

Experiences in Area Studies around the World

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ABSTRACT:- In the world, area studies are the field of research that appeared in the early years of the twentieth century and thrived from the 50s of this century but still quite new in Vietnam. This field was formed and developed not by governments but by Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford in the 1950s. The appearance of area studies has certainly been affected by concerns during the Cold War, and, in addition, was driven by a study through focusing on specific regions of the world. Thereby, area studies can promote a new study direction of interdisciplinary knowledge and promote the development of social sciences in particular. Typical area studies experiences around the world will provide a multi-dimensional view of area studies development in Vietnam.

Keywords: area studies, experience, world

I. AREA STUDIES AND COMPARATIVE AREA STUDIES

1.1 Area studies

Area studies are not a unified area of study. There are many debates about this new area of study. For starters, there are many different research subjects. Some of them refer to larger regions of the world and some refer to individual countries. In many cases, but not always, the regions or countries referred to share a common language or at least a limited number of common languages. Some popular area studies are the studies of the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, Japan, China and Korea, Eastern Europe and Russia, and many other studies [1]. Meanwhile, others are determined by the cultural position in their study subjects, so this study will provide specific knowledge about peoples, territories and history (economic, social and political processes) of each region of the world.

Many regional experts have the same opinion with Szanton, when he argued that: Area studies are best understood as an dominant term for a family of academic fields and activities that are engaged by a general commitment to: (1) intensive language study; (2) intensive study in the field of local languages; (3) participation in local history, documentation and interpretation; (4) test, construction, critic or theoretical development with grounds against detailed observations; and (5) multidisciplinary conversations crossing the boundaries of social sciences and humanities [5]. In another related study, Prewitt was based on the concepts of the Social Science Research Council (U.S) and the American Council of Learned Societies, distinguishing between, on the one hand, "traditional area studies" and, on the other hand, "knowledge based on areas" [3]. While in the past, regions in the whole were their main study units, with other scholars who are seeking to know all that could be reasonably known about a world's region - language, history, culture, politics and religion, then study begins with an area, but then that knowledge is used to deal with trends and phenomena over any areas. Regardless of the specific definition used, what counts as area studies in different countries tends to diverge. For example, Western European or EU studies will be considered as area studies in some countries while such studies are often considered mainstream study in Western Europe.

Different chains of area studies tend to differ in their approaches. As Szanton said, the areas of individual study are not heterogeneous among researchers and research fields. In fact, it is seen that they are very focused on area research, especially in political, institutional and intellectual history and in their relationship with the majors. Important differences and institutional divisions in different area studies help organize and bring out the academic debates corresponding to the study contents [5].

In summary, area study is a dominant term for a series of studies that are characterized by their specific and exclusive focus on a country or a region. Neither a specific discipline nor the use of certain area study methods, area studies can be grounded in humanities, social sciences, or in cultural studies and they use

different methodological and epistemological approaches [2]. Specific social science-based area studies can be used to test, evaluate, criticize or develop local and universal concepts and theories on the basis of detailed observations of local phenomena. Intensive linguistic study conducted in local languages and multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary collaboration is not an essential feature of area study but a subject of researchers or selection methods - they are only needed when there is a specific research topic.

1.2 Comparative area studies

While regional experts often focus on individual countries, certain parts of a world's region or interregional link, other individual or academic group are also involved in comparative study. There are 3 types of comparative area studies: intra-regional comparisons, inter-regional comparisons, cross-regional comparisons [2]

In Germany, three distinct area study chains can be identified, specifically: (1) a chain of traditional studies focusing on the characteristics of language, literature, art and history (pre-modern) of a certain area, (2) a chain of social sciences including political science plus human economic, sociological, and geographic majors, and (3) a cultural study chain that brings together some of the regional-oriented work on sociology, ethnography, anthropology, humanities and newer interdisciplinary study clusters such as gender, film and media, ethnic studies, etc. [7]. Although these three study directions may intersect with individual areas, scholars in different chains tend to, for career or other reasons, pay more attention to their colleagues and works taking place in the respective majors.

We can talk about comparative area studies when comparing among countries or other empirical entities. Although the term of comparative area study is used by some academic institutions in the United States and elsewhere, there seems to be no definition of this term. It can be said that comparative area studies do not (yet) exist as an appropriate area of academic study.

Basically, it can be divided into three types of comparative area studies. The first one is comparison in the region. In such context of study, aspects or phenomena of different geographical entities in a certain area are compared. The second one is comparison among regions, which is still quite rare. The focuses of this research are often extensive or transformative processes affecting different regions over the world. The third one is cross-regional comparative study. Cross-sectional studies involve comparing units of analysis among different regions. This is not coincident because comparisons among regions are expensive and difficult to make with accuracy.

II. EXPERIENCES IN AREA STUDIES IN SOME COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD

In the United States, area studies [9] were created to serve national interests following the global trend after 1945. In the 1950s, federal programs and private foundations provided funds to increase US understanding of regions over the world for research and publication of global foreign policy of the United States. Before 1945, the world of the United States focused on Europe, although it included East Asia and Latin America and was in a much lesser level compared with the British and French imperial territories in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. After 1945, a new US global view on the world emerged, and along with it, area studies flourished accordingly. Specifically, US national interests have driven a simultaneous study trend between area studies and globalization of the United States.

The Cold War defined the global context of the United States until 1989. When the Cold War ended and the US government declared they were the winner, the administrators at the universities, the legislators, and the funding agencies questioned the reasons for area studies. Institutional support for area studies depends on its relevance to the new stage of globalization, as universities, like businesses and government, sought to expand their operations globally in a world where the US seemed to have no serious competitor. American scholars in area study programs were forced to create a new platform for area studies related to globalization. The reinvention of area studies was still far. Many area study programs in the United States are in the middle or on the brink of intellectual and institutional crises [9]. Area studies have now come into life, then, is a result of international pressure and national demand. On the international plane, the United States needs to strengthen the peaceful relations while maintaining the role of world hegemony. At the domestic scope, the United States is still facing the challenges caused by ethnic minority groups.

European study is a field of study offered by many universities and academic colleges focusing on current developments in European integration [8]. Some programs providing social science studies or public administration focus on development in the European Union. These programs often include a combination of political science, European public policy, European history, European law, economics and sociology. Other universities approach the topic in a broader way, including topics such as European culture, European literature and the European language. Although all programs focus on European Union studies, they also often cover national themes (according to comparative perspectives).

Studies of the Middle East are originated from the long-standing tradition of the US on Arabic and Islam [4], often involving Biblical studies or missionary activities, as well as in the study of the ancient Near East. This contributed to a considerable controversy on study direction in the Middle East when it was launched shortly after World War II, at first with foundation support and since 1958 with the sponsorship of the federation. In many ways, the historical trajectory of studies in the Middle East is similar to that of general area studies: despite some sporadic efforts of some people, a few knowledge related to policy was actually created by people in this field, and from the early 1970s it has become increasingly important to the US policy of the Middle East as well as the dominant intellectual models so far in the field, Easternism and modernization theory.

Perhaps what makes most studies of the Middle East different from other area studies is that in fact, since the 1980s, scholars and teachers in this field have been regularly suffering from harassment and vandalism campaigns by well-organized and funded groups outside the academy, they have sought to quietly express certain opinions and views, especially regarding the conflict between Israel and Palestine. As a result, studies in the Middle East have become an important battleground in the fight to protect academic freedom in the US higher education.

Southeast Asian studies aims at establishing the relationships with other Southeast Asian centers all over the world. Southeast Asia, a sub-region of Asia, includes countries located in southern China, eastern India, western New Guinea and northern Australia, including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. These countries share common historical, political, economic, cultural and social relations, and all of the countries, except for East Timor, are members of a regional bloc called the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In recent years, the regional bloc has taken several initiatives to unite its member states, including developing a single market to ensure the flow of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and free capital flows. Vietnam, in relations with East Asian countries, based on applying interdisciplinary and regional study methods to learn and study about Vietnam's historical periods in a multidimensional relationship. The process of cultural exchange and integration has contributed to forming common values for the whole region.

III. CONCLUSION

Area studies, comparative area studies research and share similar characteristics but combine in-depth knowledge of one or several areas with comparative methods. There are three different types of studies: (1) intra-regional studies referring to comparative studies in regions; (2) inter-regional comparisons placing all areas as an entity in a comparative perspective; and (3) cross-regional comparisons selecting empirical entities from different regions of the world. Experiences in area studies around the world both allow the regions to learn from each other and to continue their developments in the context of global world.

In the other angle, the evaluation of area studies to draw study experiences also needs to consider for both cultural issues and the instability of power relations in national and transnational levels. In fact, area studies have provided an important platform for studying colonialism, strengthening states and changing maps, enabling qualified research on global dynamics impacting different regions with different outcomes around the world. Due to the practice of comparative and interdisciplinary research methods, area studies have also contributed with the strong views of the United States and the European region; thereby making an important contribution to renewing the principles and research methods of the area study in particular as well as the social sciences and humanities in general.

Nowadays, in a volatile and unpredictable international context, the achievements of area studies are a powerful reminder when international agreements give the illusion that hegemony projects can be decoded. Area studies still have the task of restoring regional perspectives that can counterbalance the great difference between globalization and the diversity of production. However, it can be seen that localities, regions and countries can still create the basis for gaining knowledge if those studies are effective with global knowledge and global values.

However, area studies and even many comparative regional studies face some methodological challenges, which involve the use of concepts and the selection of full research strategies. Methodological tightness is necessary, especially when scholars are trying to determine causal relationships in the condition of heterogeneous contexts, a typical of comparative studies among regions.

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