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Review Article

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## Contemporary Application of Teaching Mode at Southwest Associated University from a Historical Perspective: A Literature Review Based on Yunnan S University

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### Abstract

As a remarkable achievement in the history of modern Chinese education, the National Southwest Associated University gained distinction for its innovative institutional framework, flexible teaching model, rigorous governance and outstanding educational outcomes. Founded during the war, the university adhered to the guiding motto of "Perseverance and Excellence," cultivating a generation of eminent scholars and professionals during a period of national crisis. Drawing on a historical perspective, this study takes the teaching model of the National Southwest Associated University as a point of departure to explore its pedagogical implications for University S in Yunnan and its innovation and inheritance by University S. Particular emphasis is placed on instructional approaches such as professor-centered lecture, team teaching, and the integration of research and instruction, which collectively generated teaching models including discovery teaching and inquiry method. This study focuses on a comparative analysis of the teaching model of the National Southwest Associated University and that of University S in Yunnan, with the aim of offering constructive recommendations that may contribute to its reform of pedagogical models.

**Keywords:** Southwest Associated University, Teaching model, A Case University in Yunnan

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### 1. Introduction

The National Southwest Associated University (commonly abbreviated as Southwest Associated University) was established through the joint efforts of Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Nankai University following the full outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. It has been regarded by scholars both in China and abroad as the most successful and most legendary institution founded during wartime. The renowned historian Joseph Needham even remarked publicly that it could be compared with Cambridge, Oxford, and Harvard. During a mere eight-year period from 1938 to 1946, Southwest Associated University brought together many of China's most renowned experts, scholars, and professors, while cultivating a large number of outstanding talents. Among its prominent alumni were Nobel Prize laureates Chen Ning Yang and Tsung-Dao Lee, as well as eminent scientists such as Deng Jiaxian and Zhu Guangya, who later contributed to China's nuclear and space program, which achieved breakthroughs in the atomic bomb, hydrogen bomb, and satellite. The achievements of the university exerted a profound influence on the development of China's educational enterprise. The American scholar John Israel (1988) commented on Southwest Associated University:

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“At a time when the nation was extensively borrowing ideas from abroad, the Chinese could take pride in their own modern educational system, and, within less than half a century, were able to establish a university of world-class standards. The legacy of this university belongs to all humankind.” The legacy of this university belongs to all humankind”. The significance of the National Southwest Associated University in the history of modern Chinese education can hardly be overstated. (Qian and Gao, 2003) Under extremely difficult conditions, Southwest Associated University cultivated a large number of outstanding talents for the nation and society. It was described as the most impoverished yet the greatest university of its time, and has since become a legend in the history of modern Chinese education. These remarkable achievements were evidently closely related to its teaching model. Guided by the principles of academic freedom and inclusiveness, the university adhered to faculty governance, promoted instruction by distinguished scholars, and implemented the idea of liberal education, thereby creating a distinctive model of teaching unique to that historical period. The elective course system and credit system implemented by Southwest Associated University continue to be adopted today. Moreover, the university gave concrete expression to John Dewey’s educational philosophy of “learning by doing,” enabling students to acquire genuine knowledge and practical skills through practice and to apply what they had learned. Southwest Associated University adhered to Confucius’s heuristic teaching principle of teaching students in accordance of their aptitude, encouraging students to identify their own interests and thereby fostering the capacity to learn effectively and with genuine enthusiasm. This demonstrates that the teaching model of the university had, in many respects, already sketched a blueprint for the educational reforms of contemporary higher education.

## 2. Literature Review

A search of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) using the National Southwest Associated University as the subject indicates a substantial body of scholarship, including 1,890 journal articles, 593 theses and dissertations, 54 conference papers, 156 newspaper articles, and 28 books. A search for literature on the teaching of the National Southwest Associated University reveals 352 journal articles, 255 theses and dissertations, 12 conference papers, 4 newspaper articles, and 9 books. A search for literature on the teaching model of the National Southwest Associated University yields 4 journal articles and 11 theses and dissertations. Research on Southwest Associated University has predominantly focused on its historical significance, legacy, educational contributions, and overall influence. Besides, discussions of its teaching model have been largely confined to specific disciplines. At present, research integrating the teaching model of Southwest Associated University with its contemporary application of colleges and universities in Yunnan remains limited, indicating a promising area for further investigation. A review of the literature reveals that previous studies have not focused directly on the teaching model of Southwest Associated University. Instead, discussions are mostly dispersed across analyses of its educational philosophy, training mode, and instructional style. For example, scholars have argued that the fundamental approaches to cultivating academic talents at Southwest Associated University include a scientifically structured curriculum, research-oriented teaching methods, training in academic research, and an educational environment like that of an academy of classical learning (Yuan, 2021). By analyzing the distinctive teaching style of Southwest Associated University, scholars have sought to discern the characteristics of its faculty, including a conscientious teaching attitude, rigorous scholarship attitude, and solid knowledge foundation (Liu and Duan, 2002). Without these prerequisites, it would have been impossible for teachers to implement a teaching model of teaching students in accordance of their aptitude. At Southwest Associated University, teachers and students would engage in debates in the classroom due to differing academic perspectives, yet students were never silenced because of disparities in social or institutional status. This illustrates that the university’s teaching model was student-centered, focusing on the needs and development of the learners rather than relying on the authority of the teacher. For instance, during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, faculty and students of Southwest Associated University endured considerable hardships before reaching Kunming, Yunnan. During this period, a close-knit relationship developed between teachers and students (Shi, 2015). Such a relationship facilitated the implementation of a flexible and adaptive teaching model. Teachers devoted themselves to instructing students and guiding them toward success, while students, in turn, often received instruction with a deep sense of gratitude. In this way, a strong tradition of respecting teachers and valuing learning was fully preserved at Southwest Associated University. Moreover, the pedagogical interactions between teachers and students were not confined to the classroom, extending to professors’ residences, teahouses in Kunming, casual walks, and even the fields during survey work. Informal conversations centered on academic issues thus became an integral part of everyday university life (Wang, 2015). Southwest Associated University adhered to the principle of “independent spirit and academic freedom” which served as a crucial condition for ensuring that its teaching could develop freely without political interference (Liang, 2020). Southwest Associated University brought together a constellation of renowned professors and distinguished scholars. The coexistence and interplay of diverse academic perspectives and schools of thought gave rise to varied teaching styles, which in turn fostered students’ independent academic character. In order to promote the development

of academic subject, specialized research institutes were established, including the Institute of Contemporary China Studies, Tsinghua University, the Frontier Humanities Research Institute and the Institute of Economics, Nankai University, as well as the Sociology Research Institute at Yunnan University (known as the “Kuige” research station) with the participation of scholars from Southwest Associated University. These institutions and groups carried out extensive investigations in southwestern part of China and produced a series of scholarly achievements that had a significant impact on the international sociological community (Qu and Li, 2011). Research institutes are commonplace in contemporary colleges and universities. To better integrate academic disciplines with the local knowledge economy, local universities commonly establish specialized research institutes. The teaching model embodied in the establishment of research institutes at Southwest Associated University offers valuable insights for colleges and universities in Yunnan province.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study mainly uses literature review as the main research method. Its purpose is not only to collect new empirical data, but also to conduct a systematic and critical overall analysis of existing academic literature, in order to construct a framework that links the history teaching model of National Southwest Associated University with modern applications. The research process is mainly divided into three stages: literature collection and screening, thematic analysis, and theoretical integration.

#### **3.1. Literature Collection and Screening Strategy**

The literature review data in this article mainly comes from comprehensive academic databases, including China National Knowledge Infrastructure, Wanfang Data, and library collection resources. The search strategy used keyword combinations such as “National Southwest Associated University”, “Southwest Associated University”, “teaching mode”, “teaching method”, “general education”, “professor centered system”, “team teaching”, “integration of teaching and research”, etc. Simultaneously using both Chinese and English terminology to ensure breadth. Subsequently, the “snowball” method was employed to track the reference list of identified key articles and books in order to search for more relevant literature.

The screening process is divided into two steps. Firstly, based on the title and abstract, the search results are preliminarily screened to exclude literature unrelated to the core teaching theme of Southwest Associated University. Secondly, conduct a full-text review of the remaining literature to select those that have conducted in-depth discussions, critical insights, or empirical evidence on the teaching philosophy, specific practices, and institutional mechanisms of Southwest Associated University.

#### **3.2. Thematic Analysis Process**

Subsequently, the selected literature corpus was analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves careful and repeated reading of the text to identify, encode, and categorize recurring themes and patterns related to the teaching model of Southwest Associated University. The initial encoding is open and records all relevant concepts. Then classify these codes into emerging topic categories. Through this process, the core components of the teaching model at Southwest Associated University are extracted. The key themes that have emerged and form the basis of the findings in this review include the professor centered system, team teaching practices, deep integration of teaching and research, and the manifestation of modern teaching models such as discovery based and inquiry based learning.

#### **3.3. Theoretical Synthesis and Model Development**

The final stage of the method is theoretical synthesis. The goal of this stage is to go beyond simple descriptions of historical practice and shift towards the construction of the entire theoretical system. Analyze the themes identified in the previous step within mature modern Western educational theories. It integrates historical elements, its modern transformation path, and corresponding theoretical foundations, providing a structured template for contemporary universities to draw on the heritage of Southwest Associated University under theoretical guidance.

## **4. Conceptual Definition**

### **4.1. Domestic Definitions of Teaching Model**

In Chinese, the term “model” conveys meanings such as “form” or “mold.” According to the Chinese Dictionary, its precise definition is “a standard form of a given object, or a normative pattern that can be emulated by others.” Owing to differences in disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives, there is currently no unified definition of the term “teaching model” in the domestic literature. Consequently, the present study draws on the following interpretations provided by

several experts as points of reference. From a theoretical perspective, teaching model is a theory of designing and organizing instruction that emerges in the course of teaching practice, and this theory is expressed in a simplified form. From a structural perspective, Wu (1991) contends that the teaching model constitutes “the basic structure or framework of various types of teaching activities, established under the guidance of certain pedagogical ideas or theories”. From a procedural perspective, Zhen Deshan (1984) defines teaching model as “a relatively stable instructional procedure and its corresponding implementation strategies, established under the guidance of certain pedagogical ideas to accomplish designated teaching tasks.” Li (1991) argues that “a teaching model, guided by specific pedagogical ideas, is a relatively stable, systematic, and theoretical paradigm of instruction formed around a central theme of teaching activities.”

#### **4.2. Overseas Definitions of Teaching Model**

The English equivalent of “模式” is “model.” In western educational field, there is likewise no clear or universally accepted definition of the term “teaching model.” Accordingly, this study also draws on several interpretations proposed by foreign scholars as points of reference. Joyce and Weil (1972) argue that “a teaching model is a plan or paradigm for structuring curricula, selecting teaching materials, and guiding teaching in classrooms and other settings.” Estes and Schwab (2015) define a teaching model as “a step-by-step procedure directed toward achieving specific learning outcomes.” Whether viewed from international or domestic perspectives, a teaching model may be understood as a methodology for organizing instructional activities. It is developed on the basis of accumulated teaching experience and constructed in alignment with pedagogical ideas and theories. A teaching model delineates the framework and procedures of instructional activities, thereby providing a foundation for the systematic implementation of teaching.

### **5. Historical Implications of the Teaching Model of Southwest Associated University**

#### **5.1. Professor-Centered Lecture Practices at Southwest Associated University**

Although Southwest Associated University implemented a curriculum management system combining an elective course system with a credit-based framework, it placed great emphasis on general courses. Most compulsory core courses were offered in the first and second years, while in the third and fourth years, students could select courses according to their disciplinary background and personal interests. This approach helped consolidate students’ fundamental knowledge and develop essential skills. Furthermore, the university explicitly stipulated that foundational compulsory courses must be taught by professors. In particular, teachers for English and Chinese courses offered to all first-year students were rigorously selected, requiring a profound level of scholarly expertise. By adopting this approach, Southwest Associated University ensured a strong and capable faculty, enabling students to receive instruction and guidance from highly qualified educators. Under the tutelage of these distinguished teachers, students were able to establish a solid foundation in their respective disciplines. When selecting professors, President Mei Yiqi set forth clear expectations: “I believe that the responsibilities of a professor extend beyond guiding students in how to read and conduct research. Any professor capable of leading students in scholarly inquiry must also be able to instruct them on how to conduct themselves as individuals, for learning and personal conduct are intrinsically connected (Mei, 1993).” Those who pursue scholarship with sincerity and diligence will likewise act with integrity, without taking shortcuts, being lazy, or resorting to deceit, and thus their academic endeavors will ultimately achieve success (Zhao and Zhang, 2000).

#### **5.2. Team Teaching**

Team teaching is a widely adopted instructional approach in contemporary colleges and universities. It typically involves multiple instructors with shared experience in teaching a particular course forming a teaching team. These teams integrate course resources and collaboratively advance the development of the curriculum. At Southwest Associated University, team teaching took two main forms. The first involved multiple renowned professors giving the same lecture. For example, the course General History of China was taught separately by Lei Haizong, Qian Mu, and Wu Han, each presenting markedly different content, emphasis, and perspectives. Similarly, the course Zhuangzi in the Chinese Department was taught by Wen Yiduo, Liu Wendian, and Tang Lan, each with their own distinctive style. The course Chu Ci was successively taught by Wen Yiduo, You Guoen, and Luo Yong, each highlighting different aspects. In philosophy, both Jin Yuelin and He Lin taught Introduction to Philosophy, but their teaching styles were distinctly different (Peking University et al., 1998). The second form involved a single course being divided among different professors, with each teacher choosing the portion in which they were most expert, thereby forming a complete course collectively. At Southwest Associated University, professors would also attend each other’s lectures in the same classroom to facilitate academic exchange and engage in discussions afterward. Prior to this, such interactions were virtually unheard of in Chinese university classrooms; yet at Southwest Associated University, team learning among

faculty was commonplace. This practice not only enhanced the overall quality of courses, but also broadened students' perspectives, provided them with greater choice, and fostered academic exchange among instructors. As Jin Fujun and colleagues from the Tsinghua University Research Laboratory noted: "With renowned professors at Southwest Associated University gathered together, each teacher brought unique strengths that complemented one another. Although their styles differed, they harmonized effectively. The strong faculty lineup was an important factor in the success of Southwest Associated University". (Jin and Tian, 2008) It was precisely the open and flexible teaching model that fostered a vibrant academic environment characterized by a multiplicity of scholarly voices.

### ***5.3. The integration of research and instruction at Southwest Associated University***

Founded during a period of national crisis, Southwest Associated University was destined to bear a profound mission. In order to cultivate truly exceptional talents, the professors at the National Southwest Associated University approached their teaching with meticulous care and rigorous dedication. As recalled by Chen Ning Yang: "The academic atmosphere at Southwest Associated University was extremely rigorous. The courses we took were generally well-prepared by the teachers, and students completed their exercises diligently. As a result, during my four years at the university and the subsequent two years at the Institute of Tsinghua University, I learned a great deal" (Yang, 1983). The students studying at Southwest Associated University were all deeply influenced by its rigorous academic atmosphere, and thus adopted a more diligent and earnest attitude toward learning. Within such a strong academic atmosphere, although living conditions were harsh and the war was raging, the students' spiritual world remained remarkably rich. At the same time, the professors not only emphasized the transmission of classroom knowledge but also personally led students in field investigations, with a particular focus on cultivating their practical abilities. For instance, in 1941, Zeng Zhaolun, together with students from the university, formed the "Scientific Expedition to Sichuan and Xikang of Southwest Associated University." Departing from Kunming, they ventured to the largely mysterious area where the Yi people live in the Liangshan Mountains, long unfamiliar to the outside world. Traveling more than one thousand kilometers on foot, they conducted extensive investigations into the geography, mineral resources, ethnic groups, and culture of the area (Peking University et al., 1998). Such field investigations not only broadened the students' horizons and cultivated their professional knowledge and skills, but also played a significant role in fostering their perseverance and resilience. The entire teaching activity at Southwest Associated University can be regarded as a re-presentation of a complete research process, which manifested in two main forms. The first was the demonstration of professors' own research achievements, mostly found in specialized elective courses. The second was the demonstration of the development of entire disciplines, which was often reflected in compulsory foundation courses. The emergence of such a pattern stemmed from the fact that scholars adhered to the principle of "specialization in one's own field of study" (Wang, 2008). Moreover, the teaching content at Southwest Associated University was continuously updated and advanced in line with professors' own research. As Xiong Deji once noted: "Professors at the university never abandoned their scholarly pursuits outside of teaching. Whenever they achieved new research results, they would design and offer new courses accordingly" (Peking University et al., 1998). A vivid example comes from Chen Yinke, who, when teaching the history of the Sui and Tang dynasties, declared: "What has been lectured on by earlier scholars, I will not repeat; what has been covered by contemporary scholars, I will not repeat; what has been presented by foreign scholars, I will not repeat; what I myself have already lectured on, I will not repeat; I will only speak on what has never before been spoken of" (Jin and Tian, 2008). Such vision and courage could only stem from a profound reservoir of academic knowledge. His principle of avoiding repetition necessarily demanded innovation, ensuring that the content was constantly refined and renewed through ongoing research. This clearly demonstrates that, at Southwest Associated University, research and teaching were closely integrated. Another example is Professor Yang Zhensheng from the Department of Chinese. During his tenure at Southwest Associated University, he offered a wide range of courses, including Chinese language and literature class for freshmen, Introduction to Literature, Poetry of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties, Biographies of Famous Figures in Chinese and World Literature, Modern Chinese Literature, Studies on the Poetry of Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun, Discussion and Composition on Modern Chinese Literature, and Selected Readings and Translation of World Literary Classics (Peking University et al., 1998). Such a vast number of courses required the teacher to possess not only extensive knowledge and in-depth research, but also the ability to make connections across disciplines rather than relying on a single textbook. Given the abstract nature of much of this content, it would have been difficult to capture students' interest without a vivid and engaging teaching style. Yet Professor Yang delivered his lectures with such appeal and clarity that even students from other departments eagerly attended his classes.

## **6. From Southwest Associated University to University S in Yunnan: Inheritance and Innovation of Teaching Models**

### ***6.1. Impart Knowledge and Educate people: The Fundamental Duty of teachers***

Delivering lectures is fundamentally the duty and responsibility of a university professor. However, in recent years, it has become increasingly common in some universities for professors not to deliver lectures to undergraduates. Some faculty members focus primarily on their own scientific research and rarely deliver lectures, while others rely on nominal participation in team teaching without actually giving lectures. Such practices inevitably have a negative impact on students' professional development. A review of professor-centered lecture practice at Southwest Associated University shows that, from the rigorous selection of faculty to their meticulous approach in the classroom, teaching—especially foundational courses—played a crucial role in the development of students' professional knowledge and skills. Only with a solid grounding in core disciplinary knowledge and competencies can students achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in subsequent learning and academic activities. According to the Ministry of Education's *Several Opinions on Further Strengthening Undergraduate Teaching in Institutions of Higher Learning (2005)*, universities are required to make it a fundamental policy that professors and associate professors deliver lectures to undergraduates. Specifically, each professor and associate professor must teach at least one undergraduate course per academic year. Those who fail to teach any undergraduate courses for two consecutive years will not be reappointed to their professorial or associate professorial positions. Under this directive, all universities nationwide are required to strictly implement the professor-centered teaching system. At University S, not only are professors required to deliver lectures to undergraduates, but they are also specifically expected to deliver foundational lectures for freshmen and sophomores. Professors are likewise responsible for preparing syllabi and teaching plans, participating in the revision of personnel cultivating programs, grading assignments and examinations, and providing guidance on students' homework and problems. These practices collectively contribute to the cultivation of students' fundamental knowledge structures. Moreover, in the annual professional title evaluation, the selection criteria for professors are stringent. In addition to meeting research performance standards, professors are required to teach a minimum of 300 class hours per academic year and to have served as teachers, class supervisors, or actively participated in academic and research management, as well as practical skill training. Furthermore, consideration is given to their experience in social practice. These multifaceted requirements demonstrate that professors are not only instructors responsible for teaching, and pioneers in research, but also mentors guiding students' personal and professional development.

### ***6.2. Team teaching: The Predominant Approach in Modern University Teaching***

As a local university in southwestern China, University S is situated in a border region with relatively limited educational resources, and its faculty strength is somewhat weaker compared to universities in central and eastern regions. Consequently, in recent years, against the backdrop of broader education reforms, University S has actively implemented team teaching along with a mentoring system for junior faculty. University S has also adopted a team teaching model inspired by Southwest Associated University, which can be divided into two types. The first involves a teaching team composed of faculty across senior, mid-career, and junior levels. The team collaboratively refines the course through pre-class discussions, deliberation on key and difficult topics, assignment design, final exam formats, and post-class practical activities. While each member individually undertakes specific teaching responsibilities, they continuously communicate about teaching progress and challenges. In particular, senior faculty with extensive teaching experience generously share their instructional expertise with younger colleagues, facilitating their professional growth. The second type consists of teams of two or more teachers jointly delivering a single course. Prior to the start of teaching, the teachers divide the chapters among themselves, with each taking responsibility for the sections that align with their areas of expertise. This arrangement not only ensures the overall quality of the course but also enables faculty members to complement one another's strengths, thereby enhancing their collective teaching proficiency. In addition, University S has vigorously implemented a teaching supervision system. This system requires not only that faculty members serving as teaching supervisors attend classes, but also that teachers observe and learn from one another's teaching. The policy further stipulates the number of class hours each faculty member must attend per semester, typically within their own school or department. At the end of the process, teachers evaluate one another through the university's educational administration system. Over the course of a semester, this practice fosters constructive exchange and interaction among faculty members. Such a model not only improves the quality of faculty, but also promotes academic communication among teachers, thereby improving, to a certain extent, the overall quality of students' education.

### ***6.3. Teaching and Research: A Mutually Reinforcing Relationship***

Research questions arise from practical discoveries, and the application of research must ultimately be grounded in addressing problems in teaching. At Southwest Associated University, professors continuously refined the teaching

process to foster the advancement of research. For instance, whenever they achieved new research, they would introduce new courses, and previously taught would be replaced or updated. In this way, the content of courses was constantly renewed, enabling students' learning to progress in a cumulative and dialectical manner. Although Yunnan is not traditionally considered a leading province in terms of education development, it possesses unique regional resource advantages. Educational development in Yunnan must be grounded in local realities, oriented toward the economic and social development of the region, and dedicated to cultivating the types of talent needed by the local population. University S has recognized this point clearly. For instance, in the training objectives of its preschool education major, it emphasizes that graduates should be high-level talents who are able to take root in frontier ethnic minority regions, endowed with firm political conviction, noble professional ethics, and a deep passion for preschool education. Accordingly, curriculum development is carried out in line with local conditions. The teaching content is not confined to textbook knowledge, but is also adapted to the economic development and cultural characteristics of local ethnic communities. Leveraging its geographical advantages, much of the faculty's research is oriented toward addressing practical issues in frontier minority regions, with the resulting findings often compiled into school-based textbooks for use by both teachers and students. In this way, students are enabled to gain a genuine understanding of the land where they live, ensuring that local talents can be retained and nurtured to become builders and successors dedicated to the development of their hometowns and the revitalization of the nation. Moreover, faculty members also lead students to engage actively in various research activities. For instance, in the field of agronomy, both teachers and students maintain their own experimental bases on campus. Their classrooms are not confined to classrooms but extend into the fields, where teaching and research are carried out simultaneously, and where meaningful research outputs are generated directly from practice. Students majoring in science and engineering frequently participate in national skill competitions and have repeatedly won awards, such as the "Internet Plus" Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition. In these contests, teachers serve not only as supervisors but also as co-participants, thereby integrating teaching with research. While students gain valuable training and experience through the competitions, teachers in turn use the insights derived from these activities to feed back into and enhance their teaching practices. Moreover, the university actively engages in communication with local governments and collaborates with external research institutions to serve as internship bases. Junior and senior students are assigned to these institutions for observation and practical training, thereby strengthening their professional competencies. Faculty members, as the primary persons responsible for students, are not only tasked with monitoring the progress of internships but also with addressing difficulties encountered during the process, ensuring that students receive comprehensive and well-rounded training.

## **7. Interweaving of History and Reality: The Impact of the Teaching Model of Southwest Associated University on University S**

### **7.1. Discovery Teaching Model**

According to Jerome Seymour Bruner's discovery learning theory, learners should actively engage in the exploration and identification of the fundamental principles and structures of a discipline, rather than passively receiving prepackaged knowledge (Bruner, 1966). Their inquiry should be centered on the fundamental concepts and structural features of the discipline, so as to foster the development of a well-organized cognitive framework. At Southwest Associated University, professors often employed a discovery method. For instance, in some of Professor Yang Zhensheng's courses, he would at times refrain from lecturing directly and instead pose questions for students to discuss. In his course Discussion and Composition on Modern Chinese Literature, for example, when addressing Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman*, Yang asked, Why did Lu Xun claim that his "Diary of a Madman" was deeper and broader in its indignation than Gogol's, yet less remote and transcendent than Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*? (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Kunming Committee for Literature and History [CPPCC Kunming], 2008) Such discussions occurred frequently in the classrooms of Southwest Associated University. The teaching mode is also employed in the present era. As teachers pose questions to guide inquiry, students gradually learn the process of discovery, and it is through continuous exploration and reflection that they ultimately arrive at solutions. The modern discovery teaching model follows a sequence in which teachers pose questions, students formulate hypotheses, engage in inquiry to generate new concepts, and ultimately apply these newly formed concepts to solve practical problems. In the discovery teaching model, the relationship between teachers and students is collaborative. Students actively engage in the learning process and cooperate with one another. Teachers provide the necessary information as a reference to support students' inquiry, but the construction of knowledge remains primarily driven by the students themselves. The process of discovery is itself the process of learning for students. During this process, the atmosphere between teachers and students is relaxed and harmonious, allowing students to put forward bold hypotheses. Owing to their high level of active engagement, students are required to integrate textbook knowledge with real-life contexts in order to solve problems. Under such a teaching

model, students are trained to actively identify and solve problems. University S has also adopted this approach. Within the team teaching model, teachers pose questions that prompt students to learn through hypothesis and verification, employing a discovery-based approach to help them construct a coherent knowledge framework.

## **7.2. Inquiry Teaching Model**

Dewey's educational philosophy embodies the principle of "learning by doing." He argued that learning must originate from authentic, meaningful, and student-relevant problems that genuinely engage their interest. The primary goal of education is to cultivate students' scientific thinking methods and their ability to solve real-world problems, rather than merely to accumulate knowledge (Dewey, 1938). Professor Fei Xiaotong of the Sociology Department at Southwest Associated University recalled his experience teaching the course Rural Sociology, "I taught while exploring, and the perspectives I presented were entirely discussion-oriented... I dared to lay bare my own immature ideas in front of young students because I believed this was an effective educational method. I did not consider the teacher's task to be merely the transmission of existing knowledge, which students could learn from books on their own; rather, the main purpose was to guide students to venture boldly into unknown territories" (Fei, 2012). Teaching itself is a generative process. The extent of students' learning depends not solely on how much the teacher has taught, but more importantly on how much the students have actively explored. The inquiry teaching model achieves its instructional objectives through the following steps. First, teachers create contextualized problem scenarios that immerse students in challenging situations. Next, teachers provide exploratory materials, enabling students to formulate hypotheses and gather relevant data. This process is iteratively repeated until conclusions are reached. Finally, teachers guide students to analyze the entire inquiry process, consolidating their understanding and learning outcomes. The model places greater demands on teachers to design scenarios and pose problems that align with students' learning needs, while requiring students to exercise their analytical skills, patience, and persistence in sustained inquiry. Although teachers play a supportive role in this process, they do not replace students in the exploration; their primary function is to provide the necessary materials in advance to facilitate student-led inquiry. In today's information society, knowledge is rapidly evolving. The goal of education can no longer be the mere transmission of fixed knowledge, and teaching should move away from the traditional "monologue" approach dominated solely by the teacher. At University S, teaching is no longer primarily teacher-centered. Instead, it is student-centered and problem-oriented, producing learning outcomes through methods such as group discussions, team collaboration, and collective inquiry. Since most of the teachers' research projects stem from challenges in local economic and social development, they create problem-based learning scenarios for students based on their research questions, enabling students to engage in free inquiry and deep critical thinking. The learning outcomes not only enhance students' knowledge but also connect with the resolution of problems in daily life, which greatly stimulates their interest in learning.

## **8. Conclusion**

### **8.1. Summary of Findings and Theoretical Contributions**

This study explores the educational philosophy and teaching methods of Southwest Associated University to identify approaches suitable for teaching models in University S. During its eight years in Yunnan, Southwest Associated University made an indelible contribution to the development of education in the province, propelling Yunnan's educational development to become the foremost in Southwest China at the time. For education in Yunnan, research on the history of Southwest Associated University holds particular significance. Southwest Associated University was a product of extraordinary circumstances, a unique approach adopted against the backdrop of war to ensure the continuity and advancement of education. It was precisely this joint action that created a miracle recognized worldwide. By bringing together the finest faculty from China's three leading universities, it pioneered a teaching model centered on discovery and inquiry. This was achieved through a combination of professor-centered lectures, team teaching, and the integration of research with instruction. Although these teaching models had been proposed by earlier scholars and were not unique to Southwest Associated University, the institution significantly leveraged them in its educational practices. Through these approaches, it cultivated a cohort of world-renowned talents, marking one of its defining characteristics. The teaching models of Southwest Associated University not only provided a vital platform for resource integration and innovative education in China at the time, but also offers a template for University S facing uneven educational resource development and insufficiently qualified faculty. Building upon the teaching model of Southwest Associated University, University S has adapted to contemporary educational reform demands. While preserving its time-honored pedagogical approach, the institution integrates practical considerations of its own development to cultivate talent capable of contributing to the local community. The practical application of Southwest Associated University's teaching model in University S includes the following aspects. First, by having students solve practical problems, their practical skills are

honed. Second, by fostering mutual cooperation between teachers and students as well as among students themselves, their team coordination and collaboration skills are developed. Third, through discovery and inquiry learning, students have developed a solid knowledge structure.

### 8.2. Practical Implications and Limitations

Research has found that a free, democratic, open, and inclusive atmosphere at Southwest Associated University consistently maintained. The success of Southwest Associated University can be primarily attributed to hold all the aces. First, it was established during the anti-Japanese war period, bringing together the resources of China's three top universities. During the anti-Japanese war period, both teachers and students regarded saving the country and people from an impending danger as their mission. It was widely acknowledged that mastering knowledge was the best way to serve their country. Second, after Southwest Associated University relocated to Yunnan province, the government spared no effort in providing assistance, ensuring that the university's academic programs never ceased. Third, Southwest Associated University boasted a strong faculty. Only those who passed rigorous evaluations were permitted to deliver a lecture, thereby ensuring the quality of education. These conditions are currently irreplicable by University S in Yunnan, and attempting to fully replicate the practices of Southwest Associated University is also inadvisable. This reflects the limitations imposed by the development of the era. Additionally, this study has certain limitations in that it focuses excessively on the historical context of Southwest Associated University while neglecting the case study of University S in Yunnan. Consequently, this study does not address specific classroom teaching activities.

### 8.3. Prospects for Future Research

Therefore, the next step in this study should focus on two key areas: First, a deeper understanding of the current teaching models at University S in Yunnan is required. Under the current policy documents and educational reform requirements, and drawing upon the teaching philosophy and methods of Southwest Associated University, recommendations should be proposed to optimize their teaching models. Second, it is essential to anchor efforts in Yunnan's local context. While keeping pace with universities in central and eastern China, greater emphasis should be placed on cultivating talent that is deeply rooted in local culture and aligned with regional socioeconomic needs. This approach will drive pedagogical innovation and student development within these regional universities in Yunnan.

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