

Unpacking the Practices, Challenges, and Implications of China's Cultivation of Foreign-Related Rule of Law Talent

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ABSTRACT: As China deepens its global integration and pursues higher-level opening-up, the cultivation of foreign-related rule of law talent has emerged as a strategic priority with profound implications for the nation's capacity to participate in international legal affairs and protect its overseas interests. This study conducts a systematic analysis of 79 CSSCI papers published between 2015 and 2025, treating this scholarly corpus as primary data to document how Chinese institutions cultivate foreign-related legal talent in practice. The analysis reveals a landscape characterized by considerable experimentation and diversity, with institutions developing various cultivation models ranging from dual-degree programs combining law and foreign languages to practice-oriented approaches emphasizing international legal clinics and moot court competitions. However, the findings also expose persistent, structurally-rooted challenges that span faculty capacity limitations, difficulties in theory-practice integration, resource disparities across regions and institutions, and assessment system inadequacies. These challenges appear rooted not in isolated implementation failures but in deeper systemic factors, including institutional incentive structures, coordination complexities across multiple stakeholders, and fundamental tensions inherent in professional education reform. Therefore, the study contributes to a comparative understanding of legal education transformation in emerging economies by providing evidence-based documentation of China's distinctive approach to cultivating internationally-oriented legal professionals. The implications extend beyond China's cases, offering insights for other jurisdictions facing similar challenges in preparing legal professionals for an increasingly transnational practice environment.

KEYWORDS: foreign-related rule of law talent; legal education; internationalization; professional training; China

I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary era of globalization has fundamentally transformed the landscape of legal practice, compelling nations across the world to reconsider how they prepare legal professionals for engagement with international legal affairs (e.g., Ghosh & Chakraborty, 2025). China's dramatic rise as a global economic and political power has intensified the urgency of cultivating what Chinese scholars and policymakers term "foreign-related rule of law talent" (*shewai fazhi rencai*), a category of legal professionals possessing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to handle transnational legal matters, participate in international rule-making processes, and safeguard China's expanding overseas interests (Erie, 2023; Z. J. Wang & Chen, 2025). The significance of this endeavor cannot be overstated in a context where China has become the world's second-largest economy, together with its emerging role as a leading participant in global trade and investment flows and an increasingly assertive voice in international governance institutions (Stephen, 2025). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the establishment of free trade zones, participation in multilateral frameworks such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and the growing presence of Chinese enterprises abroad have collectively generated unprecedented demand for legal professionals capable of navigating complex cross-border legal environments while advancing Chinese perspectives in international legal discourse (L. Tang, 2025; H. Wang, 2025).

The scholarly attention devoted to the cultivation of foreign-related legal talent in China has grown substantially over the past decade, with researchers from leading law schools and policy institutes examining various dimensions of this educational challenge (e.g., Huang, 2024; Ma, 2023). Studies have explored cultivation models employed by different types of institutions, analyzed curriculum innovations designed to enhance students' international legal capabilities, documented collaborative arrangements between universities and practice institutions, and identified persistent obstacles impeding the production of qualified professionals. However, notwithstanding the proliferation of individual studies, the field has lacked a comprehensive, systematic synthesis that maps the terrain of cultivation practices, identifies patterns and variations across institutions and time

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periods, and explicates the structural factors underlying persistent challenges. This gap in the literature is consequential because policymakers and practitioners seeking to enhance cultivation effectiveness require an evidence-based understanding of which approaches have been tried, what has worked and under what conditions, and which systemic barriers continue to constrain progress despite well-intentioned reform efforts.

Thus, this study addresses the identified gap by conducting a systematic analysis of 79 papers published in journals indexed in the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) between 2015 and 2025. Rather than treating these publications as traditional literature to be reviewed and synthesized in a conventional fashion, the study approaches them as primary data sources that document and reflect upon actual cultivation practices across Chinese higher education institutions. The papers encompass descriptions of specific programs, evaluations of pedagogical innovations, reflections from faculty members with firsthand implementation experience, and analyses of challenges encountered in different institutional contexts. By systematically coding and analyzing this corpus, the study mainly aims to produce a comprehensive mapping of how foreign-related legal talent cultivation actually occurs in practice. To this end, the research questions guiding this investigation are fourfold. First, what cultivation methods, pedagogical approaches, and training models are actually employed in practice across different types of institutions and regions? Second, what patterns, variations, and innovations can be identified when examining the evolution of cultivation practices over the 2015-2025 period? Third, what challenges and problems are identified in the literature, and what do these reveal about systemic issues in legal education reform? Last but not least, what implications emerge from this analysis for improving cultivation effectiveness, both within China and in comparative perspective with other jurisdictions facing similar challenges?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Legal Education and Internationalization*

Due to the increasingly transnational character of legal practice and the growing demand for lawyers capable of operating across jurisdictional boundaries, the internationalization of legal education has become a central preoccupation for law schools and policymakers worldwide (Chesterman, 2009; Upham, 2014). Scholars working within the framework of transnational legal ordering have illuminated how legal norms, educational practices, and professional standards flow across borders, shape legal training within different national contexts, and contribute to the emergence of transnational legal orders governing various domains of social and economic activity (Garth & Shaffer, 2022; Halliday & Shaffer, 2015). Seen through the lens of transnational legal ordering, legal education reform can be understood as part of a recursive process in which institutions located in specific national contexts receive, translate, and reconfigure transnational legal norms and models, while at the same time participating in the production of transnational professional fields and hierarchies of expertise (Block-Lieb, 2022; Garth & Shaffer, 2022; Halliday & Shaffer, 2015; Shaffer, 2016). As scholars of transnational legal ordering and comparative institutionalism have demonstrated, the movement of global norms is never a matter of simple diffusion or imposition; rather, it reflects recursive, negotiated, and path-dependent interactions in which domestic actors selectively appropriate, reinterpret, resist, or transform external models in light of local political configurations and institutional legacies (Acharya, 2004; Merry, 2006; Thelen, 2004).

The globalization of legal education has been extensively documented by the Harvard Law School Project on Globalization, Lawyers, and Emerging Economies (GLEE), which has produced systematic empirical research on the transformation of legal professions and legal training in major emerging economies, including India, Brazil, and China (Cunha et al., 2017; Wilkins, 2012; Wilkins et al., 2020; Wilkins & Trubek, 2017). This research agenda has demonstrated how the opening of previously closed economies to foreign investment and private enterprise generates new demands for legal expertise, prompting law schools to reform curricula, teaching methods, and faculty composition to meet the needs of an expanding corporate legal sector (Wilkins et al., 2020). The GLEE project has further shown how developments in legal education are closely intertwined with the spread of large corporate law firms modeled on Anglo-American patterns, creating what Wilkins and colleagues term the “corporate legal ecosystem” (Wilkins et al., 2020) in which law firms, corporate clients, and legal education institutions mutually shape one another’s development (Wilkins, 2012; Wilkins & Trubek, 2017). The insights generated by this research program are valuable for understanding China’s foreign-related legal talent cultivation efforts, which occur within a context where the Chinese corporate legal sector has grown dramatically, and Chinese law firms have begun expanding internationally to serve outbound investment and the legal needs of Chinese enterprises operating abroad (S. Liu, 2008).

Scholarly investigation of legal education reform in emerging economies has also highlighted persistent tensions between imperatives of internationalization and domestic political, institutional, and resource constraints. Baskir’s (2015) examination of Chinese legal education identified efforts to incorporate global perspectives through faculty exchanges, curriculum reforms, and clinical legal education programs while noting that the system remains oriented more toward academia than practical application and operates under significant party-state influence. Similar tensions have been documented in India, where the establishment of National Law Universities represented an effort to create elite institutions training lawyers for corporate practice, yet these reforms coexisted with a much larger network of traditional law colleges that continued producing graduates for more localized

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legal work (Krishnan, 2004, 2010). Brazil's legal-education transformation has included the emergence of innovative private law schools such as FGV Direito São Paulo, which adopted full-time faculty, multidisciplinary curricula, and a globally oriented pedagogical model — yet these elite institutions continue to operate alongside a large number of traditional law-school programs. This coexistence reflects structural inequalities, institutional inertia, and enduring political-bureaucratic legacies that pose significant challenges to the full realization of a cosmopolitan legal education across the board (Vieira & Ghirardi, 2022). These comparative experiences suggest that legal education reform in emerging economies tends to produce stratified systems with significant variation in quality and orientation, a pattern that appears highly relevant for understanding differentiation within China's foreign-related legal talent cultivation efforts.

B. Legal Education Reform in China

China's legal education system has undergone a profound transformation since the reform and opening-up period that began in the late 1970s, recovering from the near-complete destruction of legal institutions during the Cultural Revolution and gradually expanding to become one of the world's largest systems of legal training (Minzner, 2013). The reconstruction initially drew upon Soviet models emphasizing specialized institutes rather than law departments within comprehensive universities (J. Wang, 2024), but subsequent reforms introduced elements from other legal traditions and responded to the changing demands of a market-oriented economy increasingly integrated into global economic networks (Ji, 2016; O'Brien, 2010). The establishment of the Juris Master degree program in 1996 represented a significant reform aimed at providing professional legal education for students without undergraduate law backgrounds (Yuan, 2022), analogous in certain respects to the American JD model though implemented within a distinctive institutional context. More recent reforms have emphasized practical skills training, with the Ministry of Education (2021) requiring that practice courses constitute at least 15 percent of law school curricula, though implementing this mandate has proven challenging given faculty backgrounds oriented toward theoretical rather than applied legal work (also see Li et al., 2025).

The specific focus on cultivating "foreign-related legal talent" emerged as a policy priority during the 2010s, gaining particular momentum following the announcement of the BRI in 2013 and the explicit articulation of this priority in central policy documents after 2020 (e.g., Huang, 2024b; Kong, 2024; Zhang, 2022). The Ministry of Education (2023) designated pilot universities to develop specialized programs for foreign-related legal talent cultivation, providing institutional impetus and resources for experimentation with new approaches. The policy framework emphasizes the need for legal professionals who are politically reliable, professionally competent in both domestic and international law, proficient in foreign languages, and capable of representing Chinese interests in international legal forums (The General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China & The General Office of the State Council, 2023). This formulation reflects distinctive features of the Chinese context, including the emphasis on political loyalty alongside professional capability and the explicit orientation toward serving national strategic interests rather than simply preparing individual graduates for successful careers in a global legal services market (Ma, 2023). Understanding how this policy framework is translated into actual cultivation practices at the institutional level, and what challenges emerge in implementation, constitutes a core focus of the present study.

Notwithstanding the growing body of scholarship on foreign-related legal talent cultivation in China, several significant gaps remain in the existing literature. Individual studies have documented specific programs or innovations at particular institutions (e.g., H. Wang & Zhang, 2024), but the field lacks a comprehensive mapping of practices across the diversity of Chinese higher education institutions engaged in this endeavor. Analyses of challenges and problems tend to appear dispersed across many publications without a systematic synthesis that would indicate which obstacles are most pervasive, which appear structurally rooted rather than amenable to piecemeal solutions, and which have been successfully addressed through particular interventions. Furthermore, the Chinese-language scholarship on this topic has developed largely in isolation from international research on legal education globalization and reform in emerging economies, limiting opportunities for cross-fertilization and comparative insight. Taken all together, this study, therefore, addresses these gaps by providing a systematic, evidence-based documentation of cultivation practices and challenges based on a comprehensive analysis of the scholarly literature, while situating the findings within broader theoretical frameworks drawn from international research on legal education reform and the sociology of the legal profession (also see Webley, 2020). The contribution extends to methodological innovation in treating scholarly publications as primary data sources that document and reflect upon actual cultivation practices, an approach that may prove useful for similar studies in other national contexts or educational domains.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Source and Selection Process

The study employs a systematic literature analysis approach, treating scholarly publications as primary data sources that document and reflect upon actual cultivation practices across Chinese higher education institutions. The data were collected from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure database, which provides comprehensive coverage of Chinese academic journals and is the most widely used platform for accessing Chinese scholarly literature. Searches were conducted using the terms

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“涉外法治人才” (foreign-related rule of law talent), “涉外法治人才培养” (foreign-related rule of law talent cultivation), “涉外法治人才教育” (foreign-related rule of law talent education), and “涉外法治人才教学” (foreign-related rule of law talent teaching). The initial search yielded 434 papers, which were then filtered to include only those published in journals indexed in the CSSCI, a quality indicator that ensures focus on peer-reviewed scholarship from reputable outlets. This filtering reduced the sample to 101 papers. Through careful reading, 22 papers were excluded because they addressed foreign-related legal talent cultivation only tangentially within broader discussions of other topics, rather than treating it as the primary research focus. The final sample comprises 79 papers published between 2015 and 2025.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, scholarly attention to this topic has intensified dramatically over the study period. While only 3 papers (3.8%) appeared in the 2015-2019 period, 76 papers (96.2%) were published between 2020 and 2025, with the most recent four years (2022-2025) accounting for 65 papers (82.3%). This temporal concentration reflects the elevation of foreign-related legal talent cultivation to a strategic national priority in central policy documents after 2020, particularly following the announcement of the BRI and explicit articulation of this priority in Ministry of Education directives. The peak publication year was 2022 with 21 papers, followed by sustained high output through 2025. This temporal distribution indicates that the analysis captures current practices and contemporary thinking rather than historical approaches, ensuring relevance to ongoing policy discussions and reform efforts.

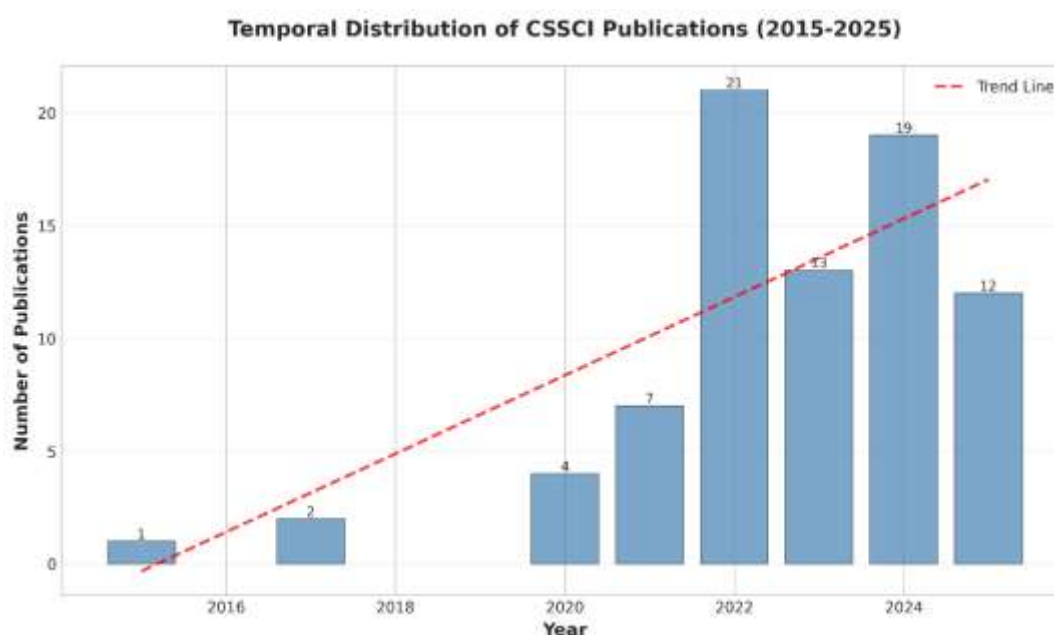


Figure 1: Temporal Distribution of CSSCI Publications (2015-2025)

The papers come from diverse publication venues, strengthening confidence that the analysis captures perspectives from across the spectrum of Chinese institutions engaged in the cultivation of foreign-related legal talent. As Figure 2 illustrates, the *Journal of Legal Education Research* (*faxue jiaoyu yanjiu*) accounts for 48 papers (60.8%), reflecting the centrality of this topic within legal education scholarship and the journal's role as the primary forum for sustained scholarly exchange on legal education reform. The remaining 31 papers appeared across 21 different journals, including general higher education periodicals such as *China Higher Education* (*zhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu*, 6 papers, 7.6%), *China University Teaching* (*zhongguo daxue jiaoxue*, 4 papers, 5.1%), and *China Higher Education Research* (*zhongguo daojiao yanjiu*, 3 papers, 3.8%), as well as 18 additional journals that each contributed a single paper. This distribution pattern, with strong concentration in a specialized legal education outlet alongside broader representation across diverse higher education and disciplinary journals, indicates that foreign-related legal talent cultivation has attracted sustained attention from legal education specialists while also gaining recognition as a significant topic in the broader higher education research community.

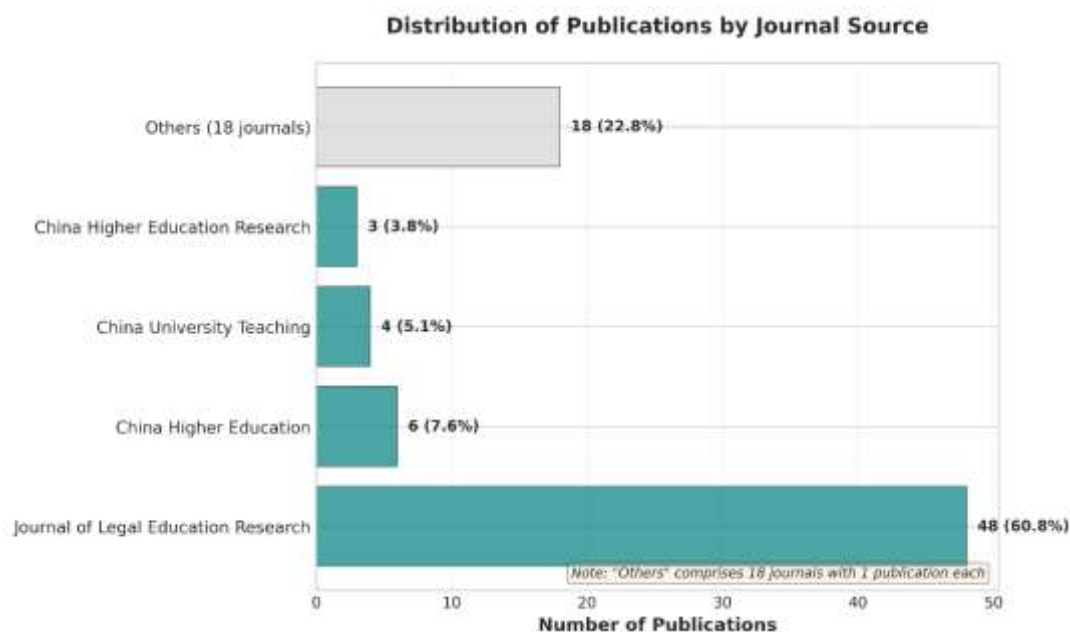


Figure 2: Distribution of Publications by Journal Source

The sample includes both regular journal articles (*qikan*, 31 papers, 39.2%) and papers published in collected works or special issues (*jikan*, 48 papers, 60.8%). The substantial presence of collected works reflects the convening of special symposia and thematic collections devoted to foreign-related legal talent cultivation, indicating sustained institutional and editorial attention to this topic. These special collections have brought together scholars from multiple institutions to address common challenges, contributing to the development of shared frameworks and comparative insights that might not emerge from isolated individual studies.

The authors represent a range of institutional affiliations, from elite national universities such as Peking University, Tsinghua University, China University of Political Science and Law, and Wuhan University to regional universities such as Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, Southwest China University of Political Science and Law, and specialized foreign studies institutions. The sample includes substantial representation from the pilot universities designated by the Ministry of Education to develop specialized programs for foreign-related legal talent cultivation, providing institutional impetus and resources for experimentation with new approaches. However, the presence of papers from non-pilot institutions ensures that the analysis captures perspectives from both well-resourced flagship programs and those operating under more constrained conditions in less economically developed regions. This institutional diversity is crucial for understanding the full range of cultivation practices and the differential challenges faced by institutions with varying levels of resources and policy support.

B. Analytical Framework and Procedures

The analytical approach combines thematic content analysis with attention to temporal evolution, institutional variation, and the identification of persistent patterns across the literature. The analysis proceeded through several phases designed to move from comprehensive familiarization with the corpus to systematic coding and pattern identification. An initial reading of the entire corpus generated a preliminary understanding of major themes, recurring concerns, and the range of approaches discussed across papers. This exploratory phase identified key dimensions around which the subsequent systematic analysis would be organized, including cultivation models, pedagogical approaches, challenges identified, and solutions proposed. Subsequent systematic coding categorized papers according to their primary focus areas, the types of institutions discussed, the specific cultivation models or approaches described, the challenges and problems identified, and any solutions or recommendations proposed. Papers varied considerably in their specificity and methodological approaches. Some provided detailed case studies of particular programs, including curriculum structures, student selection mechanisms, and outcomes assessment, offering concrete empirical grounding for understanding implementation in specific contexts. Others offered more general analytical treatments of challenges facing the field as a whole, synthesizing observations across multiple contexts to identify systemic issues requiring coordinated solutions. Both types of contributions proved valuable. Case studies provided a detailed understanding of actual practices necessary to assess feasibility and identify implementation challenges, while analytical papers offered higher-level synthesis and theoretical frameworks for understanding why particular challenges persist despite reform efforts.

The analysis attended to several key dimensions throughout the coding process. First, regarding cultivation models, the coding captured different approaches to program design including dual-degree structures combining law and foreign languages, joint cultivation arrangements between multiple institutions, practice-oriented tracks emphasizing experiential learning, and regionally-

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specialized programs focusing on particular geographic areas such as ASEAN countries or Central Asia. The analysis noted not only what models exist but also how institutions justify their choices, what evidence they provide regarding effectiveness, and what implementation challenges they acknowledge. Second, regarding pedagogical approaches, the analysis documented teaching methods, curriculum innovations, practical training components, and mechanisms for international cooperation. Particular attention was given to how institutions balance theoretical education with practical skills development, how they integrate foreign language training with legal content, and which strategies they employ to provide students with exposure to international legal practice. The coding captured both successful innovations and acknowledged failures, as understanding what has not worked proves as valuable for future reform as documenting successes. Third, regarding challenges, systematic attention was given to problems identified across multiple papers, with particular interest in whether specific challenges persisted across different types of institutions, time periods, and geographic contexts. Such persistence suggests structural rather than contingent origins, indicating that solutions require addressing underlying systemic factors rather than piecemeal interventions. The analysis distinguished between challenges that appear specific to particular institutional contexts (such as resource limitations at less well-funded universities) and those that appear universal across the system (such as faculty capacity limitations that affect even elite institutions). Fourth, temporal analysis examined how the discourse evolved over the decade covered by the sample. The analysis tracked shifts in emphasis from early papers that focused primarily on policy rationales and conceptual frameworks to more recent papers documenting implementation experiences and offering critical assessments of what has and has not worked. This temporal progression provides insight into the maturation of the field from initial advocacy and program design toward sustained engagement with the practical difficulties of producing graduates capable of effective performance in international legal settings. The shift from predominantly optimistic program descriptions in earlier years to more nuanced accounts acknowledging limitations and persistent challenges in recent years represents the healthy maturation of scholarly discourse, providing more realistic foundations for future development efforts.

Throughout the analysis, efforts were made to assess the quality and specificity of evidence provided in individual papers. Greater weight was given to accounts based on direct implementation experience or systematic evaluation rather than purely normative advocacy. Papers authored by scholars with explicit roles in program administration or teaching were considered particularly valuable for understanding actual practices as opposed to idealized designs. However, the analysis also attended to more theoretical and critical papers that questioned prevailing assumptions or identified limitations in current approaches, as such critical perspectives are essential for moving beyond taken-for-granted frameworks that may constrain innovative thinking.

The analysis was conducted iteratively, with preliminary findings informing refinement of the coding scheme and directing attention to particular dimensions deserving closer examination. Regular memoing throughout the analysis process captured emerging insights and interpretive hypotheses, which were then tested against additional papers to assess their validity across the corpus. This iterative approach allowed patterns to emerge inductively from the data while maintaining systematic attention to all papers rather than focusing selectively on those that fit predetermined categories. The goal was to produce an analysis that faithfully represents the diversity of approaches and perspectives present in the literature while identifying meaningful patterns that would be difficult to discern from reading individual papers in isolation.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Cultivation Models: Diversity and Experimentation

The analysis indicates considerable diversity in approaches to foreign-related legal talent cultivation, with institutions developing programs tailored to their particular strengths, resources, and strategic orientations. One prominent model combines legal education with intensive foreign language training, typically through dual-degree programs where students simultaneously pursue qualifications in law and a foreign language (as to the general relationship between the foreign-related rule of law talent and foreign languages, see Qu, 2017; Yu & Luo, 2024). This “Law + Foreign Language” approach has been implemented at numerous institutions, with variations in structure ranging from extended undergraduate programs to specialized graduate tracks (W. Wang, 2015). Advocates of this model argue that effective participation in international legal affairs requires not merely adequate foreign language competency but professional-level mastery enabling nuanced legal argumentation and negotiation in foreign contexts (Kang, 2025; G. Zhang & Song, 2022).

A second significant model emphasizes a practice-oriented approach, seeking to address persistent concerns about theory-practice gaps in Chinese legal education by enhancing experiential learning components (especially Fan, 2025). The “five-in-one” approach advocated by Cui (2025) exemplifies this orientation, integrating classroom simulation exercises, specialized practical courses, campus-based training facilities, off-campus internships with legal institutions, and international practice opportunities into a comprehensive experiential curriculum. Institutions implementing practice-oriented models have established partnerships with courts, law firms, enterprises, and international organizations to provide students with exposure to actual legal work in foreign-related contexts. Wuhan University’s international law program, for instance, has developed a network of practice bases including positions with international dispute resolution bodies and major law firms handling cross-border transactions. The

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appeal of such approaches lies in their potential to produce graduates immediately capable of contributing to legal work, rather than requiring extensive on-the-job training.

Regional specialization represents a third distinctive approach, with institutions in particular geographic locations developing programs focused on the legal systems and languages of nearby countries or regions. Southwest China University of Political Science and Law has developed programs oriented toward ASEAN countries, leveraging geographic proximity and established economic linkages to focus training on legal frameworks relevant to China-ASEAN engagement (H. Wang & Zhang, 2024; C. Zhang & Wei, 2022). Similarly, Northwestern institutions have developed programs focused on Central Asian legal systems, responding to the growing importance of these countries within the BRI framework (W. Chen, 2025). Shanghai-based institutions have emphasized training oriented toward international commercial arbitration and the legal infrastructure supporting Shanghai's development as an international financial center (Feng, 2024). Guangxi University of Finance and Economics has developed specialized programs targeting ASEAN-oriented legal talent, recognizing the particular demands created by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and expanding trade linkages (H. Wang, 2025). As a common feature, these regionally-specialized programs offer advantages of focus and relevance to local economic conditions.

Joint cultivation arrangements involving multiple institutions, both domestic and international, constitute another significant model identified in the literature (Du & Ke, 2017). These arrangements seek to leverage complementary strengths, with law schools contributing legal training capacity while foreign studies universities provide language instruction, or with Chinese institutions partnering with overseas universities to provide students with international educational experiences. The Shanghai Higher Education Alliance for Foreign-related Legal Talent Cultivation, established under the leadership of East China University of Political Science and Law, exemplifies the collaborative approach, bringing together multiple Shanghai-area institutions to share resources and coordinate program development (W. Guo, 2024). International partnerships have been developed with universities in Europe, North America, and other Asian countries, though the sustainability and depth of these arrangements varies considerably. Some partnerships involve genuine joint degree programs with extended study periods abroad, while others amount to relatively limited exchange visits or visiting scholar arrangements. The literature suggests that resource-intensive deep partnerships remain concentrated among elite institutions with strong international reputations and substantial funding, while institutions outside this privileged circle struggle to establish meaningful international connections that would genuinely enhance their students' global exposure (L. Guo, 2020).

The emergence of international arbitration talent cultivation as a specialized track deserves particular attention given its prominence in recent policy discussions and institutional initiatives (M. Chen, 2024; Fan, 2023; S. Zhang, 2024). Responding to China's growing participation in international commercial dispute resolution and ambitions to develop major arbitration centers in cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, several institutions have developed specialized programs focusing specifically on international arbitration (M. Chen, 2024; S. Zhang, 2024). These programs seek to produce graduates capable of serving as arbitrators, counsel, or institutional administrators in international arbitration proceedings, a domain where Chinese representation has historically been limited relative to the country's economic weight. The approach typically combines substantive training in international commercial law and arbitration procedure with practical experience through moot arbitration competitions and supervised work with arbitral institutions.

The temporal evolution of cultivation models over the study period unfolds interesting patterns of development and refinement. The earlier papers, particularly those published between 2015 and 2018, tend to emphasize conceptual frameworks and policy rationales, articulating the need for foreign-related legal talent and outlining general approaches that institutions might adopt. The middle period papers, roughly 2019 through 2021, increasingly document specific implementations, with case studies of particular programs providing detail on curriculum structure, teaching methods, and initial experiences. The most recent papers, from 2022 through 2025, reflect maturation of the field, with greater attention to challenges encountered in implementation, critical assessment of what has and has not worked, and proposals for refinement based on accumulated experience. This temporal progression suggests that the foreign-related legal talent cultivation enterprise has moved beyond initial advocacy and program design toward more sustained engagement with the practical difficulties of producing graduates who can actually perform effectively in international legal settings. The shift from optimistic program descriptions to more nuanced accounts acknowledging limitations represents the healthy maturation of scholarly discourse, providing more realistic foundations for future development efforts.

B. Pedagogical Innovations and Curriculum Development

Beyond program-level structures, the literature documents numerous pedagogical innovations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of foreign-related legal talent cultivation (e.g., Lin, 2021). Curriculum reform efforts have sought to integrate international and comparative law content more systematically throughout legal education rather than confining such material to specialized elective courses taken by small numbers of students (X. Liu & Yuan, 2022). Liu's (2023) attention to international economic law teaching advocates restructuring the course to emphasize "global thinking" and practical application, reducing coverage of comparative material that duplicates content available in other courses while deepening engagement with core

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international economic law frameworks relevant to China's foreign economic relations. Similar curriculum reform proposals appear across various substantive areas, with common themes including the need for more systematic treatment of foreign and comparative law, enhanced integration of language training with legal content, and greater emphasis on practical skills relevant to international legal work.

Clinical legal education has gained traction as a pedagogical approach particularly suited to developing practical competencies in international legal work (L. Guo, 2020; Yan, 2023). Building on models introduced to China through collaboration with American law schools in the early 2000s, institutions have developed foreign-related legal clinics that handle actual cases with international dimensions. These clinics may focus on areas such as cross-border commercial disputes, immigration matters affecting foreign nationals in China, or legal assistance to Chinese enterprises operating abroad. The pedagogical value lies not merely in exposing students to real legal problems but in developing professional identity and judgment through supervised engagement with actual clients and counterparties. However, the literature suggests that clinical programs remain unevenly developed across Chinese legal education, with resource constraints, faculty capacity limitations, and institutional incentive structures that undervalue practical teaching all contributing to uneven implementation. The papers authored by scholars at institutions with well-developed clinical programs tend to emphasize success stories, while more critical assessments note the substantial gap between aspirations and widespread realization of high-quality clinical training (L. Guo, 2020).

International moot court competitions have emerged as another significant vehicle for developing advocacy skills and international legal knowledge (X. Liu & Yuan, 2022; Yan, 2023). Chinese law schools have participated extensively in competitions such as the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition, with preparation processes providing intensive training in legal research, brief writing, and oral advocacy under conditions simulating international legal proceedings. Several papers describe institutional efforts to leverage moot court preparation as a training mechanism, with dedicated courses and coaching arrangements supporting participating teams. The competitive dimension may enhance student motivation and engagement while the substantive focus on international legal problems provides exposure to materials and analytical approaches less commonly encountered in regular coursework.

C. Faculty Capacity: The Persistent Bottleneck

Among the challenges identified in the literature, faculty capacity limitations emerge as the most pervasive and structurally consequential. Paper after paper across different institutional contexts and time periods identifies the shortage of qualified faculty as a fundamental constraint on cultivation effectiveness (Hong et al., 2022). The specific dimensions of this challenge are multifaceted. Many faculty members lack substantial international practice experience, having pursued academic careers directly from doctoral studies without extended engagement with the international legal work they are now expected to prepare students to undertake. Language proficiency varies considerably, with not all faculty teaching foreign-related courses capable of conducting instruction, supervision, and scholarly exchange in foreign languages at professional levels. Expertise in specific national legal systems beyond the major powers remains scarce, creating particular difficulties for regionally-specialized programs focused on countries such as those in Central Asia or Southeast Asia whose legal systems receive limited attention in mainstream Chinese legal scholarship (Q. Zheng & Gu, 2023). The problem is not merely a numerical shortage but a qualitative mismatch between the capabilities needed for effective foreign-related legal talent cultivation and the actual competencies widely distributed among existing faculty (Huang, 2024a).

The structural roots of faculty capacity limitations are apparent upon examination. Academic career advancement in Chinese universities continues to emphasize research publications, particularly in prestigious journals, over teaching performance or practical engagement. Faculty members face incentive structures that reward time devoted to theoretical scholarship rather than the development of practical teaching capabilities or the maintenance of connections with legal practice communities. The hiring and promotion criteria prevalent in Chinese law schools do not systematically value or require international practice experience, foreign language proficiency beyond basic competence, or demonstrated effectiveness in practice-oriented instruction. Even where institutions recognize the importance of these capabilities, competition for the relatively small pool of scholars who possess them is intense, and academic salaries often cannot match what accomplished practitioners might earn in private practice (Che, 2024).

The demographics of law faculty in Chinese universities present additional complications for foreign-related legal talent cultivation. Many senior faculty members completed their training during periods when international legal practice and foreign-related work received far less emphasis than they do today. These faculty members may lack the language skills, international exposure, or practical experience ideally desired for teaching foreign-related courses (C. Zhang & Wei, 2022), yet they occupy positions of influence in curriculum design and program governance. Younger faculty members who obtained international education or practice experience face different challenges, as their relatively junior status may limit their ability to advocate for programmatic changes or resource allocations that would enhance cultivation effectiveness (X. Liu & Qi, 2025). The literature documents various strategies institutions have employed to navigate these demographic realities, including intensive short-term

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training programs for existing faculty, strategic hiring of internationally-experienced scholars for key positions, and creative use of visiting faculty or practitioners to supplement permanent faculty capabilities (R. Liu, 2025).

D. Theory-Practice Integration: Enduring Tensions

Closely related to faculty capacity concerns, the literature identifies the persistent challenge of integrating theoretical education with practical skills development. Chinese legal education has historically emphasized doctrinal mastery through lecture-based instruction, with relatively limited attention to experiential learning, as in common law legal education traditions (Fan, 2025). Reform efforts over the past two decades have sought to introduce more practice-oriented elements, but implementation has proven uneven and incomplete (Q. Zheng & Gu, 2023). The challenges are both resource-related and more deeply structural. Effective practical training requires access to appropriate practice settings, supervising attorneys or judges willing and able to mentor students, and sufficient time within already crowded curricula (X. Liu & Yuan, 2022). Beyond these resource constraints, there are deeper tensions regarding the appropriate balance between theoretical foundation and practical skill, with some scholars arguing that premature emphasis on practice risks producing technicians lacking the conceptual sophistication necessary for leadership in complex international legal matters (Fan, 2025; Hu, 2024).

The literature documents various approaches to addressing theory-practice tensions, with varying degrees of reported success (C. Zhang & Wei, 2022). Some institutions have developed simulation-based courses where students engage with hypothetical but realistic scenarios drawn from international legal practice, enabling skills development without the resource demands and unpredictability of actual client representation (Cui, 2025). Others have invested in building relationships with practice institutions, whether courts, law firms, or enterprises, to create structured internship programs providing supervised exposure to real legal work (Fan, 2025). The more ambitious programs have established international internship networks, though these remain accessible primarily to students at well-resourced elite institutions with established overseas connections (Cui, 2025). A recurring theme across papers is the call for deeper collaboration between universities and practice sectors, moving beyond occasional guest lectures or short internship placements toward genuine partnership in curriculum design and program delivery (Fan, 2025). The “dual mentor” model, pairing academic faculty with practice-based supervisors for individual students, is advocated in several papers though with acknowledgment that implementing this model effectively requires significant coordination capacity and willing participation from practice institutions whose primary incentives lie elsewhere (Cui, 2022).

E. Resource Disparities and Regional Inequalities

The analysis reveals substantial disparities in resources and capabilities for foreign-related legal talent cultivation across different types of institutions and geographic regions (G. Tang, 2022). Elite national universities, particularly those designated as pilot institutions in government foreign-related legal talent cultivation initiatives, enjoy access to substantial funding, established international networks, and the ability to attract top faculty and students (Che, 2024). These institutions can develop comprehensive programs that incorporate multiple cultivation models, extensive international partnerships, and sophisticated practice-training infrastructure. By contrast, regional universities, particularly those located in less economically developed areas of western and central China, face significantly more constrained conditions (Fan, 2025; X. Zheng & Liao, 2023). Faculty recruitment is more difficult when competing with coastal institutions offering higher compensation and better research conditions (C. Zhang & Wei, 2022; X. Zheng & Liao, 2023). International partnership opportunities are fewer when institutions lack existing relationships with overseas universities and the financial resources to support exchange activities (Cui, 2025; G. Tang, 2022). Student quality may also vary, as top-performing students tend to gravitate toward elite programs, leaving regional institutions with less academically prepared incoming classes (Na, 2024).

Besides, these disparities raise important questions about the overall architecture of foreign-related legal talent cultivation in China (Fan, 2025). On one hand, concentration of resources at elite institutions may be efficient if the goal is producing a relatively small number of highly capable professionals for the most demanding international legal work. On the other hand, the geographic distribution of legal needs suggests value in developing cultivation capacity across regions, particularly given the regional specialization strategy that positions institutions in different areas to focus on legal systems and relationships most relevant to their geographic context (G. Tang, 2022; C. Zhang & Wei, 2022). Northwestern institutions focusing on Central Asia (W. Chen, 2025), southwestern institutions emphasizing ASEAN connections (C. Zhang & Wei, 2022), and northeastern institutions attending to relationships with Korea, Japan, and Russia all have distinctive contributions potentially to make (C. Zhang & Wei, 2022), but realizing this potential requires overcoming resource constraints that currently limit what many regional institutions can accomplish (W. Chen, 2025; Fan, 2025). Some papers advocate for national coordination mechanisms that would channel resources to regional institutions and facilitate the sharing of expertise and materials, but the implementation of such coordination remains limited in practice (L. Guo, 2020; W. Guo, 2024).

F. Assessment and Quality Assurance: Underdeveloped Systems

A less immediately visible but nonetheless significant challenge concerns the underdevelopment of systems to assess graduates' competencies and evaluate the quality of cultivation programs (Y. Guo & Li, 2022; S. Lin & Du, 2021; C. Zhang & Wei, 2022). The literature shows considerable uncertainty regarding how to measure whether a graduate has achieved the capabilities

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necessary for effective foreign-related legal work (S. Lin & Du, 2021). Traditional academic assessments emphasizing examination performance on doctrinal questions provide limited insight into practical competencies such as cross-cultural communication, negotiation skills, or the ability to analyze unfamiliar foreign legal materials (Y. Guo & Li, 2022; C. Zhang & Wei, 2022). Some papers advocate for competency-based assessment frameworks that would specify the capabilities expected of graduates and provide systematic means for evaluating achievement (Fan, 2025; G. Tang, 2022), but such frameworks remain at early stages of development within Chinese legal education. The absence of standardized assessment creates difficulties for programs seeking to evaluate their effectiveness and for employers attempting to identify qualified candidates among applicants whose credentials provide limited information about actual capabilities (S. Lin & Du, 2021). Related concerns emerge regarding program-level quality assurance and the tracking of graduate outcomes (Cui, 2022). Few studies in the literature provide systematic data on what graduates of particular programs actually do after completing their studies, whether they enter foreign-related legal work, and how effectively they perform in such positions (H. Wang & Zhang, 2024). This absence of outcome data constrains evidence-based assessment of which cultivation approaches prove most effective and limits learning from experience across the system (Cui, 2025).

V. DISCUSSION

A. *Explaining the Persistence of Challenges*

The findings demonstrate that, despite sustained policy attention, substantial resource investment, and considerable institutional effort, many of the same challenges identified in papers from earlier years of the study period persist in more recent publications. Faculty capacity limitations, theory-practice gaps, resource disparities, and assessment system weaknesses persist as concerns across time and institutional contexts. This persistence demands explanation. Why have reforms not been more successful in addressing these challenges? The analysis suggests that the answer lies in the structural character of the obstacles, which are rooted not in isolated implementation failures but in deeper features of how legal education is organized, how academic careers are structured, and how different stakeholders in the legal talent cultivation enterprise relate to one another. Path dependencies in institutional design, incentive misalignments that reward certain activities while undervaluing others, coordination problems among multiple actors with divergent priorities, and resource constraints that cannot be overcome through effort alone all contribute to the durability of challenges despite reform attempts.

Consider faculty capacity, the challenge most persistently identified across the literature. Producing faculty members with the combination of academic credentials, international practice experience, foreign-language proficiency, and teaching capability that is desired for effective foreign-related legal talent cultivation requires years of investment in human capital development. This cannot be achieved rapidly even with substantial resources. Moreover, the incentive structures governing academic careers in Chinese universities continue to emphasize research output over teaching quality or practice engagement, meaning that scholars who possess the desired combination of capabilities may find that developing and exercising those capabilities do not advance their career prospects as effectively as focusing on conventional scholarship. Changing these incentive structures requires reform at the institutional and national levels, and will encounter resistance from those invested in existing arrangements. The result is that even institutions with a strong commitment to enhancing cultivation quality face constraints imposed by the broader academic system within which they operate (in a general academic setting, see Şener et al., 2025).

Similar structural explanations apply to challenges in theory-practice integration. The organization of legal education in China, like in many civil law tradition countries, reflects assumptions about the appropriate sequence of theoretical study followed by practical training obtained outside the academy. Fundamentally restructuring this approach to integrate practice throughout the educational experience requires not merely curriculum revision but also the transformation of relationships between universities and practice institutions, the reallocation of resources from traditional instruction to experiential learning, and the development of faculty capabilities in supervising practical work. Each of these changes encounters resistance from parties benefiting from current arrangements and faces practical obstacles in coordination across organizational boundaries. The literature documents various efforts to push against these constraints, but the structural nature of the challenges means that progress tends to be incremental and uneven rather than transformative.

B. *Comparative Perspective*

Situating the Chinese experience within the broader international literature on legal education reform reveals both parallels and distinctive features. The challenges identified in the Chinese literature resonate strongly with obstacles documented in other emerging economies undertaking similar reforms. Faculty capacity limitations, theory-practice gaps, and resource disparities are not unique to China but appear across diverse national contexts in which legal education systems have sought to respond to internationalization pressures and the growing demand for lawyers capable of transnational practice. The GLEE project's research on India, Brazil, and other emerging economies documents strikingly similar patterns, suggesting that these challenges may be inherent features of legal education reform in late-developing contexts rather than specific failures of particular national approaches (Garth & Shaffer, 2022; Wilkins & Trubek, 2017). This comparative perspective is both sobering, in highlighting the

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difficulty of overcoming structural obstacles, and potentially instructive, in suggesting that lessons might be drawn from how different national systems have addressed common challenges.

At the same time, the Chinese approach to cultivating foreign-related legal talent exhibits distinctive features that reflect the particular political-economic context within which it operates. The explicit emphasis on cultivating legal professionals who combine professional competence with political reliability, and who are oriented toward serving national interests in international legal affairs rather than simply pursuing individual career success (Erie, 2023; Z. J. Wang & Chen, 2025), distinguishes Chinese discourse from the more market-oriented framing prevalent in much international scholarship on legal education globalization (Che, 2024). The role of government in designating pilot institutions, providing targeted funding, and articulating strategic priorities for talent cultivation represents a more directive approach than typically observed in countries where market forces and autonomous institutional decision-making play larger roles. Whether this state-coordinated approach yields advantages in coherence and resource mobilization, or disadvantages in flexibility and responsiveness to diverse needs, remains an empirical question that the current analysis cannot definitively resolve. The evidence does suggest that government attention and resources have stimulated substantial activity in foreign-related legal talent cultivation, but the persistence of challenges indicates that policy attention alone is insufficient to overcome structural obstacles.

Moreover, the relationship between cultivation for domestic foreign-related legal work and cultivation for international positions deserves additional consideration. Some graduates of foreign-related programs will work primarily on cross-border matters within China, handling transactions, disputes, or regulatory matters involving foreign parties or elements but operating within the Chinese legal system and domestic law firms or corporate legal departments. Others may work abroad, in international law firms, international organizations, or overseas offices of Chinese enterprises. These career paths may require different capabilities and orientations, yet cultivation programs typically do not clearly differentiate among them. The literature includes scattered discussion of whether uniform cultivation approaches adequately serve both domestic and international career paths, but systematic treatment of this issue remains limited. More attention to graduates' actual career trajectories and the different competency profiles associated with success in various types of foreign-related legal work could inform more differentiated cultivation approaches.

Last but not least, the internationalization dimension of foreign-related legal talent cultivation connects to broader debates about China's role in global legal ordering and the extent to which Chinese legal professionals can and should shape international legal norms. Some papers in the literature articulate ambitious visions for cultivating talent who will contribute to the construction of international legal frameworks more reflective of Chinese perspectives and interests, challenging what is perceived as Western dominance of international legal discourse. This aspiration raises questions about how cultivation programs should balance preparing graduates to work effectively within existing international legal frameworks versus equipping them to advocate for reform of those frameworks. The tension between integration into existing global legal practice and contribution to the transformation of global legal ordering is rarely explicitly addressed in the cultivation literature, but it underlies many discussions of program objectives and curriculum content. Understanding this tension and how different institutions address it could provide important insights into the deeper purposes animating foreign-related legal talent cultivation efforts.

C. Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings carry important implications for those involved in designing, implementing, and assessing foreign-related legal talent cultivation programs. Most fundamentally, the analysis suggests the importance of realistic expectations regarding the pace of progress. The structural character of the challenges means that they cannot be quickly resolved through individual program innovations or resource infusions, however well-designed or substantial. Sustained effort over extended time periods, addressing multiple dimensions of the challenge simultaneously, appears necessary for meaningful progress. This has implications for how programs are designed and evaluated, suggesting value in long-term planning horizons, incremental improvement orientations, and assessment frameworks that recognize meaningful progress even when ultimate goals remain distant. Institutions undertaking foreign-related legal talent cultivation would benefit from clearly articulating which challenges they can realistically address given their particular capabilities and constraints, rather than attempting comprehensive reform that overreaches available resources.

The analysis also highlights the importance of differentiation across the system. Given resource disparities and varying institutional strengths, attempting to have all institutions pursue similar comprehensive cultivation models may be less effective than encouraging specialization and complementarity. Elite institutions with strong international connections and substantial resources may appropriately focus on producing highly capable professionals for the most demanding international legal positions, while regional institutions develop expertise in particular national legal systems or sectors relevant to their geographic context. In this regard, coordination mechanisms that facilitate sharing of expertise, materials, and eventually perhaps students across institutions could help realize the benefits of specialization while ensuring that the system as a whole addresses the full range of cultivation needs. The literature offers some discussion of such coordination possibilities but suggests that implementation remains limited, representing an area where policy attention might productively be directed.

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Finally, the underdevelopment of assessment and quality assurance systems emerges as a priority area for attention. Without better understanding of what graduates actually learn and how effectively they perform in foreign-related legal work, programs lack the feedback necessary for evidence-based improvement. Investing in development of competency frameworks, assessment instruments, and graduate tracking systems may not immediately produce visible improvements in cultivation quality but would provide the foundation for sustained learning and adaptation. The international literature on legal education reform provides various models for competency-based assessment and program evaluation that might inform development of appropriate approaches for the Chinese context (e.g., N. Hamilton & Organ, 2024; N. W. Hamilton & Bilonis, 2022; Sylvester, 2015). Collaborative efforts among institutions, potentially facilitated by government or professional associations, could accelerate the development of common assessment frameworks while respecting the diversity of institutional approaches.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has provided a comprehensive, systematic analysis of foreign-related rule of law talent cultivation in China, drawing on a corpus of 79 CSSCI papers published between 2015 and 2025. The analysis documents considerable diversity in cultivation approaches, with institutions developing various models including dual-degree programs combining law and foreign languages, practice-oriented curricula emphasizing experiential learning, regionally-specialized programs focused on particular geographic areas, and collaborative arrangements leveraging complementary institutional strengths. At the same time, the findings showcase persistent, structurally-rooted challenges that span faculty capacity limitations, difficulties in theory-practice integration, resource disparities across regions and institutional types, and assessment system inadequacies. This study further indicates, by embedding the Chinese literature into the broader literature, that these challenges appear rooted not in isolated implementation failures but in deeper features of how legal education is organized and how multiple stakeholders in the talent cultivation enterprise relate to one another.

Given these empirical findings, this study has at least three contributions. First, it provides a comprehensive mapping of foreign-related legal talent cultivation practices across Chinese higher education, documenting the range of approaches attempted and the patterns of variation across institutional types, regions, and time periods. This mapping provides an evidence base that should prove valuable for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers seeking to understand the current landscape and identify opportunities for improvement. Second, the analysis explicates the structural character of persistent challenges, moving beyond the identification of problems to examine why they prove so resistant to solution despite sustained reform efforts. This explanatory contribution suggests that progress requires addressing systemic factors rather than expecting piecemeal interventions to produce transformative results. Third, by situating the Chinese experience within broader international scholarship on legal education reform and the globalization of legal training, the study contributes to a comparative understanding of how emerging economies respond to internationalization pressures in developing legal professional capacity.

However, several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. The reliance on published scholarly literature means that the analysis captures practices and perspectives that authors have chosen to document and publish, which may not fully represent the range of what is occurring across Chinese legal education. Publication bias may lead to overrepresentation of innovations and success stories relative to routine practices or failures. The analysis cannot assess actual outcomes in terms of graduate capabilities and career development, which would require empirical research beyond what the existing literature provides. Therefore, future research might usefully pursue such empirical outcome studies, as well as comparative analysis examining how cultivation approaches in China compare with those in other major jurisdictions. Notwithstanding these limitations, the systematic analysis of a substantial corpus of scholarly publications provides valuable insight into how this strategically important educational endeavor has evolved and what challenges it continues to face.

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