

Developmental Dynamics, Experience and Methods of Area Studies

(Editor's note) 2018 is the year the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) hoisted its sails. Established in April, PKUIAS guides basic research and conducts both fundamental and predictive studies covering major issues in key countries and regions. It provides a research paradigm with Chinese characteristics while making full use of PKU's advantages, to contribute to the country's area studies and international academic exchanges and development.

2018 marks the 5th anniversary of the proposal of the One Belt and One Road initiative (BRI). The economic cooperation and cultural exchanges between China and the countries along the BRI routes are deepening, and the need for more systematic and in-depth academic research in various areas of the world is becoming more urgent. 2018 also coincides with the 120th anniversary of Peking University. PKUIAS, established at this time of special historical significance, represents the accumulation of PKU's long academic history and is expected to set an example for the way PKU structures its disciplines going forward. The whistle has already sounded, and the ship is about to leave the port. Discussions on PKUIAS' development dynamics, experience, vision, methods, theory, foundation, personnel training and approach to academic disciplines must go ahead. At academic seminars such as the "All Under Heaven Forum" and "Broadyard Workshops" held in 2018, many experts and scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on these topics. Here we select some of the highlights to share, for the reference of academia, policymakers and people in all walks of life.

I "Open eyes to see the world"

Development momentum of area studies

Area studies is just unfolding in China, marking a new era of "opening our eyes to see the world." So, what is the motivation behind this field? Undoubtedly, China's national strategy and the need of major country diplomacy are the most important impetus, but we must also recognize that the academic and disciplinary driving force provides the continuous and innate momentum.

- **Zan Tao: New era raises new issues; This is the right time for strengthening**

area studies¹

With the rapid development of China's economy and society, the characteristics and approaches of academic research have been influenced by the times and the environment, and become more important than ever. In 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the "Belt and Road initiative." Ongoing and major changes in the real world have raised the issue of China's relationship with the world. Chinese scholars have more responsibility and a greater mission to face and answer this question.

Since the start of the reform and opening-up policy forty years ago, the relationship of today's China, a country of huge scale and extraordinary development, with its neighbors and the world, as well as expectations of its contributions to the future global order, have become unprecedented areas of investigation faced by the academic world. It requires a generation, or even future generations, of Chinese scholars to study the world more deeply and fully. In the final analysis, area studies in China needs to be strengthened to give a quick response to new problems raised by China while meeting the rules of academic norms and scientific development.

Obviously, in the face of such new demands on the field, an imbalance in the scale and organization of our previous foreign studies efforts has been exposed. For example, our understanding and research on neighboring countries and regions such as Russia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and South Asia appears relatively weak, unable to meet the actual needs of rapid development. This requires us to strengthen area studies and actively understand and study foreign countries and the world while deepening our understanding of China itself.

- Niu Ke: Area studies must have the duality of a think tank and an academic orientation²

Changes since China's late Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) are based on the premise of "seeking knowledge from the world." The acquisition of knowledge about the outside world is an important component of China's modernization process. Since reform and opening-up, the extent and pattern of the Chinese understanding of the world has undergone tremendous changes and enhancements, and the role of China in the world has also undergone profound changes. Our country needs to understand the

¹ Chinese Social Sciences Net. Zan Tao: *Developing area studies is inseparable from basic discipline construction and top-level design.* http://ex.cssn.cn/gjgxx/201712/t20171220_3785901.shtml

² An Gang. *Reflections on China's Area Studies—Interview with Niu Ke, Associate Professor of Peking University, and Lu Guangsheng, Professor of Yunnan University* [J]. *World Affairs*, 2018(12): 64-67; *Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies*" Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

world more comprehensively, systematically, deeply and accurately than before. The relationship with the outside world needs to be reconstructed in terms of knowledge and ideas. How should China's higher education and humanities and social science systems carry out and fulfill this mission? The way that a specialized academic knowledge system should construct, produce and disseminate knowledge about the outside world remains to be further explored.

The social sciences disciplines were reconstructed after reform and opening-up. On the one hand, our foreign research system has obvious gaps and structural problems. The research on other countries and regions is still relatively weak, and research on the non-Western world is particularly limited. Exchanges and cooperation across research fields and disciplines are relatively weak. On the other hand, the study of China by Chinese scholars applying Western models and concepts is more common. The academic research and achievements by these scholars written in English are generally considered to be “high-end” and “in line with international standards.”

Area studies in our construction certainly need to adapt and meet the current practical needs of the state and society, including providing intellectual support for foreign policy in our new era. However, area studies in universities cannot be limited to mere think tank functions. The field cannot be defined only by practical utility. In addition to policy functions, area studies must have its own academic orientation and intellectual mechanism. China is already a major country, so we have to establish a substantial and constructive connection between knowing ourselves and knowing others, and establish a high-quality, comprehensive and well-structured international academic knowledge system.

- Qu Jingdong: Area study is a mirror to understand the world and ourselves, and is the hub for the construction of a knowledge system.³

Today, to promote area studies, PKU should understand area studies from the perspective of the relationship between the ancient and modern eras and in the context of current world, and provide a basic paradigm for area research under the guidance of China's own civilization to build a knowledge system. Area studies should deepen comprehension and understanding of our own civilization. If PKU wants to highlight such an academic ambition of area studies, it should use knowledge contribution as a core effort, rather than other area research that has already largely existed and is

³ Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies” Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

relatively superficial. Area studies is definitely not limited to a certain area. It constitutes a process of some reflection, understanding and recognition within a knowledge system, our new paradigm and new ideas, our understanding of our own civilization, and the relationship between world civilizations as they enter world history.

From the perspective of the knowledge paradigm, we have been looking at the world and ourselves from the reference point of Chinese and Western issues for more than 100 years. We grow and adapt in a space of world history built with the West as the main body. The way we look at the West, the rest of the world and our own country is still being done this way. In fact, we already understand the West, which is dominated by Western Europe, but we do not understand the layers of relations that extend around the world. If area studies can be understood in the above manner, it is now critical for us to understand the rest of the world and to understand ourselves.

Area studies have played a pivotal role in the construction of the entire modern (since 100 years ago) knowledge system in China. Western modern ethnography, paleology, theory of evolution and other knowledge systems that emerged based on colonies and empires are, to some extent, the starting point and foundation of Chinese modern science. Forerunners like Mr. Wang Guowei were inspired by Western literary and paleology studies to help build our entire archaeological and paleography system, and without them we would not have seen such progress.

However, we should recognize that our system's foundation is precisely the West's own new paradigm that emerged from the transformation of modern knowledge in the 19th century. This was brought about by area studies in the Western sense.

Mr. Chen Yinque's efforts are to learn a variety of regional language and culture theories from the West to re-understand the very complex Chinese structure.

This is especially true not only for understanding Chinese traditions, but also for understanding modern and contemporary China; the problems presented by area studies are not only problems in the regions studied, but also our own problems. For example, only if we understand the problems of Turkey today will we understand the ethnic problems in Xinjiang today. Also, only if we understand the system of the Hinayana Buddhism in Southeast Asia can we understand the process of the seesaw balance between the ethnic minority groups in our southwest region and the country in terms of religious culture over the long course of history, and understand how these

different religions and ethnic groups can build a complete political community and their own identity, to answer the question of "Unity in diversity of the Chinese nation" put forward by Mr. Fei Xiaotong. Therefore, no matter whether the area we are studying is bordering us or not, it constitutes a re-understanding of ourselves, and it also constitutes the most important opportunity for Chinese civilization to understand, constantly reflect and construct itself in a very comprehensive manner.

II "Borrow stone from other mountains to strike jade"

The US experience in area studies⁴

In recent years, area studies has been highly valued by China's policy research departments, think tanks, and universities, but much of our understanding, disciplinary epistemological discussions, and sociology-oriented discussions have not kept up. The field of area studies in the US arose in the 1940s. It formed some systematic experiences in the initial stage and development process which are worth noting.

- Rise and development

During WWII, the US had a huge demand for extraterritorial knowledge due to large-scale military intelligence operations, overseas propaganda, and overseas military occupation. The military intelligence agencies quickly established some initial forms of interdisciplinary research platforms and training programs. At the same time, the American intellectual elites launched a movement for area studies. This included the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), the flagship organization of American social sciences. It also included university scholars, foundations, professional academic organizations, and government officials. They participated together in the development of a basic agenda and framework for action for post-war area studies.

First, area studies was placed under the university system rather than government institutions or government affiliates, to establish its academic background and professional orientation. Second, interdisciplinary work was recognized as the core attribute of area studies, and external research was expanded in various disciplines, so that area studies constituted a major supplement to the existing discipline system. Third, the goal and pattern of "covering the whole world" was established.

⁴ An Gang, *Reflections on China's Area Studies—Interview with Niu Ke, Associate Professor of Peking University, and Lu Guangsheng, Professor of Yunnan University* [J]. *World Affairs*, 2018(12): 64-67; Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies" Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

In the next few decades, large public welfare foundations such as Rockefeller, Ford, and Carnegie funded area studies-related projects. After 1958, federal government funds also joined. Under the regulations of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) and the subsequent Higher Education Act (HEA), the federal government annually provides funds to language and area studies centers identified as “National Resource Centers” at universities, a policy that continues to date.

- Unique advantages

Under the nation-state system, establishing academic traditions and knowledge production systems for knowledge outside of their own communities or nation-states has a long history. The West has a developed system of linguistics and oriental studies. The uniqueness of area studies established in the US is that it breaks the narrow perception of regions and incorporates many cross-border studies, which represents a new orientation. Regional and international studies in the US are supported by a unique and powerful force, which gives an important supplement and sparked a reorganization in the modern humanities and social science system dominated by the modern academic system and the subject science and technology system. In the process of creating area studies, the Americans were very conscious to create a distance from traditional Oriental studies, and even a distance from modern linguistics. They made great efforts to establish a path to cover the societal knowledge of the whole world. During this process, they also harvested many fruits of constant self-correction and self-reform.

After years of evolution, area studies in the US have not only taken root in its higher education system, realizing specialization and institutionalism, but also has become the most important interdisciplinary mechanism in the arena of the social sciences and humanities. This is an international knowledge production system with unprecedented scale, complex organization and flexible mechanisms in world history. A large number of interdisciplinary area studies centers have been established in American universities, especially public and private elite universities, to undertake the role of academic organizations and public services that cannot be replaced by departmental organizations. Some nation-wide professional organizations for area studies have also been established in succession, such as the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, etc. Area studies has also been effectively incorporated into undergraduate general education, making international knowledge an important part of university students' study.

- Three ways the US has benefited

First, area studies in the US has expanded its foreign research. Americans believed that there were too few foreign studies in the existing disciplinary system. The old oriental studies that had been established were far from enough, and the things studied in oriental studies are largely not social sciences. At that time, the US wanted to include Western Europe and the US as one region in the area studies framework but it did not succeed. But it succeeded in expanding the system of foreign knowledge studies under the existing university system.

Second, area studies in the US promotes interdisciplinary development. The US has suffered so-called "discipline isolationism" in the process of coordinating the modern disciplinary system. Some social scientists' leaders believe that some common, basic, important, and profound problems could not be effectively solved under the old disciplinary system. Therefore, interdisciplinary work has become a slogan and symbol, and this interdisciplinary effort is mainly achieved through area studies. Area studies is the largest, most systematic and profound interdisciplinary effort in the history of American social sciences.

Third, area studies in the US has advanced Americans' ability of international understanding and their ability to appreciate international aesthetics in various ways at various levels. People like Hans Morgenthau, who advocates power politics in his own academic field, saw at the beginning of the establishment of area studies that the study of foreign countries requires fundamental changes to Americans' aesthetic preferences for the outside world, forming an ideological movement that aims to eliminate American's debate over their differences from others. Area studies in the US have obvious resistance to American cultural insularity and American centralism. It can also be said that area studies is an important carrier of American cosmopolitanism and cultural pluralism. Area studies scholars are often the ones who best understand and appreciate other peoples and cultures among the intellectual elites in the US. They also criticize the mistakes and failures in US foreign policies.

III "Learn from ancient and modern times, be insightful and grasp the crucial point"

The "field of vision" needed in conducting area studies

Theories and methods top the list of discussion subjects when we talk about area studies today. Wang Zhouyi, deputy head of PKU's Office of Humanities and Social Sciences, pointed out that the perspective of area studies in China is often limited to

the “three-single” model, that is, a single disciplinary perspective, a single country or region, and a single study in a historical or current situation. The question becomes: How do we develop area studies and break through these limitations? What kind of vision should we follow?

- Wang Jisi: Deep longitudinal excavation, horizontal expansion, forming research synergy⁵

From an academic perspective, area studies is a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive field, which means it could not be considered a single discipline. It requires a combination of social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. History, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, political science, economics, law, geography, environmental science, etc. all constitute the disciplinary basis of this field. For example, among China's professional researchers on American issues, most of the ones who are well-known and have strong discourse power are scholars studying the current US economy, politics, diplomacy, and Sino-US relations. But to truly understand the US, there must be some cross-discipline knowledge. For example, researchers at least have to know Henry Longfellow, Mark Twain, Martin Luther King and other famous people, know that the US national anthem is "The Star-Spangled Banner" instead of "The Stars and Stripes Forever," or even appreciate Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and excellent Hollywood movies and have long-term personal contacts with some American friends.

When I worked at the Institute of American Studies of CASS, I learned a lot of horizontal knowledge from my colleagues who specialize in American culture, religion, and social issues. *The Chinese Journal of American Studies* from the Institute is also seeking balance between the humanities and social sciences. But after all, my specialty is American diplomacy. Its disciplinary base should be international politics, comparative politics, political theory, political thought, etc., and not "American studies." In other words, my personal research should be based on longitudinal research in the discipline and basic knowledge of political science, and at the same time strive to include more horizontal knowledge, including other areas in American studies, the politics of other countries as well as the history and current state of global political development.

It is best for scholars in area studies fields to have two identities at the same time:

⁵Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Peking University, 73rd International and Strategic Studies Report

one is an expert of a certain region or country, and the other is a scholar in a particular discipline. To form synergy in the field of area studies, scholars who study the same target country or area but belong to different disciplines need to coordinate and cooperate with each other. On the other hand, coordination by scholars of the same subject but of different target countries or regions is also needed, in order to make full use of limited material and human resources.

- Wang Hui: Pay attention to the cross-regional perspective, avoid disciplinary separation, and avoid these two wrong tendencies⁶

Nowadays, a large number of scholars in area studies have extended their focus to other regions with certain countries as the center points. This is not real cross-border studies. But sometimes in area studies, a cross-regional perspective needs to be set at the beginning. This cross-regional perspective has a methodological problem to solve—because area studies has always been marginalized in the humanities and social sciences fields in the West, it does not produce theories or real discourse, but applies other people’s discourses, theories, and frameworks. It is difficult to use this approach to meet the needs of cross-region studies.

The first step in changing the status quo is to not separate area studies from basic research in humanities and social sciences. In the past, the basic research of the humanities and social sciences was mainly based on Western experience. The hegemony of humanities and social sciences is, to a large extent, the hegemony of Western history, which applies the Western framework in other regions, leading to the objectification of other regions. But today, with globalization and the unfolding of area studies, area studies can shoulder the mission of reconstructing the social sciences and humanities. Area studies should no longer to use the general paradigms of the humanities of social sciences to study a certain area, but should open up new horizons and acquire new knowledge from regional studies, thus fundamentally changing the basic paradigm of humanities and social sciences.

Area studies should also break two tendencies. One tendency is to think of the changing history as a special space, ignoring that these spaces have their time attributes, and they are an open and ever-changing experience. Everything has its own time and space, and has connections with other times and spaces, which is important to be considered. The second tendency is completely ignoring the space attribute. The

⁶ “Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies” Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

phenomenon of writing a thesis only based on data without understanding local culture is an example. These tendencies will bring a crisis to area studies.

- Qu Jingdong: Do world-wide research, deepen studies over key issues⁷

Area studies is a worldwide discipline. In terms of methodology, there must be an extension of two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension involves the structure of the civilization of the region and the track of its transition in history. The horizontal one includes its interaction with its surroundings and its cross-regional dissemination. Take for example, the Arab world and Europe in the Middle Ages. Europe's so-called renaissance of its Greek civilization was largely through the retention of knowledge and translations from the Arab world.

In addition, area studies should be built on the most critical issues through which we could understand ourselves and the West. Area studies links the relationship between any region and the whole world, and it also links the different responses from its traditions and modern times in the context of world history. Take Turkey, studied by Prof. Zan Tao, as an example. Today we treat Turkey as a nation-state that bridges the Eurasian continent. Especially after the modern reforms from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, we regard Turkey as a modern nation-state. But even now, Turkish intellectuals, entrepreneurs, elites, and even some civilians imagine a Turkey based on the Ottoman Empire or earlier history. This means their vision of Turkey's future will still be built with the long history Turkish civilization at the core. From this example we can see that we can't only study the relatively narrow problems facing Turkey today, such as how Erdogan handles interest-based relations with other countries. The more we study in this limited way, the less we understand Turkey. Today's problems are all related to the history of the Ottoman Empire in this region, which has influenced the languages, Europe-Asia relations and the relations among the three major religions in the Near East. To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to understand the relationship between area studies and the entire world at all levels.

- Li Chenyang: Breaking the limitations of vision and adopting a multi-dimensional perspective⁸

A multidimensional perspective is required when researching in the field of area studies. A historical perspective comes the first. Problems that occur or exist in reality

⁷ "Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies" Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

⁸ Li Chenyang. *Area Studies Require Multi-perspectives*. [J]. *World Affairs*, 2017(24):69. " Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies" Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

are often closely related to history. For example, Islam in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and other countries has obvious differences with Islam in the Middle East. This is because Islam was adjusted when it tried to adapt to local societies in the process of entering Southeast Asian regions.

Second is the cultural perspective. Taking railway construction as an example, some Southeast Asian countries believe that they cannot directly refuse cooperation projects proposed by friendly neighbors or friends. So they chose to constantly raise the price to maintain their own interests during negotiations, which makes Chinese feel wronged. This prompts area studies scholars to try to really understand the culture of the target country.

Third is a global or regional perspective. Problems in any region are generally not isolated. The problems must be related to changes of global or regional situations or global or regional political transformation. For example, the political transformation of Myanmar must be related to the US and the political transformation in the entire Southeast Asia region.

Fourth is the comparative perspective. For example, scholars engaged in Southeast Asian studies should not only focus on the target country, but also pay attention to their neighboring countries and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Greater Mekong Sub-regional Cooperation, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor. In-depth research papers are difficult to write if the scholar neglects influence from major powers (US, Japan, Russia, India and the EU) in this region and doesn't conduct comparative research.

Fifth, is the perspective of Chinese politics. Diplomacy is the extension of domestic politics. Chinese scholars engaged in area studies must both meet the academic needs of international research and serve national strategies. There are still many perspectives that need to be paid attention to in area studies, but the above five aspects are the most important.

IV The Construction of a Tall Building Starts with Its Foundation

Foundation and cornerstone of area studies

Area studies have think tank functions, but they cannot lose their own academic orientation and intellectual mechanism. This requires basic research in language, history, literature, culture, and religion as a cornerstone. This is also inseparable from

solid fieldwork and effective academic transformation, which area studies strongly supports.

- Wang Hui: Area studies should be based on basic research⁹

Area studies should begin with basic research. Although a think tank program is important, the importance of basic research should be further emphasized.

Historically, area studies in various countries has culminated during the expansion of an empire, as in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan. When the empire began to shrink, area studies also shrank. According to historical experience, the formation of area studies in the world is linked to the formation of hegemony. In the past three or four decades, scholars from the West have reflected on and wrote criticisms of their area studies programs. When we begin to conduct the design of area studies in China, we must systematically summarize these reflections, attach importance to the academic orientation of area studies, and not repeat the same mistakes.

- Niu Ke: Area studies requires the support of general education¹⁰

General education is of great importance to area studies. Today, we attach great importance to general education among undergraduates, but the leadership of the universities, and those who participate in the area studies movement, especially the organizers and leaders, must have a clear self-awareness that they also need general education themselves.

Area studies are fundamentally trans-disciplinary and interdisciplinary, and are an upper-level structure that accommodates all disciplines. There are also ideas and attempts to conduct area studies within disciplines, but this is not reasonable in terms of the university discipline structure and system. Scholars without general education awareness may also make a lot of contributions to area studies. However, there will be a great negative impact if the organizers and leaders of area studies lack general education or lack knowledge in sociology and philosophy of science, and have no systematic critical approach toward knowledge.

Focus on ethnography, explore the details of the real world, and transform field observation into an academic theme¹¹

⁹ "Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies" Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

¹⁰ "Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies" Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

¹¹ "Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies" Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin (quoted Gao Bingzhong and Guan Kai)

Area studies must examine the real community, rather than the imagined one. Therefore, the ethnographic orientation in anthropological research is worthy of attention. It can provide us with details about the real world beyond grand theory. Be aware that the rumors stemming from political myths often obscure the nature of an event. For example, the benefit of independence is one of the political myths that the big powers are now touting. However, many studies have found that a country's independence will bring about many problems. The independence of Kazakhstan brought the country significant problems. Is the history of this country 500 years or 30 years? This problem is similar to the problem of Chinese people wondering where their family tree should begin. Therefore, ethnography is an important method for us to solve many theoretical problems today. Through fieldwork, researchers can truly understand the religious activities of the middle class and understand the details of daily life in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Such knowledge can even subvert the myth of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. And these findings cannot be provided by the mainstream intellectual community.

Fieldwork is a very basic job. Researchers need to be rooted in a small community and keep observing the local people who are living their own lives. That often means the researchers should leave their loved ones, their social circles, and their habitual lifestyle and live in an environment which is worse than their normal academic and living conditions for at least one year. In fact, the researchers regard themselves as a primary school student studying in a foreign country, learning the language of others from the beginning like a child, such as learning hieroglyphs little by little, learning the Roman language from the most basic ABCs etc.. And this is only one stage in the hard studies. Researchers also need learn from the lives of ordinary people in these communities, and use their own wisdom, imagination, and experience to do academic research with the material they discover. To transform empirical observations obtained from field investigation into academic themes, we need to reflect on big topics through small local events, research central issues through peripheral phenomenon, and present culture and civilization as a whole through trivial daily experience. Also, via the interpretation of the others we get to know ourselves, and gain a new perception of "us" through the association with the others.

This is the two levels of anthropology in the classic expression of Geertz. The location of the study is not the purpose of the research. Anthropology does not study the village, but only studies in the village. Recognizing these two levels helps us to

cultivate talent and form real area studies. The study of anthropology can be said to be a process from point to line to plane. The fields of ethnography are scattered points, and the topic is the line connecting these points, and finally these lines form a certain area that is the plane. Anthropological investigations and care for human civilization as a whole are two basic links in research and play an extremely important role in area studies.

V The Wrong Method is Doomed to Fail (Fishing on the Tree)

Misunderstandings and warnings in area studies¹²

With the proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative, in recent years, research on the current situation in area studies has shown a huge increase in the amount of research, but this increase has not brought about a simultaneous rise in quality. The reason for this is that area studies, as comprehensive studies, generally lack theoretical systems and systematic thinking and perspectives. Without the right method, it is like fishing in a tree, and it is difficult to truly promote the development of area studies.

- The lack of standards and the emergence of some bad tendencies

Currently, there is a lack of standardization in area studies and there are also some bad tendencies. First, some people seek quick success and instant benefits in academics, specializing in popular countries and hot topics. They have no fixed research focus, and most of them are engaged in macro research without the support of details. They do not have a solid academic foundation, and do not do academic research first. They are only keen on policy research. Second, the academic training of the researchers is not standardized. The field of area studies has high requirements for researchers. Specifically, it requires them to understand the history, culture, and language of the country, as well as to have a good grasp of the theory and methods of a discipline to study an exact problem. In addition, writing, research and analytical capabilities are also needed. There are very few people who can do all these at the same time. Thirdly, area studies in China are disconnected from the field's international academic platform. At present, China's area studies articles published in English or in the target language are rare.

In addition, many researchers have not dealt with the relationship between points and planes. It is difficult for scholars who do research in a certain country to have a comprehensive understanding of the situation in neighboring countries. This is very

¹² Li Chenyang. Chinese Thinking in Area Studies [J]. World Affairs, 2017(22):73; "Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies" Broadway Workshop Academic Bulletin

limiting, because many problems are not just a country's problems, but are closely related to neighboring countries, regions and the world.

- “Chinese-style thinking” in area studies

In recent years, the number of people engaged in area studies has become larger and larger, but the overall level of work is worrying. We have made a series of mistakes in the analysis of the political direction and the China-related policy in many countries, especially neighboring countries. The reason is that some researchers in China use "Chinese-style thinking" to observe and analyze the problems.

First, they are accustomed to using habitual thinking to analyze the political situation and foreign policy of other countries. Take the 2015 general election in Myanmar as an example. Before the election, our foreign affairs and security departments believed that the ruling party could continue to be in power. The reason for the judgment is the assumption that when a ruling party faced a crisis of life and death in a general election, it would certainly cheat to maintain its political power. However, since Myanmar first had parliamentary elections in the 1920s and 1930s, its people have never done this kind of thing. Another example is that we usually think that if we want to become wealthy, we must improve the transportation situation first. However, people in other countries often do not think this way.

Second, researchers like to apply their experience in some countries to other countries. For example, although Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia are all countries that believe in Theravada Buddhism, the behaviors of the people in these countries vary widely. Although Myanmar and Thailand have similarities in their policies toward China, their ways to deal with similar China-related issues are still significantly different. So our policy toward Thailand will not easily work in Myanmar. The career path of diplomats can also cause similar problems. When officials from embassies in Europe, the US, and Australia transfer to embassies in Southeast Asia, they like to use their experience from previous countries to deal with present countries. This is often problematic.

Third, we often confuse ethnic Chinese relations by blood, their cultural identity and national identity. Take the case of Myanmar's Kokang people as an example. Although the Kokang people are all Han people, they are legitimate national minorities in Myanmar. When the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) was beaten by the Tatmadaw, many people in China people believed that the MNDAA was just like their married daughter being bullied by her husband's

family and that they should help her. But this concept is wrong.

Fourth, we sometimes deliberately create certain problems that did not exist or deliberately raise the seriousness of certain problems to obtain approval. For example, there are people who say that, in Myanmar, American warships and planes are about to enter, and there are many mercenary armies in North Myanmar. But these problems are fabricated.

Fifth, on the one hand, some of us oppose the "China threat" theory. On the other hand, we consciously and unconsciously have a "China-centered" theory and a "Sino-foreign friendship" theory.

Area studies must avoid these misunderstandings and put an end to the above-mentioned "Chinese-style thinking." Otherwise, our methods will not be able to achieve our goals and the work we do will be counterproductive.

VI Top-level Design for the Entire Strategy

Discipline design for area studies

In recent years, China's area studies are mainly driven by the development of think tanks. Policy research requires strong intellectual support, academic support, and an academic foundation. The main task of building and developing the discipline of area studies in China will inevitably fall to colleges and universities. This process needs a large amount of external input and strong top-level support.

- Niu Ke: As an interdisciplinary organization model, area studies needs to reflect the demands of professional and deep development¹³

Area studies is an intellectual approach that takes geographic, political, and cultural units as entities beyond the nomothetic trend of conventional social sciences. It is an academic scheme emphasizing "context-specificity." It is also a macro-knowledge framework and academic organization method that transcends the conventional disciplinary system, forming intellectual connections and organizational networks which are full of diversity, complexity and flexibility.

The development of area studies requires not only the expansion of the existence of the external world in certain social sciences, but also the establishment of mechanisms and platforms for exchanges between disciplines and fields. Our country's current recognition and organization of academic institutions leans to the single model and orientation of disciplines, and lacks the concepts and framework of

¹³ An Gang. Reflections on China's Area Studies——Interview with Associate Professor Niu Ke from Peking University and Professor Lu Guangsheng from Yunnan University [J].World Affairs, 2018(12):64-67

interdisciplinary organizations and complex organizations. Therefore, the current common thinking and practice of developing area studies is to place it under a discipline or sub-discipline conceptual framework. In terms of academic rationality, this is only expedient.

In principle, area studies should not be constructed in accordance with a single, homogeneous research field or discipline, but rather should establish a comprehensive, diverse and expanded group of academic activities and communication mechanisms. It should be a knowledge production structure in which the social sciences and the humanities are involved, and it should also be an important supplement to the setting of the conventional discipline system. In the post-war US, "area studies" was an interdisciplinary academic movement that broke and weakened "discipline isolationism." Area studies represented the most extensive and in-depth mobilization and reshaping of various disciplines and research fields, and had the effect of transcending foreign research itself and producing a profound impact on the construction and organization of knowledge in the social sciences and humanities. We need to consider how China's area studies can learn from the American area studies' principles and purposes, and how to fully mobilize existing resources and forces to effectively embed and enhance our knowledge systems and discipline systems.

- Zan Tao: Basic research-oriented area studies call for institutional innovation in education¹⁴

The training of talent in area studies requires a lot of time and energy in language learning, professional training, data acquisition and fieldwork. From the perspective of the entire training cycle, we can even say that, to a certain extent, this talent training model does not necessarily conform to the current academic evaluation system that encourages efficiency and quantity of results. To have enough patience and analyze problems based on the longer-term development of education is a decisive variable in the development of area studies based in colleges and universities.

Therefore, in the development of area studies, colleges and universities need to comprehensively consider the existing discipline system, evaluation indicators and policy framework and other factors to carry out corresponding institutional innovation. The best way to encourage and support Chinese scholars and students to engage in

¹⁴ Chinese Social Sciences Net. Zan Tao: The Development of Area Studies is Inseparable from Basic Discipline Construction and Top-Level Design. http://ex.cssn.cn/gjgxx/201712/t20171220_3785901.shtml

time-consuming and labor-intensive foreign research is the first issue for universities to consider when developing area studies programs. This is not just a question of resource input, but also a problem about how to build a more scientific, reasonable and fair academic evaluation system that is in line with national conditions.

In particular, area studies means interdisciplinary studies. Currently, this approach is still difficult for the discipline-led higher education system to accept. Peking University once invited American scholar Bruce Cumings to give a lecture on "Rethinking American Area Studies." He believes that national interests imposed requirements on area studies, and these requirements will promote area studies and drive the development of existing disciplines in the field. According to his point of view, emphasizing the characteristics and advantages of a particular academic discipline is an established feature of modern universities, and interdisciplinary area studies programs have difficulty forming its own unique discipline attributes. Of course, the development experience of area studies in the US has its own unique character, but at least it provides a framework for other countries to carry out relevant research, that is, without support of policies or power in specific periods, an area studies program is very difficult to develop naturally and maintain under the current discipline arrangement in colleges and universities.

Under the current education system, Chinese universities have their own discipline divisions, evaluation indicators and policy frameworks. The question of how to open up space for area studies focusing on foreign studies, especially on basic research, is the most important issue for universities to consider. It is necessary for colleges and universities to consider the top-level design or communicate with the education department, and establish the status and role of area studies in discipline construction and design in various universities. In this way, they can promote the humanities and social sciences and even application-oriented disciplines at colleges and universities through the gradual development of area studies, and make contributions to the construction of a philosophy and social science system with Chinese characteristics.

VII “It takes ten years to grow trees but a hundred years to cultivate talent”

Talent cultivation in area studies¹⁵

Area studies researchers should master the basic knowledge and methods of a

¹⁵ Institute of International and Strategic Studies Peking University, 73rd International and Strategic Studies Report

particular discipline, both to be proficient in a specific area and to have extensive knowledge. At present, China's area studies have a gap between the supply and demand of talent. The root cause of the problem lies in the fact that China's area studies are undergoing a major transformation. In the current situation, what kind of talent is needed for area studies?

- Wang Jisi: Both interdisciplinary talent and specialists are needed.

To cultivate talent in area studies, we need to work hard in both the horizontal and vertical directions, not only to train generalists but also to train experts. In the design of the project, it is necessary to show the characteristics of each region and highlight their common traits, and accordingly improve the curriculum design and training programs. For example, when observing the political situations of certain countries and regions, it can be found that most countries in the world today claim to be democratic countries. These countries have elections, heads of state, heads of government, parliaments, courts, political parties, and they all claim judicial organs can perform their duties independently. This was formed after the modern Western countries occupied a globally dominant position, and currently it has become common in all countries in the world. However, the political systems of each country and their modes of operation vary widely, forming their own characteristics. A course called "Introduction to Political Systems of Different Countries" could even be designed as a general elective course taught by the "generalists" among teachers. Generalists in area studies should be scholars who can provide general elective courses in world history, economics, politics, civilization and religion.

According to different academic standards, experts in area studies can be divided into three types. The first type is experts who do functional research and at the same time have a specific interest in certain region or country, such as Middle East energy experts, Latin American agricultural experts, US financial experts, European social security experts, etc. They do not necessarily have to do in-depth research on other aspects of the region or country.

The second type is experts in area issues research, such as experts on Arab issues, Middle East issues, and Central and Eastern European issues. They may have a good command of a foreign language other than English, such as Arabic or Russian. These scholars have published relevant works and traveled through major countries in the area, but may not have a deep understanding of a particular country.

The third type is country experts, such as Iran studies experts and Ukraine

studies experts. This is a top-level scholar who is rare in number. An Iran studies expert is supposed to master Persian, have lived in Iran for a long time, met some well-known figures in Iran and published books about Iran. In the US and Europe, such experts are not difficult to find. The reason is that after Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, many Iranian experts and scholars were exiled to the West. They became citizens of Western countries, and they or their relatives later had the opportunity to return to Iran. However, Iranian experts are rare in China. Iran is a major country in the Middle East. However the domestic talent in China who specialize in Iranis still scarce. It is even more unimaginable to find and cultivate talent who specialize in small countries like Azerbaijan.

- Niu Ke: Equip students with both regional and discipline knowledge¹⁶

Area studies, as an interdisciplinary macro-organizational structure, is involved with multiple disciplines, and is an academic community composed of diverse fields and research types. The discipline attributes and specific interdisciplinary styles of different branches and fields present various characteristics and emphasis. But in principle, area studies in China should have two attributes: one is specialization in the regions or countries, that is, the study of general knowledge of a country or region, including language, history, society and culture. The other is discipline specialization, that is, equipping researchers with knowledge and methodology in one or more disciplines.

In terms of the training of graduate students, especially doctoral students, the discipline departments should still be the main body of teaching and personnel training. But the interdisciplinary steering committee should also be used to reflect the specializations of both disciplines and regions. If necessary, it can also be multidisciplinary, inviting teachers from different disciplines and fields to participate in joint guidance, to help students gain the knowledge and skills of both regions and disciplines and break through the limitations of a single discipline or research field.

The training of postgraduates in area studies requires special arrangements. Since research on foreign countries, especially on non-English speaking countries or areas, generally requires more time and capital investment, it is necessary to extend the length of time of doctoral programs. Now that our country's education funds are relatively abundant, we should greatly increase the funding for students and

¹⁶ An Gang. Reflections on China's Area Studies——Interview with Associate Professor Niu Ke from Peking University and Professor Lu Guangsheng from Yunnan University [J].World Affairs, 2018(12):64-67

researchers, to provide them an opportunity to go to the target country for "immersion" visits and fieldwork.

- Li Chenyang: Attach importance to knowledge accumulation and building a theoretical basis, conduct fieldwork, and form an analytical framework¹⁷

The development of area studies requires accumulating knowledge and resources from multiple aspects. The deepening of area studies requires great efforts.

First of all, the accumulation of knowledge is of great importance. It is necessary to have the accumulation of knowledge of regional and national history, as well as global history and the history of civilization. Moreover, researchers must have a solid language foundation, mastering both English and non-common languages.

Second, researchers must have a solid theoretical basis. When studying the political, historical, economic, international, diplomatic, social, and ethnic issues of a certain country or region, researchers should know theories and methods from certain fields and not be limited to describing facts. Moreover, it is necessary to carry out in-depth and continuous fieldwork and observe the development and changes of countries or regions all year round.

Third, an analytical framework for major issues needs to be established. Taking Myanmar studies as an example, the major problems in Myanmar's political economy should sum up several regularities that do not change within a certain period of time, which are equivalent to certain theorems and then used to verify some information.

Finally, a strong academic network must be built up. In the field of area studies, researchers should have some personal connections in China, in the target countries, and in the European and American academic circles. Otherwise, research results will not be adequate for policy guidance or academic development.

- Fu Zhiming: Cultivate talents that can connect China and the world, and explore bridges that can communicate history and future¹⁸

Talent cultivation is an important task in the development of area studies.

First of all, researchers not only need to understand English but also need to have a good command of this language. More specifically, they are asked to master English as well as their mother tongues. In this way they can use languages to understand the culture, blood relationships, ethnicities, religion, and society of the studied areas.

Second, researchers must have a background in an academic discipline. For

¹⁷ "Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies" Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

¹⁸ "Experience, Theory and Methodology of Area Studies" Broadyard Workshop Academic Bulletin

example, if they want to study the Myanmar economy, then their major should be economics, and they must have economic theory to guide them. The most important thing is to have first-hand sources. The researchers should go to the target country to conduct fieldwork, not mislead readers with hearsay or rumors.

To cultivate professional talent in area studies, it is necessary to establish a four-advisor system. The language advisor will take charge of students' language proficiency and comprehension; the discipline advisor will guide the relevant research directions in the future. An advisor coming from an international advanced country who studies the same major is also needed. And a language advisor from the target country also should be taken into consideration. The four advisors form a team to work together to foster outstanding talent in area studies.