

# Exploration and Practice of the "Three Specials" Discipline Construction Model

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## **Abstract:**

The "three specials" discipline construction model, which takes "special features" as the starting point to build disciplinary advantages, "special needs" as the anchor point for the layout of key disciplines, and "special zones" as the focus point to gather construction resources, is a new path of high-quality development of academic research, talent cultivation and social service, and is a new model of the coordinated development of special discipline clusters, special professional clusters and special service clusters.

**Keywords:** *Discipline construction, Talent cultivation, Social service.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Newly established undergraduate colleges and universities generally refer to colleges and universities that have been upgraded from various technical colleges to undergraduate colleges after 1999. As of November 2020, there were 731 newly built undergraduate colleges and universities, accounting for 57.5% of 1,272 undergraduate colleges and universities <sup>[1]</sup>. In terms of quantity, new undergraduate colleges and universities have become a major component of higher education in China. Over the past twenty years, although the new undergraduate colleges and universities have built up a relatively perfect system of disciplines and majors, the overall appearance of poor construction foundation, lack of distinctive features and fewer disciplines and majors with comparative advantages have not been fundamentally changed, and the trend of widening gap with high-level universities has not been fundamentally reversed. What is especially worrying is that a large number of new undergraduate universities have serious homogenization in key disciplines and insufficient characteristics. Some scholars point out that many local universities still cannot find their own characteristics based on the in-depth analysis of the self-assessment reports of nearly 100 new undergraduate universities' self-evaluation report of teaching qualification assessment <sup>[2]</sup>.

In January 2021, then Education Minister Chen Baosheng pointed out at the National Education Work Conference that "during the '14th Five-Year Plan' period, China's education enters a stage of high-quality development". High-quality development has become the focus and distinctive feature of the third decade of higher education in the 21st century. As the main component of higher education, the development quality of newly established undergraduate colleges and universities is related to the development quality

of the whole higher education system, and the discipline construction level of new undergraduate colleges and universities will certainly affect the overall discipline construction level of the higher education system, so how to seize the opportunity in the journey of high-quality development of higher education and find the suitable path of discipline construction and development for themselves have become the proposition of the times that new undergraduate colleges and universities must seriously consider.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Anyang Normal University was upgraded to an ordinary undergraduate university in Henan Province in 2000. Over the past twenty years, the university has gradually explored the "three specials" discipline construction model, which is based on the "special features", "special needs" and "special zones". The "three specials" discipline construction model is to focus on the discipline construction with "special features", to serve the "special needs" of national and regional economic and social development as the goal, and to make use of the "special zones" policy that could gather advantageous resources and implement key support as guarantee, and thus to implement the discipline, professional and social service integrated design and cluster development.

### 2.1 Create Disciplinary Advantages with Special Features as a Starting Point

The characteristic discipline construction model of Anyang Normal University is to take the special discipline as the starting point of discipline construction, actively implement the development strategy of the famous school with special features, gather the resources of the whole school to build the discipline brand in a few discipline fields, form comparative advantages, highlight the characteristics of school operation, achieve the development goals of the school, and lead the construction business to make breakthroughs continuously.

Anyang Normal University is located in Anyang City, the hometown of oracle bones, a national historical and cultural city, and one of the eight ancient capitals of China. Taking full advantage of its regional culture, the university has been promoting the cross-disciplines and integration on the basis of decades of oracle bone research, and has gradually formed a series of distinctive disciplines, discipline groups and research directions, such as Chinese history discipline with a focus on Yin and Shang Dynasty culture and oracle bone research, archaeology discipline with a focus on Yin and Shang Dynasty archaeology, and the cultural relics restoration and conservation are formed by the cross-discipline of Chinese history, archaeology (Yin and Shang Dynasty archaeology), chemistry, physics, and art, etc.; the research directions of sports, law, art, and geography of the Shang Dynasty are formed by the cross-discipline of Chinese history, art, education, law, and geography, etc.

In 2016, the university formed the oracle bone information processing discipline group based on the traditional advantageous research directions of Yin and Shang Dynasty culture, Yin and Shang Dynasty archaeology and oracle bone research, supported by modern information technology, and integrating multidisciplinary talents from Chinese history, archaeology, Chinese language and literature, and computer

science and technology. By using big data and artificial intelligence to analyze oracle bone characters and calculate their semantics, the group has formed new research characteristics in oracle bone examination and interpretation, oracle bone embellishment and identification, and has initially become a world oracle bone data center and a training base for domestic oracle bone research and cultural inheritance and innovation talents, and has made a way to combine social and natural sciences, basic and applied research, traditional culture and modern technology, innovative research and creative transformation in construction of special disciplines and discipline groups.

In the past five years, the oracle bone information processing discipline group has made remarkable achievements. In 2016, the discipline group was awarded three of the nine sub-projects of the National Social Science Foundation's major commissioned project "Research on Oracle Bone Examination and Interpretation Supported by the Big Data Cloud Platform"; the publication of the *Yin Ruins Culture Dictionary*, with a total of more than 3 million words, won the book award of the Fifth China Publishing Government Award and was called by Cao Dingyun as "the first large-scale integrated work that gives a comprehensive introduction to Yin Ruins. Its role and contribution cannot be replaced by other works at present."<sup>[3]</sup> The Great Dictionary of oracle bone in Yin Ruins published in 2021 has a total of more than 1.7 million words, which is called "an encyclopedia Dictionary of oracle bone in Yin Ruins" by Mr. Wang Yuxin<sup>[4]</sup>. In 2017, it was awarded the oracle bone information processing team, the only innovation team of the Ministry of Education in the field of oracle bone research. In 2018, it was awarded the oracle bone information processing key laboratory of the Ministry of Education, the only key laboratory of the Ministry of Education in the field of oracle bone research. In 2019, the most complete, standardized and authoritative oracle data platform "Yinqi Wenyuan" was opened to the world for free, marking the entry of oracle research into the intelligent cloud era<sup>[5]</sup>. In 2020, the oracle information processing discipline group was approved as the first batch of characteristic backbone discipline construction discipline group in Henan Province, and Anyang Normal University became one of the 17 characteristic backbone universities and characteristic backbone discipline construction colleges and universities in Henan Province. In 2021, the oracle Chinese character culture research and experience dissemination center was approved as the national language and writing promotion base, and "the Collaborative Innovation Center for Oracle Information Processing and Revitalization and Utilization" was listed as an important platform to serve the national strategy. *Yindu Journal* is the journal of the Yinshang Culture Society of China, and has been selected as a journal funded by the Ministry of Education and the National Social Science Planning Office.

Anyang Normal University has actively played the role of special disciplines to support the talent cultivation and cultural communication and heritage innovation, focusing on the construction of a master's degree of Chinese language for international education with the spirit of "exchange and mutual appreciation of civilizations", the service direction of "cultural heritage innovation and overseas communication", and the characteristics of "characters research and revitalization and utilization". The master's degree of Chinese language for international education, which is characterized by "characters research and revitalization and utilization", has taken a new path to combine the service of "going global" of Chinese culture with special discipline construction of the university, and to carry out the construction of special majors and master's degree authorization points. The major of Chinese language for international

education is oriented to the countries along the "Belt and Road", and has undertaken long-term Chinese international promotion projects and training of international students, sending 538 Chinese teacher volunteers to 24 countries such as Thailand, Cambodia and Jordan, which is ranked first in Henan Province. A group of outstanding graduates have successively won the titles of "Confucius Institute Medal", "most beautiful Chinese teacher volunteer" and "excellent Chinese teacher volunteer" awarded by NOCFL. In 2015, *China Education News* published an in-depth report on the outstanding achievements of the university's international Chinese language promotion work <sup>[6]</sup>. In 2016, the Chinese language for international education program was approved as a master's degree authorization point of Henan Province. According to the data published in the *2019-2020 China Postgraduate Education and Discipline Professional Evaluation Report*, Anyang Normal University ranked 18th among 137 authorized professional degree points in Chinese language for international education nationwide, and among 28 of them with five and four stars (the highest five stars), Anyang Normal University is the only local one <sup>[7]</sup>.

## 2.2 Layout of Key Disciplines with "Special Needs" as the Anchor Point

The special needs model of discipline construction of Anyang Normal University refers to the development of discipline construction model and discipline layout based on its own discipline advantages and characteristics, oriented to the special needs of the country and the special needs of regional economic and social development. Anyang Normal University takes serving the special needs of the country and the special needs of the regional economic and social development as the original intention and mission of discipline construction, and takes it as the landing point of the layout of key disciplines.

In 2011, China launched the pilot project of "Talent Cultivation for Serving Country Special Needs" (hereinafter referred to as "Special Needs Project"), and Anyang Normal University, taking into account the situation, firmly grasped the important opportunity of the country to carry out the "Special Needs Project". The College has taken advantage of its discipline strengths in Chinese language, literature and Chinese history, its academic strengths in oracle bones and other ancient scripts, its learning-origin strengths in close cooperation with famous domestic script research and cultural communication institutions, its geographical strengths as the "capital of characters" of Anyang, and its traditional professional strengths in normal education. Aiming at serving the strategy of "going global" of Chinese culture, the university was successfully approved as a pilot unit for the cultivation of master's degree students with the pilot major of Chinese language for international education. The successful approval of the "Special Needs Project" has further deepened the university's understanding of discipline construction, which should not only focus on "learning" but also on "needs". Focusing on "learning" means that we should strengthen the discipline construction, and actively promote academic research, scientific and technological innovation and talent cultivation to achieve new achievements; focusing on "needs" means that we should fulfill the fundamental mission of discipline construction, serve the national and regional economic and social development needs, and realize the virtuous cycle and sustainable development of discipline construction. Therefore, the concept of "special needs" discipline construction in Anyang Normal University is inspired by the "Special Needs Project" and the experience summary of the key disciplines of the college in serving the national and regional economic and social development. Based on

its own strengths and discipline features, Anyang Normal University has made it an important part of its development strategy to meet the "special needs" of regional economic and social development and to serve the "special needs" of the country in a few disciplines such as oracle bone research and inheritance and overseas dissemination and promotion of Chinese language for international education. Therefore, the concept of discipline construction based on the needs of national and regional economic and social development and its own characteristic advantages development becomes the theoretical basis and practical path for Anyang Normal University to make the discipline layout and implement key construction projects, which brings out a new pattern and path of newly established undergraduate colleges and universities facing the special needs of the country and the specific needs of regional economic and cultural social development, basing on the special discipline construction, and realizing the high quality development of academic research, talent cultivation and social service. It also forms a new concept and new mode of school running and governance with the synergistic development of special discipline clusters, special professional clusters and special service clusters.

### 2.3 Gathering Construction Resources with "Special Zones" as the Focus

The "special zones" model of discipline construction of Anyang Normal University refers to the construction model of implementing special support policies for key construction areas in order to achieve the strategic goals of the school's development. With the idea of "doing something but not doing something", Anyang Normal University has been facing the special needs of serving the national needs of oracle bone research and cultural transmission, the special needs of serving the regional economic and social development, and the target needs of breaking through the master's degree authorization point, planning the key construction areas, formulating special support policies, and gathering the advantages of the school. The university has launched three special construction zones, namely, "teaching and research secondary colleges", "master's degree cultivation sites", and "advantageous special discipline group".

In 2011, Anyang Normal University officially launched the construction of teaching and research secondary colleges, which became a novelty for national teaching-oriented institutions to carry out the construction of key disciplines. After seven years of construction, in 2018, the key disciplines belonging to six teaching and research secondary colleges, including the College of Liberal Arts, the College of History and Museology, the College of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, the College of Computer and Information Engineering, the College of Physics and Electrical Engineering, and the College of Mathematics and Statistics, were all approved as the ninth batch of key disciplines in Henan Province; the discipline ranking of *China University Evaluation* published in that year showed that the first-level discipline of Chinese history in the College of History and Museology ranked among the top 70 in China and the top 3 in Henan Province. In 2020, the first-level discipline of chemistry in the College of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering achieved a breakthrough of top 1% in the ESI world ranking.

In 2016, Anyang Normal University launched the construction of "master's degree cultivation sites" and "advantageous special discipline group", and In 2020, the first batch of six master's degree cultivation points will all meet the basic requirements for applying for master's degree authorization; The



"advantageous special discipline group" - "the oracle information processing" discipline group was approved as the first batch of special backbone discipline construction discipline group in Henan Province. In 2021, the three cultivation points of Chinese language for international education, cultural relics and museums and education were approved as master's degree authorization points in its master degree authorization review conducted that year.

The "three specials" discipline construction of Anyang Normal University is a systematic project that complements and supports each other. The successful practice of the "three specials" discipline construction model has provided an effective driver for the rapid development of various construction undertakings, led by the backbone discipline group of oracle bone information processing in Henan Province, supported by the pilot master's degree in Chinese language for international education, and based on a century of teacher education research and schooling practice. In October 2021, the university was approved as a master's degree granting unit, as well as approved three master's degree authorization points in cultural relics and museums, Chinese language for international education and education.

### III. CONCLUSION

The "three specials" discipline construction model is not only an experience summary of the long-term construction practice of Anyang Normal University, but also reflects the common law of discipline construction of newly established undergraduate colleges and universities. However, the specific plan of discipline construction can be borrowed but not copied. Newly established undergraduate colleges and universities must come out with a discipline construction program suitable for their own reality on the basis of seriously answering specific questions such as where the discipline features come from, where service needs go and how to plan the discipline special zones.

#### 3.1 Where Discipline Features Come from

3.1.1 Find the growth point of special disciplines from serving the needs of economic and social development.

The discipline construction has been said to be "up to the sky and down to the ground", "up to the sky" means to track and lead the academic frontier and serve the national major strategy and scientific and technological needs, and have the discipline construction logic to solve the key technology "bottleneck" problem. "down to the ground" means discipline construction logic oriented to serve the needs of national and regional economic and social development by means of achievement transformation, university-enterprise cooperation and integration of industry, university and research. High-level universities, especially "double first-class" universities, can follow both construction logics. Although newly established undergraduate colleges and universities generally do not have the possibility to compete with high-level universities in the direction of "up to the sky", they can make outstanding achievements in the field of "down to the ground". To find the embedding point of discipline construction from the strategic demands of national and regional economic and social development, and

to write the discipline construction results on the motherland are the basic orientation of the discipline construction characteristics of newly established undergraduate colleges and universities.

3.1.2 Formation of innovation points of special disciplines from the development of cross-discipline and integration.

Cross-discipline and integration are effective ways to form disciplinary innovation points and disciplinary growth points. "A discipline cannot be shaped without the momentum and development of marginal disciplines and interdisciplinary disciplines, and the maturity of the discipline is often to find a breakthrough in the development and conflict of marginal disciplines and interdisciplinary disciplines, so as to further enrich the development of the discipline itself". Although the overall discipline construction strength of newly established undergraduate colleges and universities is still weak, most of them already have certain discipline foundation and long-term running experiences. Based on the existing disciplines, actively constructing a management and operation system that effectively promotes the cross-discipline and integration, breaking down disciplinary barriers and forming new disciplinary innovation and growth points are effective ways to build special discipline construction in newly established undergraduate colleges and universities.

### 3.2 Where Service Needs Go

Newly established undergraduate colleges and universities are teaching provincial local universities mainly for cultivating undergraduates, mostly located in prefectural cities which have significant regional characteristics in the various fields of economic, cultural and social development. These characteristics are not only the foundation for their survival and development, but also the main orientation of their talent cultivation and social services. Therefore, no matter based on the level of discipline construction or location, newly established undergraduate colleges and universities should generally take serving local needs as the main orientation of discipline construction, focus on planning and building applied disciplines closely related to regional economic and social development, actively promote the transformation of achievements, build an integrated social service and talent cultivation model of government, industry, academia, research and use, and provide intellectual support, technical services and talents for regional economic and social development; taking whether it is helpful, whether it can be used and how helpful it as basic basis for testing the effectiveness of discipline construction.

### 3.3 How to Plan the Discipline Special Zones

3.3.1 The planning of discipline special zones should reflect the development strategy of the university.

Discipline construction is not only the construction of the discipline itself, but also should be regarded as an important part of the overall development and construction of colleges and universities. Only the discipline construction that reflects the development strategy of colleges and universities can

provide effective support for various construction undertakings of colleges and universities. Therefore, the formulation of scientific and reasonable development strategy is the primary condition for the discipline construction planning of colleges and universities. Focusing on the three strategic tasks of showing the characteristics and advantages of running school, improving the level of running school, serving the special needs of the country and regional economic and social development, Anyang Normal University has planned three special zones of "teaching and research secondary colleges" and "master's degree cultivation sites" and "the advantageous special discipline group" fully reflecting the strategic planning and development intention of the university.

3.3.2 The planning of discipline special zones should adhere to the concept of systematic construction.

When newly established undergraduate colleges and universities are planning to build discipline special zones, they should not only pursue innovation of discipline knowledge, but also systematically plan specific contents of scientific research, talent cultivation, social service and cultural inheritance and innovation according to discipline characteristics and development goals. In the planning of the special discipline zones, Anyang Normal University did not adopt the construction model of starting directly from the discipline, but focused on the college to which the primary discipline was attached, i.e. the "teaching and research secondary college". This model of discipline construction by the college rather than by the discipline itself helps the college to systematically plan the discipline construction content, give full play to the support role of key disciplines for talent cultivation, social service and cultural heritage, and avoid the traditional drawback of "research-oriented" disciplines that may be caused by discipline planning alone.

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