

Integrating Area Studies into Undergraduate International Relations Education: Pathways and Strategies

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Abstract

The disciplinary construction of Area Studies has long been a focal point in Chinese academia, particularly after its establishment as a first-level interdisciplinary discipline in 2022. While synergies between Area Studies and International Relations have garnered increasing attention, their integration faces challenges. Despite shared goals like serving national strategies and fostering interdisciplinary approaches, differences in research objects and methodologies create tensions. This paper argues that integrating Area Studies into IR undergraduate education is vital for cultivating cross-cultural literacy, empirical research skills, and addressing shortages of compound talents in fields like international law and global governance. However, initial efforts encounter obstacles such as paradigmatic clashes, resource constraints, and institutional silos. To advance this integration, we propose reconstructing multilingual competency frameworks, redefining regional knowledge systems, and innovating compound talent cultivation models. These reforms aim to shift IR education from theory-driven to problem-oriented paradigms, aligning with China's strategic needs in global governance.

Keywords: Area Studies, international relations, interdisciplinary research

1. Introduction

With China's deepening participation in global governance, Area Studies was formally included in the Graduate Education Discipline Directory (2022) in September 2022, becoming a new first-level discipline under the interdisciplinary category. In terms of disciplinary scope, Area Studies and International Relations have long been interconnected and mutually influential. With the establishment of Area Studies as a discipline, its integration with International Relations has become an issue worthy of in-depth exploration. On one hand, this integration is an inevitable choice to serve national strategic needs—it can cultivate students' cross-cultural cognitive abilities, overcome the limitations of macro-system analysis in international relations, and strengthen students' empirical research skills. On the other hand, it can gradually address the shortage of national interdisciplinary talent reserves in areas such as foreign-related legal affairs, international organizations, and international communication. As the foundational stage of higher education, undergraduate education must integrate Area Studies into international relations teaching. Against this backdrop, this paper will analyze and explore pathways for integrating Area Studies into undergraduate international relations curricula by drawing on exemplary cases of disciplinary construction from domestic and international universities, thereby supporting the upgrading of undergraduate talent cultivation systems in international relations.

2. Connections and Differences Between International Relations and Area Studies

Although Area Studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field, domestic research in this area has a long history, primarily concentrated in three disciplines: Foreign Language and Literature, International Relations, and History (World History). Among these, International Relations shares the closest ties with it. As the

cross-integration of Area Studies with international relations has become a strategic proposition in higher education reform in the new era, some domestic universities have begun reconstructing their international relations curricula based on the connections between these two disciplines and their own institutional characteristics. This allows the two disciplines to complement each other in research, promoting disciplinary development through mutual verification and innovation. The similarities between the two disciplines can be summarized in three main points. First, both International Relations and Area Studies serve national foreign strategic needs. Since the formation of the Westphalian system, International Relations has consistently focused on power politics and order-building, with the evolution of its theories and practices reflecting the needs of great power competition. While Area Studies excels in local knowledge, it is fundamentally applied basic research that reveals specific patterns, primarily serving practical needs. (Qiu, Y. P., 2023) The two disciplines form a “macro-micro” complementary relationship in serving national strategies. Second, both disciplines exhibit interdisciplinary characteristics. International Relations theory builds upon political science while incorporating tools from economics, sociology, and other fields. Area Studies practices interdisciplinarity more thoroughly, encompassing perspectives from linguistics, anthropology, history, and other dimensions. This disciplinary openness allows for methodological dialogue between them. Finally, both disciplines are constrained by “Western-centrism.” Mainstream international relations theories have long been confined by the Westphalian framework, struggling to explain political practices in the non-Western world. Although Area Studies deeply examines the history and culture within regions or countries, it remains a discipline developed in the West, objectively deconstructing the universality of Western experience.

Despite these similarities, fundamental differences exist between International Relations and Area Studies in disciplinary orientation and research paradigms, evident in core aspects such as research objects and methodological approaches. Clarifying these differences is a necessary prerequisite for exploring integration pathways. On one hand, International Relations focuses on systemic-level interactions, concerned with abstract international power structures, institutional frameworks, and relationships among actors. Whether realism’s definition of balance-of-power structures or liberalism’s analysis of interdependence, both tend to simplify states into functionally convergent “black boxes.” For example, Waltz’s structural realism theory reduces states to “billiard-ball” units, retaining only military and economic power as variables while deliberately ignoring historical and cultural specificities. While this builds concise theoretical models, it struggles to explain the differentiated behavioral choices of states—especially non-Western states—under similar structural pressures. Area Studies, however, takes specific countries or regions as its research objects, emphasizing “thick description” of internal elements within specific states or regions. Its research scope extends beyond traditional political and economic fields to socio-cultural domains such as language customs, religious beliefs, and ethnic relations. On the other hand, International Relations has long been dominated by the scientific paradigm, primarily due to the rise of scientism and the shift in the center of international relations research after World War II. Scientific research adheres to deductive logic, deriving theoretical propositions from basic premises and empirically verifying their truth to obtain certain universal knowledge. While this approach enhances the scientific rigor of conclusions, it easily falls into the trap of method-driven problems—when complex social phenomena cannot be reduced to quantifiable indicators, the explanatory power of theories significantly diminishes. Unlike international relations research, Area Studies aims to acquire local knowledge, not universal knowledge. (Zhao, K. J., 2021) It favors hermeneutic approaches, integrating anthropological participant observation, historical archival research, and sociological qualitative interviews. It emphasizes understanding social facts within specific contexts and focuses on producing localized knowledge—such as through language learning, immersion in local cultures, and long-term fieldwork documenting historical changes—without forcibly fitting individual cases into existing theoretical frameworks.

Thus, it is evident that the two disciplines possess distinct research pathways and knowledge systems. International relations research typically exhibits strong theoretical orientation, with its core goal being the discovery and summarization of universal patterns. Mainstream theories have historically been modeled on European and American experiences—such as hegemonic stability theory and security community theory that once dominated discourse—while marginalizing the historical development and international status of regions like Latin America and Africa. This “knowledge hegemony” led to the misinterpretation of non-Western states’ behaviors as deviations from Western theories, until greater attention emerged when other major powers and relatively less developed latecomer countries strengthened their summaries of their own developmental experiences. The knowledge system of Area Studies, however, features problem-orientation and the accumulation of local knowledge. Its research often begins with specific practical needs, extracting experiences through in-depth case studies. It is precisely these deep-seated differences that make the integration of Area Studies into undergraduate international relations education not only theoretically complementary but also a practical imperative for cultivating urgently needed future talent.

3. The Necessity of Integrating Area Studies into Undergraduate International Relations Education

Area Studies requires the use of international relations theories' concepts and logic for research, while studies on regional international relations and foreign policies can provide more case validation and innovation space for international relations theories. (Song, W., 2024) Systemic factors emphasized in international relations theories also play a significant role in the domestic political development of various countries. Integrating Area Studies deeply into undergraduate international relations teaching extends far beyond addressing existing deficiencies; it proactively shapes students' core competencies to meet future challenges, providing solid talent support for major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics and global governance. Specifically, its necessity manifests in three aspects:

3.1 Cultivating Students' Deep Cross-Cultural Cognition and Understanding Abilities

The essence of international relations lies in interactions among countries with different civilizations, systems, and development paths. Traditional undergraduate teaching of international relations requires the integration of Area Studies to adapt to the new complexities of international relations. Since the formation of the Westphalian system, the discipline of international relations has long focused on power games and institutional interactions among sovereign states, forming a research paradigm centered on systemic analysis. However, with the deepening of globalization today, the boundary between domestic and international politics has become increasingly blurred. Phenomena such as the "whole-of-government" approach in US strategies toward China and the impact of sectarian conflicts in the Middle East on the global energy landscape indicate that internal political structures and socio-cultural elements within states have become key variables influencing international relations. Traditional international relations teaching emphasizes macro-system analysis but lacks interpretation of internal state dynamics, causing students to often fall into a cognitive dilemma of "knowing what without knowing why" when analyzing real-world issues. Area Studies emphasize language learning, value fieldwork, and engage in multidisciplinary dialogue beyond humanities and social sciences boundaries to deeply explore local history and culture, acquiring local knowledge. (Wang, Z., 2023) This knowledge is a constitutive element for analyzing political behavior, understanding foreign policy preferences, and predicting strategic trends. Integrating regional and country content enables students to move beyond superficial cultural curiosity or stereotypes, fostering a "sympathetic understanding" of different cultures and establishing a cognitive framework of respecting differences and understanding diversity—the foundation for effective communication, conflict resolution, and trust-building.

3.2 Developing Students' Solid Empirical Research and Fieldwork Competencies

Area Studies is characterized by its practical orientation and on-site requirements, with its methodological essence lying in obtaining firsthand data through immersive fieldwork. Introducing this research paradigm into undergraduate teaching can effectively counteract the tendency in traditional international relations education to "prioritize theory over empiricism, deduction over induction." By designing overseas or domestic fieldwork activities—such as oral history collection, community observation, institutional interviews, and archival research—students are guided to step out of classrooms and textbooks and directly confront the social realities of their research subjects. They employ qualitative research methods from anthropology, sociology, and history to collect, analyze, and verify information. Such training not only significantly enhances students' information discrimination, independent research, and complex problem-solving abilities but also cultivates acute observational skills, critical thinking, resilience, and adaptability in unfamiliar environments. This competence of "doing scholarship with one's feet" is the core competitiveness for future high-quality work in policy research, intelligence analysis, international reporting, and multinational corporate operations.

3.3 Building Interdisciplinary Talent Reserves Aligned with National Strategic Needs

The localized nature of Area Studies can promote a "1+1" composite language training model in undergraduate international relations programs: primarily English supplemented by the official or ethnic languages of the research subject countries. This is not merely language acquisition but aims to cultivate students' ability to interpret primary local documents and conduct in-depth interviews. Since undergraduate education in international relations predominantly focuses on general English proficiency, with long-term neglect of other international languages, few universities systematically offer courses in non-common languages. This imbalance in language training often leads to language barriers when students analyze political systems and inter-state relations in many developing countries, resulting in misinterpretations of national or ethnic cultures and creating a vicious cycle of theoretical imposition.

Talent cultivation requires effectively linking students' cognitive and non-cognitive competencies, embodying the integration of knowledge construction, skill development, and worldview shaping to cultivate interdisciplinary international research and governance talents who are "proficient in languages, knowledgeable about countries, and specialized in fields." (Zhai, S. L., & Liu, M., 2025) Beyond "language proficiency," the talents needed by the country must also "understand countries and specialize in fields" to adapt to China's increasing prominence on the world stage and its deep involvement in global governance system reforms. Past

talent cultivation in international relations was relatively thin, making the integration of Area Studies a direct response to new national strategic demands. For example, it is essential to cultivate foreign-related legal talents proficient in the laws, judicial practices, and business environment rules of target regions to serve the “Belt and Road” initiative and protect overseas interests; to train international organization and multilateral diplomacy talents capable of coordination, communication, and mediation in multicultural contexts—requiring not only knowledge of international rules but also deep understanding of the domestic political ecology, interests, and negotiation cultures of key member states; and to develop international communication and public diplomacy talents who provide timely regional analysis and policy advice to government departments, think tanks, and multinational corporations, necessitating solid language foundations and profound regional knowledge reserves.

Integrating Area Studies at the undergraduate level is a crucial early-stage foundation for cultivating various types of talent, directly impacting the establishment of China’s interdisciplinary talent reserves. However, current teaching practices still face challenges.

4. Practical Challenges in Integrating Area Studies into Undergraduate International Relations Education

The integration of Area Studies into undergraduate international relations education is influenced by multiple factors. Beyond differences in research paradigms, challenges also arise because international relations is already a mature discipline, while Area Studies is still in its nascent stage in terms of theoretical foundations, teaching resources, and talent cultivation.

4.1 Theoretical Integration Faces Disciplinary Paradigm and Knowledge System Conflicts

One challenge in integrating Area Studies into undergraduate teaching stems from methodological divergences at the theoretical level. As a discipline, international relations have increasingly moved toward scientific rigor—a trend well-reflected in the history of its theoretical development. In contrast, Area Studies relies more on interpretive methods that focus on history and culture, creating significant barriers to integration. The methodological differences between “seeking universal laws” and “deeply describing specific contexts”—obtaining “local knowledge” through in-depth case studies, historical analysis, and fieldwork while focusing on particularity and complexity—constitute fundamental obstacles to disciplinary integration in both cognition and teaching practice.

Discrepancies in research approaches further complicate integration. Traditional international relations research prioritizes theoretical over empirical studies and emphasizes major powers over smaller states. This tendency often treats the non-Western world as a testing ground for theories rather than a source of knowledge, leading to neglect or oversimplification of regional diversity, historical trajectories, and cultural logics. This easily results in a “dialogue of the deaf” at the methodological level during disciplinary exchanges, significantly hindering theoretical research and innovation. The “inside-out” perspective and emphasis on non-Western agency in regional and country studies starkly contrast with this traditional inertia.

Facing the knowledge system of international relations—typically centered on core theoretical schools and systemic-level analysis—the knowledge system exhibits problem-oriented characteristics, inherently interdisciplinary, capable of integrating political, economic, historical, linguistic, cultural, religious, and anthropological perspectives. Its structure is more decentralized and contextualized. Effectively integrating these two distinct knowledge systems within the undergraduate international relations curriculum framework—avoiding mechanical juxtaposition or the dissolution of one into the other—poses a significant challenge to instructional design and cognition.

4.2 Teaching Integration Confronts Insufficient Educational Resources

On one hand, most faculty in international relations programs at domestic universities have received training in traditional international relations theories and methods. The proportion of teachers with solid area knowledge backgrounds and proficient interdisciplinary skills remains low. Thus, for many faculty members, organically integrating regional perspectives and interdisciplinary methods into core international relations courses and developing new integrated courses presents fresh challenges. Even teachers with regional studies backgrounds may lack the ability to effectively connect regional knowledge with international systems theory, indirectly leading to the absence of regular collaborative teaching and research mechanisms between the two fields. On the other hand, few universities systematically offer and maintain high-quality courses in less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), often facing difficulties in enrollment and course sustainability, making it hard to meet the language requirements for specialized regional research. Consequently, regional studies within international relations commonly suffer from a monolingual problem, limiting research depth to secondary literature analysis. The absence of talents capable of conducting deep research using the languages of the studied countries prevents research from breaking free from Western-constructed knowledge frameworks. Taking Southeast Asian studies as an example, scholars relying solely on English-language sources often fall into the cognitive trap of “deconstructing former colonies through a colonizer’s lens,” failing to access genuine political ecosystems

within local discourse systems.

Beyond curriculum resources, universities need to provide more domestic and overseas immersive fieldwork opportunities for international relations undergraduates—including community observation, oral history collection, and institutional visits—given that the essence of studies lies in “being on-site.” The true goal of Area Studies should be to comprehensively understand all kinds of information about countries and regions worldwide, including politics, economy, society, culture, history, geography, natural environment, etc. (Qian, C. D., & Yin, R. Y., 2024) However, these aspects often face multiple obstacles such as funding constraints, security risks, project design guidance, and inter-university collaboration mechanisms, lacking systematic support.

4.3 Structural Problems Within the Higher Education System

Beyond insufficient teaching resources, structural issues within the higher education system also hinder integration. Current university departmental and disciplinary setups are often rigidly compartmentalized. International relations programs are typically housed within Schools of Political Science, Public Administration, or International Relations, while Area Studies may be scattered across Foreign Language Schools, History Departments, or newly established Regional Studies Institutes. This separation impedes course sharing, faculty mobility, cross-disciplinary student training, and interdisciplinary projects. Existing undergraduate curricula in international relations are relatively mature and fixed, making it difficult to adjust credit structures and core course requirements. Limited flexibility makes it challenging to accommodate substantial new regional and country content, especially elements requiring language support and practical components. How to scientifically restructure the curriculum without significantly increasing overall credit burdens remains a major challenge. For faculty, the current teaching and academic evaluation systems tend to favor traditional theoretical research outputs and publications in English-language international journals. The value placed on qualitative research, policy application reports, and fieldwork documentation emphasized in it remains insufficient, affecting faculty motivation to engage in integrated teaching and research.

Addressing these challenges requires systematic educational reform. At the theoretical level, it necessitates reconstructing conflicting cognitive frameworks and bridging the opposition between “universality” and “particularity” research paths. At the practical level, it demands breaking down disciplinary silos and innovating traditional teaching mechanisms to accelerate effective alignment between education and national strategic needs, providing solid talent support for major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.

5. Exploring Pathways for Integrating Area Studies into Undergraduate International Relations Education

Facing the practical challenges of disciplinary integration, exploring viable pathways for integration is crucial. This can begin with reconstructing core teaching elements, focusing on three major directions: multilingual competence cultivation, regional knowledge cognition system innovation, and interdisciplinary talent training model optimization, proposing concrete implementation plans to overcome barriers and advance the deep integration of Area Studies into undergraduate international relations teaching.

5.1 Reconstructing the Multilingual Competence Cultivation System

Like many non-language disciplines, international relations traditionally emphasize English in its teaching system. While this met research and communication needs during early globalization, it no longer suffices for national strategic demands amid profound global changes and China’s increasing prominence on the world stage. The Action Plan for High-Quality Development of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Universities Toward 2035, jointly issued by the Central Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Education, calls for optimizing country and regional studies and building new university think tanks with Chinese characteristics. The integration requires redefining the value of language competence and actively expanding new language course systems. This transformation involves not only curriculum adjustments but also a paradigm shift in students’ language cognition: learning less commonly taught languages enhances understanding of different countries and civilizations, better overcoming language barriers, broadening research scope, improving academic exchange quality, contributing to regional studies, and aiding in understanding political behavior and national strategic trends. Therefore, efforts should promote the cultivation of “Area Studies + Foreign Language” talents, exploring distinctive and localized cultivation paths based on market demands and institutional strengths.

Simultaneously, in traditional teaching models, language instruction and specialized education have long been compartmentalized. Foreign language departments handle language courses, while international relations programs focus on theoretical teaching. This division makes it difficult for students to translate language skills into research tools. Integration demands breaking down disciplinary barriers to fuse language learning, international relations theory, and regional knowledge acquisition. Cross-disciplinary course development is key to solving this problem. Embedding specialized content into language teaching and strengthening language application in disciplinary courses are essential. Establishing English as the foundational course language,

supplemented by in-depth training in two strategic regional languages, balances linguistic breadth and disciplinary depth. Enhancing English academic writing and specialized literature reading abilities—such as intensive analysis of classical international relations theoretical works—enables students to master disciplinary terminology and local cultural acquisition.

5.2 Reconstructing the Area Knowledge Cognition System

Traditional undergraduate courses in international relations emphasize theoretical and systemic teaching, with few universities offering targeted courses on micro-level differences between countries or regional characteristics. Existing interdisciplinary initiatives mostly rely on single-discipline talent cultivation programs sharing courses and faculty with other schools or departments. (Wang, W. L. L., 2024) Future undergraduate teaching in international relations must break disciplinary barriers to integrate the essence of Area Studies.

First, regarding curriculum: Traditional international relations courses focus on systemic-level analysis. Integration requires adding cognitive dimensions centered on state internals and regions. Area Studies emphasizes the integrity of history and culture and “contextual specificity,” preferring to achieve “breadth of substantive knowledge” through local languages and “general cultural knowledge,” attaining “cross-cultural understanding” through historical and cultural interpretation and comparison. (Liu, Q., 2018) The attention to historical particularity in Area Studies can compensate for the “simplified state” assumption in international relations theories. Therefore, curricula can reconstruct deep cognition along historical dimensions—for example, adding “regional history” modules to International Relations History courses. Along social dimensions, Comparative Politics courses can strengthen analysis modules for “non-institutional power structures.” Beyond course design, since traditional international relations courses mostly rely on textual analysis and case deduction, Area Studies emphasizes “unity of knowledge and action” competence cultivation. Russian universities provide excellent models: their practical teaching systems emphasize interaction between academic research and policy formulation. For instance, Kazan Federal University requires “Regional Studies of External Regions” majors to complete “dual internships”: policy analysis training at the Federal Ministry of Economic Development and participation in cross-border cooperation practices at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tatarstan. (Liu, J., 2022)

Second, regarding teaching resources: Actively establishing digital sharing platforms is essential. Integrating historical archives, fieldwork data, policy documents, and multidimensional resources consolidates scattered teaching materials, corpora, and audiovisual resources across universities. For example, creating a “Regional Political Discourse Corpus” systematically collects primary materials such as leaders’ speeches and social media political discourse. Building a “Belt and Road Legal Terminology Database” with multilingual comparative texts of investment laws from ASEAN countries supports students’ comparative legal research. Virtual teaching and research sections are equally important, using 5G technology to enable cross-institutional faculty sharing and optimizing resource allocation efficiency.

Finally, promoting dual-track advancement of faculty capacity reconstruction and faculty structure optimization: Faculty training mechanisms require forward-looking planning. Emphasizing talent reserves for regional language instructors—such as selecting international relations students for targeted language teaching training—is crucial. Advancing China’s Area Studies could begin with the internationalization of research talent, focusing on cultivating scholars with long-term overseas study, fieldwork, internship experiences, solid disciplinary foundations, and academic rigor. (Xie, T., Chen, Y., Dai, C. Z., et al., 2022) Regularly holding disciplinary dialogue workshops fosters integration between international relations structural research and in-depth localized studies.

5.3 Reconstructing the Talent Cultivation System

The integration must ultimately manifest in talent cultivation. As General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, participating in global governance requires a large number of professionals familiar with Party and state policies, knowledgeable about China’s national conditions, possessing a global vision, proficient in foreign languages, well-versed in international rules, and skilled in international negotiations. This means that integration requires cultivating interdisciplinary strategic talents. However, China’s talent cultivation faces structural problems beyond shortages in three key areas (international organizations, foreign-related legal affairs, international communication): first, how to coordinate “instrumental knowledge” with “disciplinary knowledge”; second, how to balance “domain specialization” with “regional specialization”; third, how to integrate knowledge literacy, skill literacy, and value literacy. (Chen, J., & Bai, L., 2025) Therefore, beyond integrating course knowledge—requiring students to master the language, history, and culture of target countries while specializing in domains like law, economics, or communication—it is necessary to cultivate and leverage students’ diverse learning abilities: studying theory in classrooms and practicing real-world skills outside, making fieldwork and negotiation simulations compulsory courses. It also requires constructing new evaluation systems—for example, placing greater emphasis on internship reports, policy analyses, and other practical outcomes.

For foreign-related legal talents, efforts should focus on shaping specialized competencies in regional and national laws, cultivating “rule-knowing, operation-capable” practical talents. Curriculum design can center on courses related to specific countries’ or regions’ laws—for example, training students to understand the cultural roots of the “mediation-first” principle in judicial practices of Southeast Asian countries, avoiding rigid application of Western adversarial litigation models. In practical components, students should gain internship opportunities in judicial organs and participate in judicial case database construction.

For international organization talents, training should cultivate “rule-knowing, coordination-skilled” multilateral talents. Domestic universities’ international relations programs can innovate curricula based on institutional strengths—analyzing various negotiation cultures, studying existing negotiation materials from different countries, and interpreting motivations behind strategic choices. Active experiential learning should be promoted: annually selecting students for internships at international organizations and practicing negotiation skills in simulation competitions. Language proficiency must meet bilingual or multilingual working standards to ensure accurate articulation of China’s stance in complex international contexts. In exploring international organization talent cultivation, beyond building institutional brands, universities should collaborate internally and externally to leverage collective strength. (Jin, Q., & Liu, J. R., 2020) For example, Shanghai universities formed an alliance for international organization talent development, while Beijing Foreign Studies University and China University of Political Science and Law jointly established a bachelor-master integrated program for foreign-related legal talents in 2021.

For international communication talents, training should focus on cultivating “storytelling, prejudice-counterering” communicators. Developing cross-cultural precision narrative abilities is key. To ensure teaching quality, universities should enhance cultivation models by forming interdisciplinary supervisory teams guiding professional knowledge application, participant observation techniques, and multilateral negotiation strategies. Multiple professional certifications should be established for different research directions. In building practical platforms, active collaboration with international media outlets, research institutions, and cultural exchange organizations is essential. Jointly establishing platforms for international cultural dissemination and exchange—covering international news co-production, cross-cultural exchange programs, and international media forums—enables international communication talents to access broader global perspectives, understand cultural communication strategies and audience needs in different countries, thereby enhancing their cross-cultural communication and international dissemination skills in practice. (He, L., Liu, B. D., & Zhang, D., 2025)

6. Conclusions

Against the backdrop of globalization and the information revolution, Area Studies is flourishing, reflecting an era of resurgent local knowledge. “The more national it is, the more global it becomes”; conversely, “the more globalized, the more localized.” Deeply integrating Area Studies into undergraduate international relations teaching can nourish the development of regional studies while injecting vitality into international relations. With economic globalization and digital connectivity, demand for “international” knowledge has surged. Traditional “ivory-tower” international relations research can no longer meet this growing demand. Only by inclusively absorbing “international relations” knowledge from different disciplines and continuously expanding research fields can international relations studies respond to such needs. The discipline itself will achieve self-renewal and development through the production and creation of new knowledge. Area Studies represents precisely such a field, holding great significance for advancing international relations research.

Rather than fixating on differences in research objects and methods, it is more productive to recognize the shared strategic goals and integrative value of the two disciplines, researching the feasibility of genuine teaching integration. This integration not only helps students build core competencies of “language proficiency, country expertise, and domain specialization” but also drives international relations education from theory-dominance to problem-orientation. Future efforts require continuous deepening of curriculum reform, fieldwork practice, and evaluation innovation to precisely align talent cultivation with national needs in “Belt and Road” construction, international organization functions, and cross-cultural communication. Amid intertwined domestic and international contexts of “two overall situations,” cultivating talents with both global vision and regional expertise, well-versed in international rules, will provide solid intellectual support for major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, enabling the international relations discipline to transcend Western discourse systems and achieve autonomous knowledge production.

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