

Research on the Training Model of “Foreign Languages + Area Studies” Interdisciplinary Talent Development: A Case Study of China’s Talent Training for International Ocean Affairs

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This paper proposes an interdisciplinary talent training model that combines foreign language education with area studies. The model aims to cultivate international ocean affairs professionals with cross-cultural communication skills, in-depth regional and country knowledge, and practical expertise in ocean affairs. Additionally, the paper presents specific training pathways and policy recommendations for implementing this model.

Keywords: foreign languages, area studies, talent development for international ocean affairs, educational reform

Introduction

As the global trends in the utilization of marine resources, the protection of maritime rights, and the development of the marine economy continue to deepen, many coastal nations have released their respective maritime strategies. The Chinese government has introduced the “Maritime Power” strategy, which not only includes promoting high-quality development of the marine economy, enhancing marine technological innovation, and protecting the marine ecological environment, but also focuses on cultivating a high-level talent pool proficient in international ocean affairs and participating in global ocean governance. The increasing escalation of global maritime disputes has made it more imperative than ever for countries to develop a large number of interdisciplinary talents who are proficient in foreign languages, with expertise in specific countries, regions, and marine affairs, in order to gain a more comprehensive, in-depth, and systematic understanding of international ocean affairs. International ocean affairs are characterized by interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral integration, involving not only traditional fields, such as shipping, fisheries, and energy, but also areas like maritime law, international security, and cultural exchange. Therefore, the cultivation of high-quality interdisciplinary talents with expertise in “foreign languages + area studies”, who can play a pivotal role in international ocean affairs, has become one of the key paths for countries to advance their maritime strategies.

Currently, research in academia on interdisciplinary talent development tends to focus on areas such as interdisciplinary education, the cultivation of practical skills, and international cooperation. It discusses how universities can cultivate such talents through innovative educational models and interdisciplinary collaboration,

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emphasizing the importance of the integration of education, science, and talent in developing outstanding marine professionals (Liu, 2025; Ning, 2024). Within this, research on the “foreign languages + area studies” talent model primarily focuses on the integration of foreign language proficiency and cross-cultural communication, but its integration with marine affairs remains relatively underexplored (Wei, 2024; Wang, 2025). Additionally, most existing studies remain at the theoretical discussion stage and lack specific practical pathways for marine affairs as well as actionable recommendations, particularly in relation to marine strategies (Kim, 2016; Chen, Yang, & Xu, 2023).

Therefore, this paper seeks to combine the “foreign languages + area studies” interdisciplinary talent development model with China’s “Maritime Power” strategy. Using the development of China’s international marine affairs talent as a typical case, this study aims to analyze its background, the challenges it faces, and the strategies to address them. The goal is to provide reference for the development of international marine affairs talents in other countries and offer theoretical support for educational reforms in universities under the context of marine strategies.

The Supportive Role of “Foreign Languages + Area studies” Interdisciplinary Talent Development in the “Maritime Power” Strategy

Area studies focus on the comprehensive and in-depth examination of specific countries or regions, including their humanities, geography, politics, economy, and society. This approach enables an understanding of the dynamic development trends and key directions of a country or region, making it a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and integrative field. Cooperation, exchange, and competition between different nations are inevitable, and understanding different countries and regions is the prerequisite and foundation for maintaining maritime rights and promoting international cooperation. The complexity and international nature of global ocean affairs mean that they not only involve technical operations and management but are also influenced by a multitude of factors, including politics, economics, culture, law, and history. The cultivation of “foreign languages + area studies” interdisciplinary talents can significantly enhance the understanding and response capabilities in addressing international marine affairs.

Enhancing the Understanding and Response Capabilities in International Ocean Affairs

The complexity and global nature of international ocean affairs make it difficult for talents with a single-disciplinary background to effectively address current maritime issues. By combining foreign languages with area studies, the cultivation of interdisciplinary, composite talents enables more effective responses to the challenges present in complex international ocean affairs. This is especially true in scenarios such as marine resource development and maritime rights disputes, which involve multilateral cooperation and competition. In such contexts, interdisciplinary talents can play a crucial role.

Currently, global maritime disputes, particularly in sensitive regions, are not merely territorial conflicts but often involve historical legacy issues and nationalist sentiments of neighboring countries. When addressing these issues, the cross-cultural and historical background knowledge provided by area studies becomes essential. With proficiency in foreign languages, students can deepen their understanding of the underlying causes of these disputes by studying the history, political systems, diplomatic strategies, and cultural mindsets of the involved countries. This deeper understanding enables them to employ more rational diplomatic and legal measures in

future practical work.

In international marine affairs, international legal frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea play an important role. However, many countries tend to interpret and apply these laws differently due to their unique historical backgrounds, cultural traditions, and national interests. In this regard, area studies can help students better understand the legal positions and interpretations of different countries, thus enabling them to adopt differentiated response strategies in their future professional endeavors.

Enhancing the Capacity to Participate in Global Ocean Governance

International ocean affairs often involve communication or negotiations with multiple countries, each with distinct cultural backgrounds and language conventions. Through the study and research in area studies, students can build on their solid foreign language foundation to gain a deeper understanding of cultural differences and communication styles among countries. This understanding and communication capability enables them, in future diplomatic negotiations, legal negotiations, and international cooperation in ocean affairs, to adjust their communication approaches in a timely and appropriate manner according to the cultural backgrounds of the countries involved, thereby enhancing communication effectiveness.

Different coastal countries have varying policies and needs regarding marine economy, marine governance, and marine resource development. Research in area studies can assist governments and businesses in understanding the policy backgrounds, development needs, and cultural characteristics of these countries, thereby promoting in-depth cooperation in marine affairs across various sectors.

Moreover, international marine affairs often require multilateral mechanisms, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea meetings, the International Maritime Organization, and the Arctic Council. These multilateral frameworks require participants to not only possess solid professional knowledge, but also engage in cross-cultural communication and consultations with parties from different cultural backgrounds in a complex international environment. Area studies can cultivate talents with this cross-cultural communication ability, enabling them to handle these multilateral mechanisms with ease and earn greater understanding and support from the international community.

Real-World Challenges in the Development of “Foreign Languages + Area Studies” Interdisciplinary Talents

Lack of Integration Between Disciplines

As an interdisciplinary field, area studies have been clearly defined as a cross-disciplinary subject within the primary disciplines in China. However, the existing system is largely based on language and literature, international relations, or political science, and has yet to form a cohesive knowledge system for more specialized fields of study, such as marine affairs. The integration of area studies with a specific, highly specialized area of research remains an area for further exploration and practice. Additionally, the courses related to area studies in various universities are often set up independently from those of other disciplines, resulting in a lack of necessary synergies between disciplines.

Limited Course Offerings in Area Studies, Lacking a Systematic Framework

Taking my own university as an example, the number of courses related to area studies offered in relevant

programs is extremely limited, and these courses are primarily general in nature. For instance, the English program offers courses, such as American Society and Culture, British Society and Culture, and similar electives. The Japanese program offers courses like Overview of Japan and other similar electives. The Political Science and Administration program offers courses, such as Analysis of International Hot Issues. Russian studies do not yet offer an undergraduate program, but it does offer electives like Contemporary Russian Society and Culture. The course offerings are relatively narrow and lack flexibility. Furthermore, these courses often focus on the delivery of theoretical knowledge and neglect the cultivation of practical skills, such as specialized content related to marine affairs simulations or international negotiation exercises. Students find it difficult to select interdisciplinary courses according to their individual career paths, leading to an incomplete knowledge structure that impedes the achievement of educational objectives.

Limited Resource Support for Area Studies

Talent development requires sufficient resource support for students, including access to textbooks, library resources, opportunities for domestic and international academic visits, and exchange platforms. The development of textbooks is a critical foundation for cultivating “foreign languages + area studies” interdisciplinary talents, yet it also represents a significant challenge. Not only at my university but in many Chinese universities, beyond existing general textbooks on foreign societies and cultures, there are no authoritative textbooks effectively combining language skills with multidisciplinary knowledge. Similarly, there is a comparable issue with the availability of relevant books and literature.

In addition, resources for domestic and international academic visits and exchange platforms related to area studies are also limited. The cultivation of “foreign languages + area studies” interdisciplinary talents requires not only substantial intellectual input but also significant practical exposure, such as foreign language applications, academic training, fieldwork abroad, and cross-cultural communication, all of which need to be developed through practice. Training in foreign language applications and cross-cultural communication is an inherent requirement for foreign language majors, while academic training and fieldwork practices need to be given more attention. Providing students with opportunities to gain participatory research experiences is crucial for enhancing their research capabilities. Currently, many Chinese universities have limited resources in these areas. Most universities lack specialized practical teaching platforms, such as marine affairs simulation labs or international negotiation simulation rooms, meaning students can only learn about international marine affairs through theoretical classroom instruction without practical opportunities.

Additionally, there is a weakness in university-industry collaborations and ties with international organizations. Cooperation between Chinese universities and marine enterprises or international organizations is limited, resulting in a lack of opportunities for students to participate in practical experiences within international organizations or enterprises. For example, Chinese university students have relatively low participation in projects related to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The lack of cooperation channels with international organizations means that students often find it difficult to engage in actual international marine affairs projects or internships.

Limited Diversity in Faculty Knowledge Structure

The cultivation of interdisciplinary talents with distinct characteristics in “foreign languages + area studies”

requires faculty with a broad knowledge base. While traditional foreign language faculty members often possess strong linguistic advantages and may be proficient in multiple foreign languages, they frequently lack a solid, systematic foundation in the relevant interdisciplinary fields. This is a common issue in many Chinese universities. Typically, university faculty are composed of experts in either foreign languages or marine affairs, but there is a lack of interdisciplinary talents who not only master foreign languages and regional knowledge but also possess practical experience in marine affairs.

Furthermore, some faculty members lack an international perspective and have limited overseas exchange experience, which hampers their ability to provide students with guidance from a global viewpoint. This is a significant barrier in the cultivation of talents for international marine affairs, as students are unable to gain comprehensive cross-cultural communication and cooperation experience from their instructors.

Conclusion

Maritime studies serve as the foundational domain for area studies. National maritime strategies, including China’s “Maritime Power” strategy, rely on maritime research as a key discipline and talent support system. Conducting maritime research effectively is crucial.

Firstly, it is essential to break down disciplinary barriers. The development of the maritime field encompasses various disciplines such as shipping, logistics, economics, management, computer science, information technology, environmental science, and security. A more rational combination of these disciplines should be established to form a larger, integrated area study framework that enhances its influence. By breaking free from the limitations of traditional thinking, we should translate, critique, and draw from existing modern marine studies, constructing a new, shareable, integrated maritime knowledge system.

Secondly, the internationalization of university discipline development should be promoted. Seamless alignment and deep collaboration with the countries of research interest are vital. Conducting field research on ports, docks, oceans, deep-sea exploration, and other related projects, while extracting valuable materials, is essential for training large numbers of international marine affairs professionals with firsthand experience, primary data, and top-tier networks. At the same time, leveraging existing strengths in marine law, marine management, and marine culture, it is important to accelerate the filling of knowledge gaps in the international maritime field. Discipline development and talent cultivation should be the foundation for conducting in-depth area studies related to maritime affairs.

Lastly, focusing on major national development areas and frontier issues, top-tier disciplines should serve as think tanks, extending the knowledge value chain. Adopting a demand-driven, problem-solving, and application-oriented approach, we should integrate multiple disciplines and knowledge areas, with policy consultation and service as the main goal, to jointly address pressing challenges. Establishing a high-level think tank strategic position, with a focus on the international maritime field, will facilitate the development of operational mechanisms for international maritime think tanks, leading to the production of high-level maritime policy outcomes.

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