint Belt and Road cooperation can better benefit all peoples and make tangible contributions to local economic and social development” (Xi Jinping 2020). This

statement not only continued the core meaning of “tangible benefits” but also specified practical areas – such as poverty reduction and employment promotion – providing a clearer path for implementing the “Sense of Gain” in international cooperation and indicating the direction for cross-border cooperation in vocational education and other livelihood sectors. In 2021, at the Third Symposium on Belt and Road Construction, President Xi Jinping further stressed that “projects related to people’s livelihood are an important way to rapidly enhance the people’s sense of gain in BRI partner countries” (Xi Jinping 2022a), clearly defining both the value connotation and the practical direction of the “Sense of Gain” in international cooperation. In the same year, at the 21st Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), President Xi Jinping pointed out that “[we should] help countries in need strengthen capacity building and improve people’s livelihood and well-being” (Xi Jinping 2022b). This statement further shifted the “Sense of Gain” concept from the Belt and Road cooperation context to multilateral cooperation practices within the framework of the SCO, making it a shared value orientation guiding China’s promotion of international cooperation in different regions.

With the continuous deepening and expansion of this concept, the “Sense of Gain” is no longer confined to the sharing of material interests but has become an important criterion for assessing the effectiveness of international cooperation. It emphasizes not only the practical outcomes of cooperative projects in areas such as employment promotion, livelihood improvement, and capacity enhancement but also the construction of public recognition and cultural resonance throughout the cooperation process. In the field of international cooperation in vocational education, the “Sense of Gain” serves as a value orientation, guiding cooperation outcomes to be perceptible and tangible, and translating them into real skill enhancement and improvements in quality of life. President Xi Jinping has repeatedly stressed that external cooperation must allow all participants to “enjoy tangible and genuine sense of gain”, providing a clear value orientation and evaluation standard for vocational education cooperation.

Within the SCO framework, this concept provides an important theoretical basis and strategic direction for promoting cooperation in vocational education. By adopting an education cooperation model guided by the “Sense of Gain”, China has achieved remarkable results in advancing human resource development, improving people’s livelihood and well-being, and strengthening cultural identity. It has also laid a solid value foundation for building a stable, sustainable, and widely beneficial SCO vocational education community. This demonstrates that the “Sense of Gain” is not only an innovative expression of China’s diplomatic philosophy with distinctive characteristics, but also an important driving force for promoting regional cooperation toward joint consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits.

## 2.2 The “Sense of Gain” Concept in Contrast to Western Subjective Value Paradigms

As a homegrown Chinese concept, the “Sense of Gain” differs fundamentally from Western psychological evaluation systems that emphasize individual subjective well-being and life satisfaction, displaying systemic distinctions in cultural foundations, institutional logic, and evaluation criteria. Compared with Western psychological traditions that define measurement systems such as “satisfaction” and “happiness” centered on individual feelings, China’s “Sense of Gain”, guided by developmental philosophy, focuses more on the tangible benefits and gains of people in partner countries. In the practice of external cooperation, it reflects China’s unique values and advantages in the philosophy of international cooperation.

First, in terms of cultural foundations, China’s “Sense of Gain” is deeply rooted in the Confucian political-ethical tradition of “giving equal weight to righteousness and interests” and “being people-oriented”. It emphasizes that the outcomes of cooperation should not only represent a fair distribution of material interests but also highlight the people’s principal status and the fulfillment of social responsibilities. In vocational education cooperation, this concept is embodied in providing skill training, capacity improvement, and fair employment opportunities that promote economic development while also addressing individual dignity and social integration, embodying the value pursuit of “development for the people”. In contrast, Western studies on happiness are largely based on psychological traditions, defining happiness as an individual’s subjective assessment of life conditions and emphasizing emotional states and life satisfaction. For example, the model of “Subjective Well-Being” proposed by Diener et al. (1999) has been widely used in Western social welfare evaluations, but in cross-cultural practices it pays insufficient attention to structural factors such as institutional improvement and participation in public services, making it difficult to address the measurement needs of collective gains among developing countries. Taking the Luban Workshops in SCO countries as an example, their curriculum design and cultural philosophy commonly embody a people-centered value orientation, fostering both skill acquisition of youth and a stronger sense of cultural affinity and institutional trust in educational cooperation. This injects endogenous momentum into building a vocational education community based on emotional identification.

Second, at the level of institutional logic, the “Sense of Gain” embodies a cooperative pathway that combines state leadership, social collaboration, and public participation, emphasizing the creation of a stable and sustainable institutional guarantee system. In vocational education cooperation under the framework of the SCO, this institutional orientation is concretely reflected in joint standard development,

teacher training, curriculum localization, and employment docking, which have promoted the long-term operation and mutual benefits of cooperative mechanisms. The establishment of this institutional logic not only enhances the stability of cooperation but also promotes the gradual formation of a multi-actor, co-governance, and shared educational mechanism among SCO countries, providing institutional support for the building of a vocational education community.

Third, in terms of evaluation standards, the “Sense of Gain” emphasizes the objectivity, practicality, and sustainability of cooperation outcomes, highlighting that the people should obtain tangible and perceptible real benefits from specific cooperative projects, such as skill improvement, increased employment opportunities, and enhanced quality of life. In international cooperation in vocational education, such evaluation standards are reflected not only in the supply side of education – course quantity, teacher structure, and teaching quality – but also in whether beneficiaries can acquire actual employment opportunities, possibilities for social mobility, and long-term development support through education. Taking the Luban Workshops in SCO countries as an example, their cooperation assessments emphasize empirical indicators such as “curriculum implementation rate” “employment conversion rate” and “local satisfaction”, strengthening the application-oriented and outcome-oriented logic of vocational education. This has promoted higher consensus and sustainable momentum for cooperation within the community.

In summary, the “Sense of Gain” concept has constructed a differentiated value framework from Western mainstream paradigms of “happiness” and “satisfaction”, encompassing aspects such as cultural foundations, institutional logic, and evaluation standards. Its advantages are particularly evident in addressing the institutional demands and structural development needs within international cooperation, demonstrating stronger practical resilience and guiding power. This concept provides core ideological support for international cooperation in vocational education initiated by China. Collaboration platforms represented by the Luban Workshop, by translating the concept of “Sense of Gain” into concrete cooperation mechanisms and action paths, have not only consolidated the cognitive foundation of the SCO vocational education community, but also provided an experience reference that embodies both theoretical value and practical significance for leading the construction of a fair, sustainable, and widely participatory pattern of regional educational cooperation.



### **3 The Practical Exploration of the Construction of Luban Workshops in SCO Countries Under the Guidance of the Concept of “Sense of Gain”**

#### **3.1 The Overall Layout and Development Status of the Construction of Luban Workshops in SCO Countries**

The Luban Workshop is an important platform for promoting the internationalization of vocational education cooperation in China in recent years and a characteristic Chinese model of vocational education (Lü Jingquan 2018). It is also a global education cooperation brand highly valued by President Xi Jinping. Since the establishment of the world's first Luban Workshop at Ayutthaya Technical College in Thailand in 2016, this model of international cooperation in vocational education has rapidly developed worldwide, with 34 Luban Workshops built in 30 countries and regions around the globe (Xinhua News 2025). As a result of multi-party cooperation among governments, schools, and enterprises supported by the government (Cao Ye 2019), the Luban Workshop has gradually matured.

Particularly among SCO member states, the Luban Workshop has gradually emerged as a vital platform and strategic pivot for deepening vocational education cooperation. President Xi Jinping has consistently underscored the importance of the Luban Workshop at multiple high-level diplomatic events. On September 17, 2021, during the 21st Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), President Xi Jinping announced China's plan to establish 10 Luban Workshops in SCO member states within the next three years (Xi Jinping 2022c), clearly outlining the layout of the Luban Workshops in the SCO regional cooperation framework. A series of subsequent high-level diplomatic engagements have further advanced this initiative. In February 2022, during his meeting with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, President Xi Jinping proposed accelerating the establishment of the first Luban Workshop in Central Asia in Tajikistan. In September 2022, during his meeting with Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, both sides agreed to explore the establishment of a Luban Workshop in Kazakhstan to inject new momentum into bilateral educational cooperation. In October 2023, during his meeting with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, he called for accelerating the construction of the Luban Workshop. On July 2, 2024, while meeting with Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, he announced China's decision to

open a second Luban Workshop in Kazakhstan. On July 3, 2024, during his meeting with Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov, he emphasized the need to fully leverage platforms such as the Luban Workshop to cultivate more successors to carry forward China-Kyrgyzstan friendly cooperation. In September 2025, during the 25th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization held in Tianjin, he proposed that within the next five years, China would establish 10 Luban Workshops in SCO member states and provide 10,000 human resources training opportunities (China Daily 2025). This latest statement underscores the Chinese government's strong emphasis on the development of Luban Workshops, highlights the platform's continued potential for expansion under the SCO framework, and further demonstrates the significant value of Luban Workshops within the regional vocational education cooperation system.

As of now, the initial layout of Luban Workshops within SCO countries has taken shape: Russia Luban Workshop is housed at the Moscow Technical University of Communications and Informatics; Kazakhstan has set up Luban Workshops at both the D. Serikbayev East Kazakhstan Technical University and L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University; Kyrgyzstan Luban Workshop is established at the Kyrgyz State Technical University; Tajikistan Luban Workshop operates in partnership with the Tajik Technical University; Uzbekistan Luban Workshop is based at the Tashkent State Transport University; Indian Luban Workshop is located at the Chennai Institute of Technology; and Pakistan Luban Workshop is situated at the Punjab Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority.<sup>1</sup>

The construction and distribution of Luban Workshops in SCO countries have already begun to demonstrate a strong momentum toward shared, mutually beneficial vocational training and education. They serve as a vivid embodiment of the “joint consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits” principle within the SCO framework. At the same time, this cooperation model has tangibly enhanced member states' sense of gain in skills development, employment improvement and people-to-people and cultural exchanges, laying a solid practical foundation for building a more cohesive and sustainable vocational education community.

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<sup>1</sup> Lü Jingquan, keynote address at the “Wisdom for the SCO: 2025 International Symposium on Vocational Education Governance,” titled “China's Indigenous Teaching Model and Global Education Brand: EPIP and Luban Workshops in SCO Countries – Cooperation and Development”.

## 3.2 The Content Representation of the “Sense of Gain” in the Construction of Luban Workshops in SCO Countries

### 3.2.1 Sense of Gain in Technical Education

As the flagship platform for Chinese vocational education “going global”, the Luban Workshop is dedicated to cultivating practice-oriented, innovative technical talent. Centering on the real-world needs of Central Asian economies and emerging industries, it co-builds training bases and develops localized curricula and standards, markedly raising the quality and relevance of skills education and giving young people a stronger sense of gain from high-level technical training. For example, the Kazakhstan Luban Workshop – hosted by D. Serikbayev East Kazakhstan Technical University – concentrates on new-energy vehicles and intelligent-connected directions, offering seven standardized courses such as “Theory of Pure Electric Vehicle Operation” “Electric Vehicle Equipment” and “Assembly Technology for Unmanned Vehicles”, together with hands-on teaching manuals, injecting advanced teaching resources and an engineering-practice system into Kazakhstan’s transport-related majors. The Uzbekistan Luban Workshop, based at Tashkent State Transport University, targets modern logistics management and IT, introducing a smart-logistics training system and enterprise internships that equip students with state-of-the-art supply-chain operation skills. In addition, the Kyrgyzstan Luban Workshop has set up training modules in energy engineering, construction, and water conservancy, gaining favorable recognition from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Energy. While Turkmenistan has launched Luban Workshop teacher training at the oil and gas universities, gradually weaving a multi-tiered regional education network. As heads of several Central Asian universities have noted, the Luban Workshop not only supplies cutting-edge courses and equipment but also, through its “practice-orientation, industry-education integration” philosophy, effectively underpins the educational pillar of Central Asian countries’ innovation-driven development strategies (CNR 2025).

### 3.2.2 Sense of Gain in Career Development

The Luban Workshop not only focuses on imparting technical skills but is also committed to connecting the entire chain between education and employment, providing substantive and sustainable career development paths for young people in Central Asia. Through multi-level cooperation with local enterprises, Chinese-funded institutions, and government departments, the Luban Workshop has

promoted the establishment of an integrated mechanism combining “teaching, training, and employment”, enabling training outcomes to be effectively transformed into job opportunities and enhancing young people’s sense of career identity and economic gain. Taking the Tajikistan Luban Workshop as an example, since its establishment, the project has been closely aligned with the country’s actual needs for infrastructure development and skilled personnel shortages, offering urgently-needed professional courses and practical training in surveying and mapping, construction, and intelligent manufacturing. As of now, more than 1,500 local trainees from Central Asia have received systematic vocational training. Data shows that the employment rate of graduates from this workshop has reached 70 %, with a considerable number employed in key national industries and government institutions, such as the Tajikistan’s Committee for Architecture and Construction, thus achieving effective linkage from skills training to high-quality employment. This practice demonstrates that the Luban Workshop has become not only a platform for technical education but also an important channel for young people to achieve social mobility, improve their quality of life, and participate in national development (CNR 2025).

### **3.2.3 Sense of Gain in Cultural Identity**

The Luban Workshop has also played an important role in promoting people-to-people and cultural exchanges and cultural communication, deepening the understanding and identification of the young generation in SCO member states with Chinese culture, the vocational education model, and concepts of social governance, while fostering cultural exchange and value sharing among member states. For example, representatives from multiple countries, including Russia and Kyrgyzstan, deeply experienced China’s vocational education system and technological culture during their visits to the Luban Workshop Exhibition and the industry-education integration base. Among them, Khodachek, Director of the Center for Eurasian Studies at the European University at St. Petersburg, personally operated a laser marking machine during his visit and engraved his name on a metal plate, calling it “a wonderful memory”. He spoke highly of the positive significance of the Luban Workshop in promoting the synergy between education and development in the context of globalization. Baktygulov, head of the Institute for World Politics of Kyrgyzstan, noted that the introduction of robotics and unmanned driving technologies by the Luban Workshop has injected new vitality into his country’s technical education (Xinhua News 2025). More importantly, the Luban Workshop has promoted bilateral in-person interaction between teachers and students through a combined model of “going global” and “bringing in”. For instance, after learning

CNC technology, a Luban Workshop student said, “I feel that the theoretical knowledge I have learned has come to life.” He plans to bring the results of his study in China back to his home country to promote cooperation in technical and vocational education between China and Egypt (Xinhua News 2025). These cross-cultural exchange practices have gradually deepened the understanding and identification of young people from SCO countries with China’s vocational education philosophy, governance model, and craftsmanship spirit, making the Luban Workshop not only a platform for technical cooperation but also an important bridge for emotional communication and value sharing between China and its neighboring countries.

### **3.3 The Discursive Construction of the “Sense of Gain” in the Building of Luban Workshops in SCO Countries**

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that it is necessary to strengthen the development of a discourse system for philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics. In international cooperation, China should not only provide material and technological support but also export theories, discourses, and knowledge systems that embody a distinctive Chinese style, spirit, and character. As an important platform for the internationalization of China’s vocational education, the Luban Workshop has not only accumulated rich practical experience but has also, in practice, gradually built and refined a Chinese-style vocational education cooperation discourse system centered on the concept of “sense of gain”. It has thus become important discursive support for building a community of shared future between China and SCO countries.

#### **3.3.1 The Discursive Construction of “Joint Consultation, Joint Contribution, and Shared Benefits”**

“Joint Consultation, Joint Contribution, and Shared Benefits” is an important component of Xi Jinping’s diplomatic philosophy with Chinese characteristics in the new era and also a core concept emphasized by China in international vocational education cooperation. The construction of Luban Workshops in SCO countries has deeply embodied the connotation of this discourse. Taking the Luban Workshop as a platform, China and other member states have consistently emphasized equality in dialogue and a demand-oriented approach, respected local subjectivity, avoided the traditional “aid-oriented” output model, and highlighted joint consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits in decision-making, platform building, and outcome sharing. This discursive expression and logic of action clearly convey China’s values in foreign cooperation – equality, mutual benefit, and win-win results – allowing the discourse system of “joint consultation, joint contribution,

and shared benefits” to gradually gain broad recognition in the field of international cooperation.

### **3.3.2 The Discursive Construction of Vocational Education Empowerment**

The Luban Workshop not only focuses on the teaching of vocational skills but also emphasizes the important discourse of “vocational education empowerment”, advocating for enhancing the developmental capacity of SCO member states – particularly their youth – through high-quality vocational education. This discursive construction deeply reflects China’s long-term and empowerment-oriented development philosophy in international cooperation and highlights the value influence of China’s vocational education cooperation model.

### **3.3.3 The Discursive Construction of Cultural Affinity and Value Identification**

The Luban Workshop has further built a discourse system centered on cultural affinity and value identification, emphasizing that vocational education concerns not only the economy and employment but also cultural identity and people-to-people connectivity. In practice, this discourse system has effectively enhanced the understanding and awareness of young people in SCO countries toward Chinese culture, institutions, and values, thereby strengthening mutual affection among the people and social cohesion.

### **3.3.4 The Discursive Construction of a Community of Shared Future with Neighboring Countries**

Against the backdrop of profound changes in the international landscape, President Xi Jinping’s diplomatic vision of “greater neighborhood diplomacy” and the strategy of “building a community of shared future with neighboring countries” have deeply influenced the discursive logic underlying the development of the Luban Workshops. The successful practice of Luban Workshops in SCO countries vividly demonstrates the formation and dissemination of this discourse system, effectively strengthening regional countries’ sense of identification with the concept of “a community of shared future with the greater neighborhood”.

Discourse is practice, and discourse is also power. Through vocational education cooperation, the Luban Workshop has, in practice, gradually refined an international cooperation discourse system with distinct Chinese characteristics – from “joint consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits” and “vocational education empowerment” to “cultural affinity and value identification”, and finally to the

“community of shared future with neighboring countries”. In specific practices, it has constructed a discourse system that embodies both theoretical depth and practical orientation. This discursive construction not only exemplifies the dissemination path of China’s development philosophy but also realizes innovation in the discourse system, promoting deep integration between China’s vocational education practices and international consensus. As a result, it has expanded the knowledge system, theoretical system, and discourse system of vocational education internationalization, and has provided the international community with a clear, tangible, and actionable discursive foundation for understanding China’s philosophy, recognizing China’s model, and participating in China’s initiatives.

## **4 Analysis of the Challenges and Problems Facing the Development of Luban Workshops in SCO Countries from the Perspective of the “Sense of Gain”**

Within SCO member states, the Luban Workshop has gradually forged a relatively stable footprint: The number of cooperative projects keeps rising and the operating mechanisms are ever more mature, furnishing the region with a solid foundation and a living template for vocational education collaboration. Under the guidance of the principle of “joint consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits”, the golden brand of the Luban Workshop has grown increasingly prominent, initially demonstrating the radiating effect and developmental vitality of a transnational vocational education platform. However, in the process of further deepening cooperation, promoting localization, and establishing long-term mechanisms, several pressing practical challenges remain to be addressed. These issues involve multiple dimensions, including local integration capacity, efficiency of resource adaptation, dissemination and cognition systems, and multi-party coordination mechanisms, all of which affect the sustainability of Luban Workshop cooperation projects and the tangible sense of gain among regional countries.

### **4.1 Insufficient Local Integration: Constraining Partner Countries’ Skill Acquisition and Value Identification, Undermining the Foundation of the “Sense of Gain”**

Local integration is the key foundation for the sustainable development of Luban Workshops, yet it remains conspicuously insufficient in practice. First, language

barriers continue to be one of the major factors restricting teaching effectiveness. In the training environments of Central Asian countries, Luban Workshops mainly use Russian and local languages (such as Kazakh and Uzbek) as primary communication media. However, the textbooks and some teaching materials used in the projects are mostly imported directly from China. Switching between languages increases learning difficulty to some extent, affecting learners' motivation and receptivity. Especially for skill-oriented courses, unfamiliarity with the language often directly impacts learners' understanding and mastery of key content such as technical terms and operational procedures.

Meanwhile, the shortage of teachers with bilingual proficiency and cross-cultural understanding has significantly limited the ability of Luban Workshops to achieve localized adaptation and cultural connection during the teaching process. Such composite teachers, who not only need to be familiar with China's vocational education system but also deeply understand the host country's linguistic environment, educational system, and cultural practices, are crucial for the in-depth implementation of the workshops. However, there is still a lack of a systematic cultivation mechanism for such talent.

Second, some Luban Workshops still rely heavily on standardized resources provided by the Chinese side in developing curriculum standards and teaching materials. They lack dynamic adjustment mechanisms aligned with local industrial structures and the pace of technological updates. Certain course content is disconnected from the actual job requirements of local enterprises, resulting in limited adaptability of trainees in the local job market after completing their training. This, to a certain extent, weakens the Luban Workshops' training objectives of skill enhancement and employment orientation.

In addition, cooperation between some workshops and local educational institutions remains at the level of project coordination, lacking in-depth mechanisms for joint research and development, co-building of curricula, and joint training of faculty. Consequently, local colleges and vocational schools are not fully mobilized, undermining the long-term operational capacity and local recognition of the projects. These shortcomings in local integration directly impede trainees from efficiently acquiring skills suited to local needs and reduce the sense of identification among local educational stakeholders with the project – ultimately diminishing the core “sense of gain” of partner-country citizens in vocational education cooperation.



## **4.2 Poor School-Enterprise Collaboration Mechanisms: Causing a Misalignment Between Skill Training and Employment Demands, Reducing the Practical Effectiveness of the “Sense of Gain”**

One of the important features of the Luban Workshop is school-enterprise cooperation; however, many challenges remain in its practical implementation. School-enterprise cooperation requires not only direct interaction between schools and enterprises but also coordinated development in technical standards, curriculum design, teacher training, and talent cultivation objectives. Yet, in some workshops within SCO countries, such cooperation often remains at the level of simple company visits, short-term internships, or employment recommendations, lacking truly in-depth collaboration in technology and curriculum co-development.

For example, according to the report submitted at the Tianjin SCO Vocational Education Governance Conference, although some Chinese-funded enterprises have participated in the construction of Luban Workshops locally, their roles are mostly limited to “coordination”, and the number of enterprises actively involved in technology development and education training remains small. Moreover, enterprises have generally reported that some of the trainees trained by Luban Workshops still need further improvement in technical adaptability, indicating that the current school-enterprise cooperation mechanism still shows certain deviations in linking teaching directly with employment.

At the same time, due to the lack of more flexible and incentive-based institutional design, the willingness and enthusiasm of local enterprises – especially non-Chinese-funded ones – to participate are not high. This has objectively weakened the Luban Workshop’s ability to take root in the local economic ecosystem and limited the diversity of employment paths for graduates. Such shallow school-enterprise collaboration has led to a mismatch between skill training and employment demands, making it difficult to achieve the expected goal of “training leading to employment”, narrowing learners’ career development space, and significantly reducing their actual sense of gain in the cooperation process.

## **4.3 Weak Discourse Communication and Cultural Identity: Affecting Brand Awareness and Emotional Resonance, Undermining the Recognition of the “Sense of Gain”**

The implementation of the Luban Workshop in SCO countries has already received positive responses; however, deficiencies remain in discourse communication and cultural identity. On the one hand, from international media to the local public, awareness of the Luban Workshop brand is still limited. There are relatively few

related reports in international mainstream and new media platforms, which has, to some extent, affected the international visibility and local acceptance of the Luban Workshop brand.

On the other hand, achieving effective communication in cross-cultural dissemination also poses challenges. During the promotion process of the Luban Workshop, cultural exchange activities have tended to focus more on cultural display, while insufficient attention has been paid to the absorption of local culture and bidirectional interaction. This has affected the recognition of the Luban Workshop among local youth and teachers as a platform for two-way cultural exchange. Meanwhile, inadequate understanding and awareness of Chinese educational concepts within local societies have also influenced the long-term rooting of the Luban Workshop in the local cultural ecosystem and its effectiveness in fostering cultural identification. The weakness of brand awareness and the lack of cultural interaction have made it difficult for local people to fully understand the value significance of the Luban Workshop or to establish emotional resonance with it, thereby weakening their sense of gain and recognition of the outcomes of cooperation.

#### **4.4 Absence of Collaborative Management Among Multiple Stakeholders: Reducing Project Operational Efficiency and Undermining the Sustainability of the “Sense of Gain”**

The long-term operation of the Luban Workshop hinges on effective synergy and governance among schools, enterprises, governments and other stakeholders. Yet, within SCO member states, its management and coordination mechanisms are still immature; benefit-sharing, resource allocation, responsibility demarcation and communication channels all await institutional refinement. According to the research report provided at the Tianjin Vocational Education Governance Conference, some Luban Workshop projects have relatively loose daily management and decision-making mechanisms, with unclear boundaries of responsibility and vague role definitions among the participating parties. As a result, a phenomenon has emerged in which “schools focus on teaching, enterprises focus on production, and governments focus on supervision”, leading to fragmented coordination and an unsmooth collaborative management mechanism.

Moreover, due to the absence of institutional guarantee mechanisms, it is often difficult to properly coordinate key issues such as joint teacher training, funding allocation, and the sharing of technological achievements during project implementation. This has, to some extent, reduced the overall effectiveness of collaboration and the sustainability of the projects in practice. For instance, some Luban Workshop projects rely on a single funding source and lack diversified financial channels and institutional support, resulting in high operational risks and making sustained

localization and large-scale expansion difficult to achieve. The absence of effective collaboration among multiple stakeholders not only reduces operational efficiency but also increases management risks, making it difficult for the outcomes of cooperation to consistently and sustainably benefit the public, thereby directly threatening the sustainability of the sense of gain.

The above-mentioned challenges highlight that the Luban Workshops still need further optimization and improvement in aspects such as local integration, school-enterprise cooperation, cross-cultural communication, and collaborative management mechanisms. The presence of these problems not only constrains the practical operational efficiency of the Luban Workshops but also limits their potential for further promotion and deepening among the SCO member states. More importantly, they directly affect the “sense of gain” experienced by local participants in vocational education cooperation, becoming an obstacle to building a shared vocational education community within the SCO framework. Guided by the concept of “sense of gain”, how to use the Luban Workshop as a fulcrum to systematically enhance cooperation quality, strengthen institutional support, and expand cultural communication will serve as the crucial pathway and focal direction for advancing the development of an SCO vocational education community.

## **5 The Pathway for Building an SCO Vocational Education Community Based on the “Luban Workshop” Under the Guidance of the “Sense of Gain” Concept**

The development practice of the Luban Workshops in SCO member states has become a landmark platform for China’s vocational education “going global” and serves as a crucial vehicle for building a vocational education community among SCO countries. However, the existing challenges – such as insufficient local integration, loose school-enterprise collaboration, weak communication and recognition, and the absence of diversified governance mechanisms – have objectively limited the regional public’s perceptual experience of the cooperation outcomes in terms of skills, employment, culture, and institutions, thereby hindering the comprehensive implementation of the “sense of gain” concept. Therefore, starting from the perspective of “sense of gain”, this paper explores sustainable pathways for advancing the construction of the SCO vocational education community from three major dimensions: platform capacity building, the cultivation of value recognition, and the improvement of cooperation mechanisms.

## **5.1 Strengthen the Local Support System and Consolidate the Foundation of the Vocational Education Community Through a “Sense of Skill Attainment”**

As a practical unit for building a shared community, the Luban Workshop's localization capacity directly influences both the effectiveness of cooperation and the public's perception of skill development. On the one hand, it is essential to strengthen the development of a local teaching team equipped with bilingual competence and cross-cultural literacy. This can be achieved through jointly-organized teacher training programs and job-oriented language courses, which enhance the interactivity and adaptability of the teaching process and increase students' tangible sense of skill acquisition. On the other hand, efforts should be made to promote deeper alignment between the curriculum system and the local industrial structure. Courses should be dynamically updated in line with job standards and enterprise needs to ensure that teaching content keeps pace with employment market trends. This approach will not only improve trainees' job matching but also help build a curriculum ecosystem grounded in local industry realities, thus reinforcing the “practical relevance” and “applicability” of vocational education. In addition, local and Chinese resources should be effectively integrated to build sustainable training platforms that link teaching with employment, thereby enhancing the workshop's capacity for long-term development and strengthening its social recognition.

With continued progress in localization, the Luban Workshops will be better positioned to serve as local centers for skills training, achieving a transformation from “technology export” to “cooperative integration”. This will provide the public with a tangible and perceptible “sense of skill attainment” and lay a solid foundation for building a vocational education community.

## **5.2 Optimize the Communication and Expression Mechanism to Foster a Shared Consensus Within the Vocational Education Community Through a “Sense of Identity Attainment”**

The construction of the SCO vocational education community is not only an institutional undertaking but also a humanistic endeavor that requires the support of shared values. In this process, a “sense of identity attainment” serves as a vital foundation for stimulating participation and strengthening collaborative cohesion. The Luban Workshop should optimize its communication logic across three dimensions: communication system, content expression, and public engagement. On the one hand, it can enhance its public appeal by presenting authentic and convincing “sense-of-gain narratives” that demonstrate how Luban Workshops promote

employment and improve people's livelihoods. On the other hand, it should encourage diverse participants – including teachers and students from partner countries, enterprise representatives, and other stakeholders – to co-create content. Through bilingual short videos, live interviews, and other new-media formats, they can share “cooperative experience” in a more engaging and socially resonant manner.

More importantly, efforts should be made to jointly build a discourse system for vocational education cooperation, with “sense of gain” as the core concept. This will help member states reach fundamental consensus on the value of educational cooperation, development pathways, and institutional design, gradually forming a discourse sphere with distinct regional characteristics. Such collaboration will not only enhance the brand recognition of the Luban Workshop but also improve the acceptance of China's vocational education approach, thereby strengthening the cultural identity foundation of the vocational education community.

### **5.3 Promote Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration to Strengthen the Resilience of the Vocational Education Community Through a “Sense of Governance Attainment”**

The sustainable development of vocational education cooperation depends on effective collaboration and institutional support among diverse stakeholders – governments, educational institutions, enterprises, and society. In practice, the operation of Luban Workshops should gradually transition from a “project-based” model to a “mechanism-based” one, establishing a systematic framework characterized by a clear division of responsibilities, stable resource allocation, and coordinated governance processes. On the one hand, collaboration mechanisms among all participating entities should be improved in areas such as education project planning, teaching resource sharing, and internship and employment arrangements, ensuring that each actor fulfills its proper role in building the vocational education community. On the other hand, multi-level and multi-channel resource provision and feedback mechanisms should be explored to institutionalize support in key areas such as funding, policy alignment, and project evaluation.

Particularly in the realm of governance evaluation, “sense of gain” indicators should be introduced as a key dimension for assessing cooperative outcomes. A quantifiable evaluation framework can be built around aspects such as trainees' skill development, employment conversion rate, enterprise participation, and public recognition, thereby realizing the principle of “enhancing institutional optimization through cooperation outcomes” and advancing the development of a multi-stakeholder governance system in depth. As the multi-stakeholder collaboration mechanism matures, Luban Workshops will no longer be confined to the role of a

technical training platform. Instead, they will evolve into cooperative entities characterized by joint participation, co-governance, and shared development, further strengthening the institutional foundation and replicable experience for building an education community within the SCO framework (Wang Lan 2021).

The practice of Luban Workshops in SCO member states represents not only the forefront platform for China's international cooperation in vocational education but also a strategic pivot for innovating regional education governance concepts. From “sense of skill attainment” to “sense of institutional identity”, and from localized practical exploration to regional discourse construction, their development trajectory fully demonstrates the unique value of the “sense of gain” concept in regional education cooperation. Looking to the future, we should continue to adopt “sense of gain” as a core value orientation and take the Luban Workshop as a concrete foundation for action. Efforts should focus on deepening pathway design in educational provision, cultural communication, and collaborative governance, so as to promote institutional synergy among SCO member states in areas such as mutual recognition of educational standards, facilitation of talent mobility, and shared development agendas. In this process, the SCO vocational education community will not only serve as a practical arena for the public to experience a genuine sense of gain but also become an important platform to advance the building of a regional community with a shared future and to participate in global education governance – contributing Chinese perspectives, experience, and solutions to international vocational education cooperation.

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