



Goals, Challenges and Innovative Paths for Cultivating Regional and Country Studies Talents

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Abstract: *As China increasingly moves to the center of the world stage, regional and country studies, as an emerging interdisciplinary discipline, plays a vital role in serving national strategies and promoting mutual learning among civilizations. This article explores the core objectives, key challenges, and innovative approaches to talent cultivation in regional and country studies. Research indicates that regional and country studies talent cultivation aims to serve national strategic needs, cultivate a comprehensive talent pool encompassing both generalists and specialists, and strengthen language proficiency and local experience. Currently, challenges include the difficulty of integrating disciplines, insufficient resources, and an imperfect system for evaluating the quality of talent cultivation. In the future, innovative approaches such as developing interdisciplinary curriculum systems, strengthening localized practical teaching, and empowering artificial intelligence technologies will be necessary to improve talent cultivation quality and provide intellectual support for China's participation in global governance.*

Keywords: Regional and Country Studies; Talent Cultivation; Interdisciplinary; National Strategy; Innovation Path.

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1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of unprecedented global changes and the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, China is increasingly pressing for a deeper understanding of various regions and countries around the world. Traditional disciplines such as international politics, world history, and foreign languages and literature, due to their clear boundaries and disciplinary divisions, are no longer able to meet the country's demand for talent with a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the world. [1] In September 2022, the State Council Academic Degrees Committee and the Ministry of Education jointly issued a new catalog of graduate education disciplines and majors. This included the establishment of a first-level discipline, "Regional and Country Studies," under the newly established interdisciplinary discipline category, which could award degrees in economics, law, literature, and history. This sparked considerable discussion at the time. Now that this catalog has officially been implemented, the layout and development of regional and country studies has entered a fast lane. [2] In April 2025, the Ministry of Education updated and released the "Catalogue of Undergraduate Majors for Regular Institutions of Higher Education (2025)." Among the 29 new majors added was regional and country studies, marking a significant transformation in China's regional and country studies from scratch, extending from graduate education to a full-scale undergraduate, master's, and doctoral program.

Regional and country studies is a new discipline established to serve national strategic needs. As the high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative enters a new phase of intensive development, regional and country studies are accelerating the development of China's independent knowledge system for regional and country studies while also providing distinctively Chinese solutions to the practical challenges of the Belt and Road Initiative. Currently, China urgently needs a deep and comprehensive understanding of all countries around the world, large and small, and regional and country studies has emerged precisely to meet this need. Based on the current development of regional and country studies and drawing on practical case studies from various universities,

this article systematically analyzes the goals and current challenges of talent cultivation in regional and country studies, and proposes innovative approaches to talent cultivation. This paper aims to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for building a distinctively Chinese regional and country studies discipline system and cultivating high-quality, multi-faceted talents.

2. Goals of Training Talents in Regional and Country Studies

2.1 Serving National Strategic Needs

As an interdisciplinary discipline emphasizing "applying knowledge to practice," regional and country studies' fundamental mission is to serve national strategic needs. As China's participation in global governance continues to deepen, all industries will need a large number of practical professionals capable of understanding and resolving national and regional issues, applied research professionals engaged in think tank work, and basic research professionals committed to promoting mutual learning among civilizations. Han Zhibin, Dean of the School of Regional and Country Studies at Northwest University, pointed out that as the high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative enters a new stage of intensive cultivation, regional and country studies, while accelerating the construction of China's independent knowledge system for regional and country studies, also provide uniquely Chinese solutions to addressing practical challenges in the joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative[3]. Regional and country studies talent training actively serves the Belt and Road Initiative, facilitates international exchange and cooperation, and enhances national soft power. For example, Northwest University has established the "English (Regional and Country Studies Experimental Class)," focusing on key Belt and Road Initiative regions such as the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. This class aims to cultivate a multi-disciplinary talent training model that deeply integrates "language + regional and country studies," aiming to cultivate high-level, multi-disciplinary talents with "fluent" skills in languages, regions, fields, and countries.

2.2 Cultivating "generalist + specialist" Compound Talents

The cultivation of talents in regional and country studies emphasizes a "generalist + specialist" model. Professor Qian Chengdan of Peking University pointed out that talents in the field of regional and country studies should be both "generalists" and "specialists," and should "know the form, the heart, and the behavior" of the research subjects [4]. This means that students need to have a comprehensive understanding of a specific country or region, and then conduct in-depth research in a specific field based on this understanding. Specifically, the cultivation of talents in regional and country studies requires students to have both a broad knowledge base covering multiple fields such as the politics, economy, society, culture, history, and geography of the research target country, and in-depth specialized knowledge to conduct professional research in a specific field. For example, Peking University's Country and Regional Studies Program cultivates interdisciplinary and cross-regional compound talents through a three-module learning program of "regional learning (knowledge related to the target country) + language learning (the local language of the target country) + subject learning (professional research in a specific direction of the target country)."

Table 1: Comparison of Talent Cultivation Models for Country Studies in Various Regions of Universities

<i>University</i>	<i>Training Model</i>	<i>feature</i>	<i>Target</i>
Northwestern University	"Four in One"	Language + Discipline Group + Region and Country + Localized Practice	Cultivating talents with "three links"
Beijing University	"Three modules"	Regional learning + language learning + subject learning	Interdisciplinary and cross-regional talents
East China Normal University	"Dual Stage"	Domestic intensive learning + cross-border immersion experience	Cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary capabilities

2.3 Strengthening Language Skills and Local Practice

Language proficiency and local experience are the two cornerstones of developing talent in regional and country studies. Regional and country studies encompasses three fundamental and core courses: history, language, and field research. History is the foundation of knowledge, language is a research tool, and field experience is the equivalent of laboratory work in science and engineering. In terms of language proficiency, regional and country studies requires not only English proficiency but, more importantly, proficiency in the language of the country or region being studied. For example, research on Japan requires Japanese proficiency, research on Latin America

requires Spanish or Portuguese, and research on the Middle East requires at least one or two of Arabic, Persian, or Turkish. Northwestern University's English (Regional and Country Studies Experimental Class) requires students to take both English and the language of the target country (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Russian, etc.). Field experience is a crucial component of talent development in regional and country studies. Field research isn't just a one- or two-month trip; it requires long-term commitment and is a fundamental requirement. Northwest University's Regional and Country Experimental Class has built a "walking practical classroom" by cooperating with many universities in Middle Eastern countries and five Central Asian countries, including Iran, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt, to allow students to take root and delve deeply into the target regions and countries.

3. Major Challenges in Cultivating Talents in Regional and Country Studies

3.1 Challenges of Disciplinary Integration and Paradigm Shift

As an interdisciplinary discipline, regional and country studies face significant challenges in disciplinary integration. Professor Han Dongyu points out that the key to regional and country studies lies in "deep cultivation" and "integration." Foreign language disciplines should fully leverage their traditional strengths in language, literature, and culture. At the same time, they must break down disciplinary barriers and actively integrate theories and methods from multiple disciplines, such as political science, economics, history, and sociology, to achieve a paradigm shift from "regional description" to "regional issues research." [5] However, traditional disciplinary fragmentation is severe, with each discipline having its own "boundaries," like a manor in the Western Middle Ages, each occupying a piece of land. This disciplinary barrier has seriously hindered the interdisciplinary development of regional and country studies.

Chen Jie, Dean of the Institute of Regional and Country Studies at Sun Yat-sen University, pointed out that regional and country studies currently faces problems such as a shortage of textbooks, fragmented research, and difficulties in interdisciplinary management. As an emerging discipline, regional and country studies lacks basic textbooks, an incomplete curriculum system, and inconsistent research methods, all of which pose difficulties for talent development. Furthermore, research fragmentation is prominent, and the lack of a systematic research framework makes it difficult to accumulate knowledge and innovate. Furthermore, regional and country studies faces the challenge of balancing disciplinary independence and distinctiveness. Liu Changming, Dean of the School of Northeast Asia at Shandong University, analyzed the three development stages of regional and country studies talent development and believed that regional and country studies talent development should be centered on cross-disciplinary integration, building a comprehensive system covering curriculum, practice, and management, while balancing national strategic needs with the characteristics of universities. [6] How to maintain academic autonomy while serving national strategies, and how to highlight the characteristics of each university while adhering to disciplinary commonalities, are challenges that regional and country studies must face in its development.

3.2 Resource Input and Institutional Barriers

Cultivating talent in regional and country studies requires significant resources, especially for local research, which requires adequate funding. Professor Qian Chengdan bluntly stated, "Local research is very expensive and requires ample funding." Long-term field research and study in the target country requires substantial funding, a heavy burden for many universities. Regional and country studies also faces the challenge of developing a strong faculty. Regional and country studies requires faculty with interdisciplinary knowledge, extensive regional experience, and a command of the target country's language. This multifaceted faculty is severely lacking. Northwest University encourages students to select research advisors during their undergraduate studies by recruiting high-level individuals such as the "Changjiang Scholars" program and professors with doctoral supervisor qualifications. However, this high-quality faculty remains scarce nationwide. Management systems and mechanisms are also ill-suited to the interdisciplinary nature of regional and country studies. Traditional disciplinary management models present numerous obstacles to faculty recruitment, curriculum development, and resource allocation across departments. Peking University's Institute of Regional and Country Studies has hired tutors from 17 departments, including the Department of History, School of Foreign Languages, School of International Relations, School of Government, and School of Economics. This cross-departmental cooperation mechanism requires breaking through the constraints of traditional disciplinary management.

3.3 Dilemma in Talent Training Quality Evaluation

The quality evaluation system for talent cultivation in regional and country studies is imperfect. As an interdisciplinary discipline, regional and country studies is difficult to evaluate using the standards of a single discipline. Traditional disciplinary evaluation is primarily based on the publication of academic papers, while regional and country studies emphasizes "applying knowledge to practice." There is still a lack of consensus and standards on how to evaluate the quality of talent cultivation in regional and country studies. Evaluating the effectiveness of local practice is also a challenge. Local research is a key step in the development of talent in regional and country studies, but the effectiveness of local learning and research is difficult to evaluate using traditional course assessment methods. The "Growth Partner" International Summer School, co-organized by the School of Geographical Sciences and the Department of History at East China Normal University, cultivates students' cross-cultural and interdisciplinary capabilities through a combination of "domestic intensive learning" + "cross-border immersion experience" + "international academic conferences." [7] The effectiveness of this diversified training model requires a more comprehensive evaluation mechanism.

Furthermore, employment channels and social recognition for regional and country studies professionals are problematic. While the country urgently needs regional and country studies professionals, the corresponding job market and career development paths remain unclear, hindering students' learning motivation and career planning. As an emerging discipline, regional and country studies lacks widespread public recognition, and employers are unclear about the skills they require. These factors pose challenges to talent development.

4. Innovative Approaches to Cultivating Regional and Country Studies Talents

4.1 Building an Interdisciplinary Integrated Training System

Faced with the challenges of disciplinary integration, universities are exploring innovative approaches to interdisciplinary integration. Northwest University's School of Regional and Country Studies has developed a deeply integrated talent development model based on the "theory of civilizational interaction" and a "four-in-one" model of "language + discipline clusters + regional and country studies + localized practice." This model transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries and achieves the organic integration of multidisciplinary knowledge. Peking University's Institute of Regional and Country Studies has established an interdisciplinary curriculum system with a three-module learning program consisting of "regional studies (knowledge about the target country) + language studies (the local language of the target country) + subject studies (specialized research in a specific area of the target country)." It also implements a learning method that combines classroom learning with field research. The institute has also hired instructors from multiple schools and departments to provide faculty support for the implementation of the new curriculum system. Yang Cheng, Executive Director of the Shanghai Institute of Global Governance and Regional and Country Studies at Shanghai International Studies University, stated that through multidisciplinary integration, language proficiency enhancement, and practice-oriented training, a distinctive discipline system with both academic depth and policy application value should be constructed to provide intellectual support for China's participation in global governance. [8] This interdisciplinary integrated training system can effectively break down disciplinary barriers and achieve a paradigm shift from "regional description" to "regional problem research".

4.2 Strengthening Localized Practical Teaching

Recognizing the practical nature of regional and country studies, universities across the globe have strengthened localized, hands-on teaching. Northwest University has established a "walking practical classroom," collaborating with universities in five Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries, including Iran, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt, allowing future students to immerse themselves in and deeply engage with their chosen region and country. This immersive, hands-on approach allows students to experience the society and culture of their research country firsthand and gain access to firsthand research data. East China Normal University has innovatively adopted a "domestic intensive study" model combined with international immersion and international academic conferences to create an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural learning journey across history and geography. The university's School of Geographical Sciences and Department of History jointly hosted the "Growth Partners" International Summer School, themed "Exploring Africa: Connectivity Across the Indian Ocean." The program, which included student field trips to Tanzania, marked a transition from "measuring China" to "reaching the world," and from the "Silk Road Economic Belt" to the "Maritime Silk Road." This significantly strengthened and enhanced students' interdisciplinary skills and cross-cultural understanding. Xi'an University of Science and Technology and the International University of Kyrgyzstan have reached a cooperation agreement on the exchange

of faculty and undergraduate students, joint undergraduate education through a "3+1" dual-degree program, and joint master's degree programs through a "2+1" or "2+0" model. This cross-border joint education mechanism provides a more systematic international practice platform for regional and national academic talent.

4.3 Innovative Teaching Methods and Technology Empowerment

Cultivating talent in regional and country studies requires innovative teaching methods and technological empowerment. Northwest University's regional and country experimental class, combined with artificial intelligence (AI), integrates think tank development, leveraging big data and AI to analyze international public opinion, predict regional risks, and empower think tank decision-making and policy research. Courses taught by diplomats and think tank experts, including ambassadors and counselors, guide students in writing think tank documents and advisory reports, contributing ideas to national ministries and provincial governments, and supporting national strategies. The School of Languages and Cultures at Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University prioritizes AI-enabled teaching as a key direction for promoting educational and teaching reform. Through seminars, training courses, and case studies, the school continuously promotes the deep integration of AI technology into teaching, enhances teachers' digital literacy and teaching innovation, and promotes the development of the school's digital and intelligent education system. The school has independently established 18 AI+ education and teaching reform projects, effectively integrating modern information technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing into its curriculum and educational reforms. Zhang Jinghui, Dean of the School of Foreign Languages (School of Advanced Translation) at Henan University, shared the results of their exploration into building a comprehensive innovation system spanning "language services, regional studies, and international communication." [9] This full-chain training model organically combines language skills, regional knowledge and international communication capabilities, and adapts to the ability requirements of regional and national talents in the new era.

Table 2: Summary of Innovative Paths for Cultivating Talents in Regional and Country Studies

<i>Innovation Dimension</i>	<i>Specific Measures</i>	<i>Typical Cases</i>	<i>Features</i>
Interdisciplinary Integration	Three modules of study	Beijing University	Breaking down disciplinary barriers
Localization Practice	Walking classroom and cross-border immersion experience	East China Normal University	Strengthening field research
Technology Empowerment	AI+Education and Think Tank Construction	Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University	Improving digital capabilities
Industry-Education Integration	School-enterprise cooperation and dual mentor system	Northwestern University Finance Experimental Class	Connecting theory and practice

5. Conclusions

As an emerging interdisciplinary discipline serving national strategies, regional and country studies are crucial for China's better understanding of the world and its participation in global governance. Currently, talent cultivation in regional and country studies is fundamentally guided by serving national strategies, emphasizing a "generalist + specialist" training model and prioritizing language proficiency and local practical experience. However, this field still faces multiple challenges, including disciplinary integration, resource allocation, and quality assessment. Future development in regional and country studies requires further advancement in the following areas: First, further strengthen interdisciplinary integration, break down disciplinary barriers, and build a more comprehensive regional and country studies knowledge and curriculum. Universities should leverage their disciplinary strengths to explore distinctive models for regional and country studies talent cultivation and avoid homogenous competition. Second, increase resource investment, particularly in support of local research. The government, universities, and society should jointly invest in establishing a dedicated fund for regional and country studies talent cultivation to support students' long-term overseas field research and study. Third, promote industry-university integration, strengthen collaboration with government agencies, think tanks, and businesses, and establish collaborative education mechanisms. Through dual-mentorship systems, internships, and project collaborations, students' practical skills and policy application capabilities can be enhanced. Fourth, fully leverage digital technologies to promote the digital transformation of regional and country studies talent cultivation. By leveraging technologies

like artificial intelligence and big data to innovate teaching methods, enhance research capabilities, and analyze international public opinion, we can cultivate regional and country studies talent adaptable to the digital age. In short, cultivating regional and country studies talent is a long-term, systematic undertaking that requires the concerted efforts of the government, universities, and society, along with continuous exploration and innovation. Only by cultivating high-quality, multidisciplinary talents with a global perspective, cross-cultural skills, professional knowledge, and policy application capabilities can we provide intellectual support and talent guarantee for China's participation in global governance and its efforts to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

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