

A Study into the Development and Practice of International Communication Education in Europe and America in the Context of Interdisciplinary Integration

He Jing

School of Education, Renmin University of China, Beijing, 100872, China

Abstract: *The advent of the digital age has brought unprecedented challenges to global media education. In recent years, journalism schools in top universities in Europe and America have undertaken reforms in digitalization, interdisciplinary integration, and innovative practices. This paper briefly reviews the birth and evolution of international communication education in Europe and America, and focuses on the development status of international communication education in journalism schools of top universities in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands, from aspects such as talent team and platform construction, interdisciplinary and transnational joint training, problem-oriented curriculum design, and practice-oriented design of training goal. It explores how European and American universities have expanded the connotation of interdisciplinary in the reform of international communication education and what practical measures major journalism schools have adopted to meet the talents training needs of this highly interdisciplinary major.*

Keywords: *Interdisciplinary; Europe and America; International Communication Education; Development and Practice*

1. Introduction

The advent of the digital age has brought unprecedented challenges to global media education. As early as the beginning of the 21st century, with the continuous decline of traditional newspapers signaling the end of the "print media era," journalism schools in universities have clearly felt the urgency of higher education reform brought about by this global transformation of information communication paradigms. Journalism schools in European and American universities have taken the lead in reform. In 2005, the Carnegie Corporation and the Knight Foundation jointly launched the "Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education," to promote reforms in digitalization, interdisciplinary integration, and innovative practices in leading journalism schools in the United States. Globally, from New York to Amsterdam, from London to Paris, disciplinary and curriculum reforms have brought vitality to the development of media education.

In recent years, with the unstoppable reconstruction of global communication order and the surging competition for soft power and global discourse, international communication has gradually become an important direction for talent training in major journalism schools. International communication is closely related to public diplomacy and mass media from both broad and narrow perspectives. An investigation into related projects in major journalism schools in Europe and America reveals that international communication education and talent training is not limited to the virtual dimension of the media, but shows strong characteristics of problem-orientation and interdisciplinary. At present, when journalism schools around the world are facing transformation and reform, the study of the reform of international communication education in Europe and America is expected to shed light on the development of international communication education in our country.

This paper briefly reviews the birth and evolution of international communication education in Europe and America, and focuses on the development status of international communication education in journalism schools of top universities in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands, from aspects such as talent team and platform construction, interdisciplinary and transnational joint training, problem-oriented curriculum design, and practice-oriented design of training goal. It explores how European and American universities have expanded the connotation of

interdisciplinary in the reform of international communication education and what practical measures major journalism schools have adopted to meet the talents training needs of this highly interdisciplinary major.

2. The Birth and Evolution of International Communication Education in Europe and America

The emergence of international communication as an academic direction in European and American journalism education mainly began in the mid-20th century. At that time, during the Cold War, the global struggle in the field of ideology intensified the Western attention to international communication. As an important tool for ideological competition, Western countries, especially the United States, began to systematically promote the development of international communication education through government funding, media practice, and university reform. Taking the United States as an example, the federal government enacted the Smith-Mundt Act in 1948 to better conduct public diplomacy through broadcasting, publishing, and educational and cultural exchanges. In the same year, the Fulbright Program was launched to strengthen the training of international communication talents, followed by the Fulbright-Hays Act, which aimed to "promote mutual understanding between nations through education and cultural exchanges. The United States also expected to spread American values to other countries through this, which is considered the beginning of American public diplomacy." [1] The practical characteristics and national strategic purposes of international communication talent training were carried out in the form of providing assistance to developing countries in non-military ways. Western countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom established volunteer organizations to regularly select young students to go to Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and other developing countries where they "take root in grassroots overseas for one or two years, becoming key forces in education, healthcare, agriculture, business, and other fields." [2]

Academic research on international communication, communication and international relations, and public diplomacy gradually emerged, and "development communication" as an emerging research direction received widespread attention, discussing how to use communication technology to influence the modernization process of developing countries. Propaganda institutions such as the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe cooperated with the academic community, funding research on international information flow and communication patterns. The Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation provided substantial financial support for related academic research projects from a broader social purpose. The International Communication Association (ICA), established in 1950 as a professional academic organization, focuses on the refinement and improvement of academic categories such as international communication knowledge, theory, and methodology, providing an important academic platform for international communication and cross-cultural research.

Starting from the 1950s, international communication gradually became a part of the American journalism education system, and by the 1970s, it was considered an independent academic field. Journalism schools such as Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, Michigan State University School of Journalism, and the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism (later renamed "Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism") began to incorporate global media systems, international news production models, development communication, cultural communication psychology, cross-cultural studies, international affairs and public relations, and global journalism ethics into their curriculum system and program design. This expanded the scope of traditional journalism education to a global scale, highlighting the early interdisciplinary characteristics of communication studies with international politics, psychology, sociology, and other academic fields.

From the 1990s to the early 21st century, more universities shifted their academic focus towards the international domain. Major journalism schools, including the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, experienced rapid growth during this period and gradually became leaders in the field of global communication. At the same time, with the deepening development of globalization and the global spread of internet technology, international communication education ushered in new opportunities for development. Digital transformation became the theme of journalism education reform in European and American universities during this period. In terms of curriculum settings and academic research, there was a shift in focus from traditional media such as radio and television to new media communication, converged media, and digital media such as video technology. There was also a tendency towards more diverse interdisciplinary integration with international politics, public administration, public diplomacy, computer technology, data analysis and visualization, cross-cultural studies, health, women's development, psychology, environmental science,

and other disciplines. For example, the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, introduced courses such as "Data Journalism" and "Visual Journalism" to explore the impact of data visualization and algorithmic journalism on the global journalism industry. The Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford launched a Ph.D. program in "Information, Communication, and Social Sciences," focusing on issues including the spread of global disinformation through the integration of communication studies, data science, and advanced sociology methods. New York University's Steinhardt School and the College of Global Public Health jointly launched the "Global Public Health/Media, Culture, and Communication" program, combining public health with media and communication studies to explore how culture and media systems affect global health practices and policies.

In recent years, globalization and multi-polarization, digital technology, and the development of artificial intelligence have made international communication education more closely linked with a wide variety of global issues and cutting-edge technologies. The boundaries of international communication education have expanded further, from climate change communication to social justice movements, from public health to digital ethics. International communication education provides interdisciplinary theoretical and practical support to address complex global issues. Centered on global and regional issues, it presents more connection points related to other disciplines, becoming an important dimension for the cultivation of talent in major European and American journalism schools. Today, international communication education has become an essential part of cultivating global composite talents in European and American journalism schools, laying a solid foundation to meet the challenges of future globalization and technological changes.

3. European and American International Communication Education Practices in the Context of Interdisciplinary Integration

After more than 70 years of development and change, facing the deepening of digitalization, the reconstruction of world order, and the multipolar development of the current era, European and American universities have continuously expanded the connotation and extension of international communication education through various means such as stimulating internal potential and joining external resources. Compared with the early stages of international communication education, today's European and American international communication education has undergone tremendous changes in terms of geopolitical background, research topics, teaching methods, curriculum settings, campus culture, and training objectives. Keywords such as globalization and multipolarization, decolonization of knowledge, digital ecology, and new media have constituted new characteristics of the times, forming a sharp contrast with the strong ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union and the strategic intentions of public diplomacy during the Cold War. The development communication under the initial colonial-style Western-centric thinking has been challenged, and interdisciplinary integration and theoretical paradigms have been greatly enriched and expanded. Focusing on the current development of international communication education in European and American universities, it can be seen that major universities have taken a series of practical and feasible reform and innovation measures to effectively ensure that talent training program design keeps pace with the times and is science-based, that the supply of teachers and courses is sufficient and diverse, and that academic research is fruitful. Among the numerous reform measures of major universities' journalism schools, we summarize and generalize some practices with shared characteristics for further analysis and attempt to judge the development trend of European and American international communication education in the context of interdisciplinary integration.

3.1 Diverse Research Teams and Platform Construction Promote the Innovation and Development of Multidimensional Theoretical Systems

In recent years, the theoretical system of international communication has evolved from a relatively single research paradigm focusing on communication media, cross-cultural communication, and information flow models to a more extensive and diverse research dimension, and the theoretical foundation of international communication is undergoing reconstruction. Major journalism schools continue to enrich their faculty configuration by building a multidisciplinary team to promote the continuous expansion of research fields and perspectives. The faculty of many journalism schools consists of teachers who used to be well-known frontline journalists, senior editors, and award-winning photographers, as well as research-oriented teachers who are dedicated to academic research. Their individual research areas generally show cutting-edge and interdisciplinary characteristics, and there are

not many teachers who specialize in international communication. More scholars choose to combine international communication with a wide range of subfields such as artificial intelligence and algorithms, public diplomacy, digital technology applications and social media, community communication, and public affairs.

At the same time, the establishment of joint research centers has become an important driver for the development of international communication research and education. Schools integrate research resources across departments, solve highly complex global issues from different perspectives and establish academic connections in various fields such as international communication and international relations, public diplomacy, civilization and culture, big data, and artificial intelligence. This provides a platform for interdisciplinary integration and more comprehensive and in-depth academic research. The Global Communication Research Center established by the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University in cooperation with the Elliott School of International Affairs, the Center for Globalization and Communication established by the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University's Steinhardt School in cooperation with the Department of Global Affairs, and the Global Communication Research Center established by the Department of Media and Communications at King's College London in cooperation with disciplines such as international relations and global affairs are all typical examples of interdisciplinary cooperation between journalism and international relations to establish joint research institutions.

Such centers have greatly expanded the depth and breadth of international communication research, closely linking theoretical research with practical needs. They also build a global academic cooperation network, gather outstanding scholars and practitioners from around the world, and establish contacts with government organizations, non-governmental organizations, and industry institutions. This ensures that research is academically rigorous while guaranteeing the practical relevance and global impact of research results. In addition, relying on an interdisciplinary educational environment, these centers can also become incubators for composite international communication talents. Taking the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) as an example, the center was jointly established by the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the School of International Relations at the University of Southern California, bringing together a multidisciplinary knowledge system including communication studies, media research, journalism, international relations, and cultural studies. As a bridge between theory and practice, the center is not only committed to academic research but also proposes innovative strategies for public diplomacy based on the experience of practitioners, helping public diplomacy practitioners cope with real challenges. At the same time, using its well-developed global academic network, the center has established extensive contacts with public diplomacy institutions and practitioners worldwide, becoming a benchmark for cross-field cooperation and international communication education practice. It has an irreplaceable strategic significance for training composite international communication talents who understand both communication and the background of culture, politics, and economics.

In addition, a variety of cutting-edge laboratories functioned as an indispensable platform for the integration of arts and sciences and the stimulation of innovative ideas. Taking the key laboratory PRIME Lab at the Missouri School of Journalism as an example, PRIME stands for "Psychological Research on Information and Media Effects". The laboratory is one of the six active journalism and mass communication laboratories in the United States, equipped with devices to measure real-time psychological and physiological responses to media information, as well as eye-tracking equipment. The laboratory is open to all students in the school, and both undergraduate and graduate students have the opportunity to participate, simply by emailing the professor in charge of the laboratory.^[3] Relying on the laboratory's first-class software and hardware equipment, teachers and students can conduct independent research topics based on academic interests. It has been proven that the effectiveness of PRIME Lab is very significant, and the research results of the laboratory have been published at major academic conferences in journalism and communication studies, such as *the International Communication Association*, *the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication*, and *the Society for Psychophysiological Research*, as well as top journals.

3.2 Interdisciplinary and International Joint Training Focuses on Global Frontier Issues

In today's era where the interdisciplinary characteristics of international communication education are becoming increasingly prominent, it is difficult for a single journalism school to fully meet the requirement for talent training in terms of interdisciplinary faculty, diversified course supply, and high project operation costs. Joint training has become an important way for different universities, colleges, and disciplines to achieve strategic cooperation, resource sharing, cost sharing, and innovative exchanges. Some prestigious European and American universities have developed globally influential international

communication joint training programs through strong alliances between advantaged colleges to ensure the global reputation, quality, and stability of student resources. With these scientifically designed joint training programs, universities can achieve interdisciplinary academic resource integration, coordinated allocation of faculty teams, and effective achievement of training objectives.

For a long time, the political attributes of international communication have been widely recognized by scholars at home and abroad. Both communication scholars and international relations scholars have tried to find the best fit between international politics, area studies, international organizations, and international communication. Nowadays, the cooperation between journalism schools and schools of international relations has become a mature practice in international communication education in European and American universities. For example, Sciences Po in France, starting from this highly relevant interdisciplinary perspective, has joint hand with its Journalism School and the Paris School of International Affairs (PSIA) to launch the "Master in Journalism and International Affairs" program in 2011. This program combines PSIA's theoretical teaching advantages in international affairs, including international security, international governance and diplomacy, international development, human rights and humanitarian action, international energy, international economic policy, and environmental policy, with the Journalism School's strong journalism practice and digital media courses, to cultivate outstanding practical talents with both political and journalistic literacy. Other examples of interdisciplinary cooperation within the university include the dual-degree Master's program in International Affairs and Journalism jointly launched by Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and its Journalism School.

More joint training programs are carried out in a transnational form, with a focus on the "Global South." For example, the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) has cooperated with Fudan University's School of Journalism, the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, and the University of Cape Town to offer three MSc Global Media and Communications programs. Students study at LSE in the first year and then move to one of the three schools in the second year. The curriculum of this program presents a multi-professional intersection and a strong regional characteristic. The first year's courses at LSE focus on media and globalization, the Global South, gender politics, feminism, neoliberalism, and other hot topics, examining the connotation of international communication from multiple disciplinary perspectives such as political science, area studies, sociology, and culture.^[4] The second year's courses in China and South Africa are full of regional characteristics, paying more attention to students' immersive understanding of the comprehensive national conditions, culture, and history and current situation of news communication in developing countries. By combining the European research perspective and methods with the actual situation and research status in Africa and Asia, and integrating international communication with area studies, this program promotes the mutual reference and innovation of academic viewpoints and methodologies under multiple civilizations, and comprehensively promotes the training of international communication talents.

3.3 Problem-Oriented Course Design Achieves Interdisciplinary Coordination of Faculty and Educational Resources

American education scholar Ken Bain believes that successful education requires not only extensive knowledge transmission but also guiding students to personalized in-depth learning through targeted topic setting.^[5] In recent years, problem-oriented course design and project-based teaching have been widely applied in major European and American universities. On the one hand, this initiative shifts the focus of course setting from "discipline" to "topic," actually blurring the boundaries between different disciplines, which conforms to the morphological characteristics of new era knowledge development. By focusing on specific topics in transnational communication, global governance, digital transformation, international organizations, and other fields, it cultivates students' critical thinking and the ability to comprehensively use multidisciplinary knowledge to analyze and solve real-world problems. On the other hand, this course design sometimes requires several teachers from different disciplines to teach from different perspectives around the same "topic," effectively promoting interdisciplinary coordination of educational resources between different departments, which is an effective innovation in teaching methods.

For example, the University of Amsterdam's "Global Digital Culture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives" course revolves around the theme of "whether digital practices can alleviate or exacerbate social inequality."^[6] It fully utilizes methods from media studies, geography, sociology, anthropology, and political science to explore how digital transformation is embedded in specific cultural backgrounds and global economic structures. Through a variety of lectures, key concept analysis, and case studies, it inspires students to critically reflect on and engage with the digital world constructed by platforms such

as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and mobile applications. The university's "Postcolonial Media and Culture" course uses postcolonial theory as an entry point, placing international communication within a multi-dimensional framework of history, power, and cultural representation. The course re-examines the asymmetric distribution of international communication power by studying the performance of media in the Global South and its reproduction of colonial legacies. The London School of Economics and Political Science's (LSE) "Media, Communication, and Development" course is based on development communication theory and discusses the role of communication technology in the social structure and cultural expression of developing countries. For example, by case studying public health communication in the Global South, students need to analyze how communication technology mobilizes community resources and promotes social participation. This process not only deepens students' understanding of development communication but also expands the applicable boundaries of international communication theory, providing more diverse practical paths for the development of disciplinary connotations. This course design embeds complex social issues into theoretical frameworks, generates more explanatory academic tools and research methods through in-depth analysis, and enables students to understand communication phenomena from a more complex perspective, thereby promoting dialogue between academic achievements and social reality.

3.4 Practice-Oriented Training Objectives Promote the Practical Application of Multidisciplinary Knowledge

Practical ability is a major focus of European and American international communication education. From the "Missouri Method" inherited to this day at the Missouri School of Journalism, to the "political theory + journalism practice" educational philosophy advocated by Sciences Po's "Master in Journalism and International Affairs," international communication education has never been a science in an ivory tower. Faced with the complex communication phenomena and digital challenges of today's era, it is increasingly combined with reality. In course and program design, schools often look for opportunities to place students in real or simulated communication situations to deeply understand the application scenarios of communication disciplines in diverse international issues, to enhance their cognition and application ability for highly complex international communication problems, and to form a virtuous cycle where theory and practice promote each other. The practical positioning of international communication talents is further highlighted, and many universities have cooperated with international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank, or large multinational corporations like Google and Facebook, to launch practice-oriented talent training programs.

For example, one of the core components of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs' Master of International Affairs, Master of Public Administration (MPA), and MPA-Development Practice (MPA-DP) is the "Capstone Workshop." The workshop is scheduled in the last semester of the program and is an excellent opportunity for students to apply what they have learned. Students are divided into consulting groups of 4-8 people and, under the guidance of a mentor, complete a real policy project for an external cooperative client, answer specific questions posed by the client, and submit a feasibility report and results presentation at the end of the project. The school's cooperative clients cover various fields, including public institutions, international non-governmental organizations, multinational organizations, and major private enterprises, such as Booz Allen Hamilton, Citi Global Wealth Management, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Mercy Corps, the Office of the Mayor of New York City, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNICEF, and the World Bank. This practical workshop effectively exercises students' initiative. During the project, students will continuously explore how to apply what they have learned in class to real life scenarios and exert their subjective initiative to comprehensively use their abilities and knowledge to solve real problems. In working with different clients, students can exercise their cross-cultural communication skills, teamwork, and negotiation and communication skills, and a series of communication abilities, laying a solid foundation for truly entering the workplace.

Another typical example is the "Grand Oral" at the end of Sciences Po's "Master in Journalism and International Affairs." Usually, students will present a relatively major news project that has lasted about three weeks during the "Grand Oral." This project is both a summary of the students' learning outcomes and a display of the skills and knowledge they have mastered. Students usually choose a topic with significant influence in current affairs, social issues, or the field of international affairs, then carry out detailed research and reporting preparation, including background information investigation, interview contact, information sourcing, technical and travel arrangements, etc. Then, students will spend three weeks actively reporting, which may involve on-site interviews, interviewing people, and multimedia content creation. This stage is very tense and requires students to continuously update and adapt to

changes in the situation on the ground. The final results of the project usually include written articles, video reports, news photography, and data journalism, mainly depending on the student's focus and the needs of the story, and are presented during the "Grand Oral." Students need to be prepared to answer in-depth questions related to their work, demonstrating their news acumen and critical thinking skills. A jury composed of college teachers and external professionals will strictly evaluate the originality of the news story, the depth of reporting, the quality of content, and the overall effect.

Such program design well combines Sciences Po's theoretical advantages in international affairs with journalism practice, especially digital media practice, focusing on cultivating students' ability to report news against the backdrop of global politics. The project particularly emphasizes the subfield of journalism combined with international affairs, such as conflict reporting, international diplomatic journalism, global governance, etc., and the students trained are highly matched with market demands. Similarly, the Missouri School of Journalism focuses on the cultivation of journalistic practice skills through its "Missouri Method," but on this basis, it guides students to explore journalistic technology innovation, data journalism, and cross-platform media production and other subfields. This focus not only helps students master the basic skills of journalism but also makes them experts in more specific areas. These programs systematically combine core abilities and related knowledge through comprehensive curriculum settings and practical experience.

Specific practical courses are more diverse. For example, the "Public Diplomacy Practicum" course at the University of Southern California, which directly places students in the communication practice of global issues, such as designing public strategies for international health communication or planning communication programs for immigration policies. Students are required not only to master communication skills but also to combine political science, sociology, and data analysis methods to formulate communication strategies from multiple angles. In the integration and application of multidisciplinary knowledge, they seek the best solution to communication problems. Through this model that combines theory and practice, the discipline of international communication has effectively responded to global issues in depth and cultivated composite talents with both theoretical depth and practical ability. Intensive development is both a requirement of the essence of the discipline and an inevitable path for international communication to enhance academic influence and practical effectiveness in the face of contemporary global challenges.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the development of international communication education in Europe and America has undergone significant changes over time, adapting to the evolution of the era's challenges. This has resulted in the formation of a highly interdisciplinary curriculum system and research ecosystem that is innovative, contemporary, and practical. Within this highly complex and diverse international communication education landscape, which continues to expand outward, we can still discern characteristics of national centrism and Euro-American centrism. Western worldviews, values, and knowledge of national conditions are naturally embedded in the various courses, allowing students to gain a broad understanding of international communication and global affairs while also subtly being influenced by the language, culture, international stance, behavioral philosophy, and global role of the host country. Conversely, we also see the continuous introduction of indigenous perspectives and global citizenship awareness, with a heightened focus on the "Global South" and global issues and challenges being a prominent reflection of this aspect.

As an essential component of the national development strategy, China's international communication education aims to cultivate communicators who not only understand the rules of international communication but can also express Chinese culture and values, thereby more effectively responding to external challenges and shaping a positive national image within the international discourse system. In the implementation of international communication education, we have constructed an independent knowledge system and theoretical framework distilled from Chinese culture and the great practice of socialism, carrying out top-down international communication talent training with distinct Chinese characteristics. This is of great significance in breaking the Western-dominated international discourse system and building a fairer, more just, and reasonable new order for international communication. In this process, some beneficial experiences from European and American international communication education, such as interdisciplinary resource integration, international joint training, problem-oriented diversified curriculum settings, and practical course design, are well worth learning. Journalism schools at universities like Tsinghua University, Fudan University, and Renmin University of China have already begun some relevant practices. It is hoped that the development and practices of European and American

international communication education detailed in this study can provide valuable insights for practitioners in the field of education, empowering Chinese international communication education to reach new heights.

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