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Disciplinary English reform and practices of undergraduate program in response to cultivation of interdisciplinary elites in China

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Disciplinary English was proposed as a new pedagogical approach of English educational reform under the heading of New Liberal Arts which requires to restructure the knowledge of Liberal Arts to cultivate interdisciplinary elites for the socioeconomic development in China. The article aims to illustrate disciplinary English's implications, its distinction from ESP, EMI and CLIL, its prevalent theories and its implicit resistance against English's hegemony in pedagogical practices of undergraduate program in China. The article adopts case study and reflectivity approach to illustrate how China's New Liberal Arts responded to English's dominance in foreign language education by implementing disciplinary English reform. The discussion shows that the interdisciplinary practices of disciplinary English were rooted in Chinese culture, aligned with the interdisciplinary requirement of English educational reform of New Liberal Arts, and featured the cooperation with the local socioeconomic enterprises. As a new pedagogical approach, disciplinary English is faced with the challenges in practices, such as the intersection between English and disciplinary knowledge and the ideological and cultural share in teaching and learning activities. The results provide a lens for the further explanation of disciplinary English and other pedagogical practices of English educational reform at the universities in China and other non-English speaking countries.

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Introduction

English as an important international language "in the ongoing processes of globalization" (Phillipson, 2009, p. 4) has entered a new phase *World Englishes* proposed by (Kachru, 1985) which "belongs to everybody who speaks it, but it is nobody's mother tongue" (Rajagopalan, 2004, p. 111) in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Englishization has become a critical concept that has arisen with globalization which embodies the capitalistic values and ideology.

English education is a field that interlocks Englishization in non-English speaking countries (Phillipson, 2003). It has been explored in different approaches, for example, English language teaching (ELT), English as a foreign language (EFL), English as a lingua franca (ELF), English as a medium of instruction (EMI), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), English for specific purposes (ESP), etc. These approaches have promoted the researches on English as a second or foreign language along different directions, which respond to the current state of world Englishes. To diversify English education, other disciplinary knowledge has been integrated to English learning and teaching in non-English speaking countries, for instance, English in Medicine in Taiwan (Chia et al., 1999), English in History in Spain (Doiz and Lasagabaster, 2021), English in Biology in Botswana (Chimbganda, 2000), English in Mathematics in Hongkong (Tai and Wei, 2020), and English in Geography in Argentina (Banegas, 2018). The studies are encapsulated as the specific terms, such as disciplinary English (Jin and Peng, 2019), genre studies in subject English (Davison, 2005), and subject teaching in English (Deller and Price, 2007). They illustrate that the integration of English and other disciplines has been widely practiced in non-English speaking countries. The diverse integrations in different regions provide a lens for the further exploration of disciplinary English in China. In China, disciplinary English reform features "the interface between English language and any specific discipline" (Wang and Wang, 2023, p. 153), and reconstructs the knowledge of English and another discipline. Thus, disciplinary English is interdisciplinarity-oriented. As interdisciplinarity is the breaking point in New Liberal Arts (He, 2021), disciplinary English is accommodated to the requirement of New Liberal Arts initiative that aims to cultivate the high-quality interdisciplinary elites for the socio-economic developments in China. Besides, according to the fundamental educational policy of cultivating morality and nurturing talents released at 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, disciplinary English reform is required to integrate ideological and political education into the teaching process (Diao and Liu, 2021), which aligns with the socio-political goals in China. This educational policy underscores the spread of communistic value and implies the resistance against capitalistic values.

This article focuses on disciplinary English reform and practices of undergraduate program under New Liberal Arts in China, and discuss three issues: (1) how does disciplinary English differ from other pedagogical approaches? (2) why has Systemic-Functional Linguistics been widely applied to conduct the tentative practices of disciplinary English in China? (3) how do the pedagogical practices of disciplinary English imply the resistance against Englishization at the universities in China? The answers offer the insight for the further studies on disciplinary English under the heading of New Liberal Arts in China and English educational reforms in other non-English speaking countries.

Research background

Historical background. Since the 17th century, English has become the leading language with "British successes in conquest, colonization and trade" (Troike, 1977, p. 2). In response to "a deeper degree of linguistic penetration" (Phillipson, 2009, p. 2) of English into non-English speaking countries, some concepts were developed, for example, linguistic imperialism, post-imperial English, peripheral English and English linguistic imperialism from below. Firstly, linguistic imperialism was put forward to elaborate the inequality between the speakers in the dominant English countries and those in the periphery-English countries (Phillipson, 1992). Though the concept was criticized for the ignorant of language as a cause of inequalities and the lack of micro-societal perspective (Canagarajah, 1999) and the lack of "a sense of agency, resistance, or appropriation" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 62), the scholars admitted that it was insightful. Secondly, Canagarajah (1999) proposed post-imperial English and peripheral English to elaborate how English's hegemony continued to work in post-colonial era. Post-imperial English is recognized as "the *lingua franca* of capitalist exploitation without being the vehicle of imperialism or even neo-imperialism per se" (Fishman, 1996, p. 8), which stresses the implicitness of Englishization. Peripheral English is appropriated by the post-colonial and neo-imperial communities to illustrate "how marginalized communities can acquire and use English language for their empowerment" (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 4). It foregrounds the new forms of imperialistic power of English in the fields such as "economy, technology and material mean" (Phillipson, 2009, p. 137) in "post-colonial and neo-imperial US dominated" (Phillipson, 2009, p. 9) areas. Finally, Mathew (2022) proposed English linguistic imperialism from below to explore "how English is newly constituted as a dominant language in a rearticulated political economic context through the fervent aspirations of non-elites and the zealous reforms of post-colonial ELT experts" (2022, p. 3) in India. He illustrated that the non-elites were "responsible for the injustices of English-medium education" (2022, p. 172) in India. It manifests that "the empire of English has extended beyond borders, history and diversity to produce new inequalities and subjugations" (Mathew, 2022, p. 18). These concepts have widely been applied to illustrate how English educational policy has changed in non-English speaking countries, which also provide some insight on the study on English pedagogical practices in this article.

Global and international English. As Englishization enters a new era, English spread and change are affected by the factors such as society, technology, indigenous cultures and so on. Thus, English is subcategorized into global English featuring the societal and technological developments, and international English incorporating other forms of indigenous cultures (Halliday, 2003). Global English implies the dominant but imperialistic status of English which is used to manipulate the international affairs by means of its implicit hegemonic power. But international English acts as a struggle against the imperialistic status of English in the linguistic field, which delineates the diversification of the variants of English. In the process of language change, international English becomes world Englishes with the indigenization of the non-English speaking countries as "in large part to the struggle against imperialism" (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, p. ix). Basically, "globally, as English; internationally, as Englishes" (Halliday, 2020, p. 346). Halliday (2020) argued that "English has become a world language in both senses of the terms, international and global" (2020, p. 345). International English is embodied in "literary and other forms of cultural life in (mainly) countries of the former British Empire" (Halliday, 2020, p. 345–346), whereas global English features exploitation "as the cogenitor of the new technological age, the age of information" (Halliday, 2020, p. 346).

As global English emphasizes the powerful dominance of English with capitalist values, its hegemonic status implies the inequality as the typicality of linguistic imperialism in international affairs, economic and political exchange, educational policies, language planning, etc. Since Englishization intertwines with Americanization and globalization (Phillipson, 2003), its widespread facilitates to establish the ideological and socio-economic values of the people, especially the youth in the non-English speaking countries by means of the English teacher training, the English teaching materials and even the English academic assessments.

Resistance against English's hegemony. As English spread in non-English speaking countries, its ideological impact (Tollefson, 1991) has been taken seriously. Some non-English speaking countries have gradually realized the implicit negative impact of the capitalistic values on their national cultures and languages in the course of Englishization. For example, Xiao (2020) studied 475 texts in college English textbooks in the past 70 years in China to explore the invasion of western culture and ideological values, for instance, Americanization, social inequality and self-orientation. Liu and Zhang (2014) illustrated that Englishization obstructed "the linguistic human rights" (2014, p. 104) in non-English speaking countries.

To fight against the invasion of capitalistic values in the course of English spread, the Chinese government has adjusted the educational reforms and the language policies (Zhou and Ma, 2023). Especially, after the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road was proposed in 2013, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China put forward to develop New Engineering, New Medicine, New Agriculture, and New Liberal Arts by restructuring educational system in 2018. The essence is to realize the interdisciplinary integration (Fan and Sun, 2023) in education for the socioeconomic development in China. To strengthen communistic values, it is required to implement the fundamental educational policy of cultivating morality and nurturing talents in these Four New educational reforms according to *Education Powerhouse Construction Plan Outline (2024–2025)* released by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council of the People's Republic of China on January 19th, 2025. Chinese culture is also required to be integrated into the curriculum, which to a certain extent lessens the ideological invasion of capitalistic values in English education.

Besides, there are some voices of reducing the status of English in education system in China. For example, Xu, a member of National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, submitted a proposal of downgrading English from a major discipline to a minor one in junior and senior middle schools to the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in 2021 (Ye, 2021). Xi'an Jiao Tong University in China issued a notice of canceling CET 4 (National College English Test Band 4) and CET 6 (National College English Test Band 6) as the basic requirements of attaining Bachelor's Degree on September 20, 2023. Luo (2015) studied 804 Chinese netizens' comments on College English Entrance Examination Reform in 2014 on Tencent News: 75.4% held the negative attitude towards English owing to its conflict of Chinese cultural values, its impediment to personal development, its uselessness, and low efficiency of English acquisition.

The above English educational policies and different voices of English status in education system indicate that English educational reform has been an important pedagogical issue and a hot topic in China.

Method
The article adopts case study to specify disciplinary English reform and practices under the heading of New Liberal Arts in China, which benefits the detailed discussions of three types of English educational practices at the universities in China. Besides, reflective approach was used to illustrate the researchers' interpretations of the outcomes of the pedagogical practices at the universities in China, for example, the implications and the challenges of these pedagogical practices of disciplinary English.

To address three research questions, the study was conducted in the following procedures. Firstly, disciplinary English was explicated in terms of three components and its distinction from ESP, EMI and CLIL in Section 4. These two parts were exemplified by the studies on English educational reform and educational policy in China. Secondly, Section 5 illustrated that the theories of Systemic-Functional Linguistics had been widely applied to conduct the practices of disciplinary English in China in terms of disciplinary knowledge, linguistic knowledge and contextual influence, supported by the data on China National Knowledge Infrastructure 2.0 (CNKI 2.0) by searching {[disciplinary English] OR [English education]} AND [systemic-functional] from 2018 to 2025. CNKI is the largest academic database for the first-class academic construction in China. CNKI 2.0 can provide the comprehensive electronic academic sources for the studies on disciplinary English. Finally, by searching {[English educational reform] and [specific research method]} on CNKI 2.0 from January 2001 to March 2025, the academic works were analyzed in two aspects: (1) they were counted in light of different methods, i.e. quantitative method, qualitative method and case study; (2) three practical studies at tertiary universities in China were further explored. Three practical studies include maritime English reform at Dalian Maritime University (Meng et al., 2022), English educational reform of cultivating the top-notch elites at a university in Shanghai (Jiang, 2022) and English educational reform at Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Chang, 2021). They were selected owing to three reasons. Firstly, these practices of English educational reform were conducted after New Liberal Arts was put forwards in 2018. Secondly, they represent three trends of the studies on English educational reform in China: the first focuses on interdisciplinarity between English and another discipline, i.e. English and Maritime Affairs; the second deals with the cultivation of the top-notch innovative interdisciplinary talents majored in English; the third is concerned with interdisciplinarity within English major, for example, Linguistic Intelligence and Speech-Language Pathology. Finally, these three studies are based on the practices of English educational reforms for years which contribute to the theoretical discussions on disciplinary English reform. They were analyzed in light of educational philosophy, disciplinary knowledge, English proficiency, indigenous factors, challenges, researchers' identities, students' perspective and broad implications, to elaborate that these studies feature disciplinary English and imply the resistance against the hegemonic status of English in English education at the universities in China. The former focuses on the diversified methods of exploring disciplinary English, whereas the latter is oriented towards the detailed discussion of the pedagogical practices of disciplinary English.

Disciplinary English as a struggle against hegemonic status of English
Three components of disciplinary English. Disciplinary English emphasizes English and disciplinary knowledge learning and teaching in a local context. There are three components:

(1) specific disciplinary knowledge;
(2) the relevant linguistic knowledge in English system;
(3) a local context.

Table 1 Differences among ESP, EMI, CLIL and DE.

aspect				
approach	ESP	EMI	CLIL	DE
role of English	second or foreign language	lingua franca	one of foreign languages	world Englishes
status of language	an end	a medium	a mean & a part of process	an end & a process
research objective	language	discipline	language and discipline	closer to content

English functions as a variant of world Englishes featuring "the acculturation of English in new environments and contexts" (Valentine, 2020, p. 579) in disciplinary English. World Englishes indicate that non-western countries "take equal part in the creation of the world econocultural system and its linguistic expression" (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, p. 108). They stress "the pluricentricity of the language and its cross-cultural reincarnations" (Kachru, 2020, p. 448). The indigenized English has been gradually understood and accepted by the Chinese college students (Gao and Xu, 2015; Sun, 2016; Lü, 2018). Disciplinary knowledge is an important component of English educational reform at the universities in China. It can be science knowledge, other liberal arts knowledge or engineering knowledge (Hu, 2020) which is integrated into the curriculum of English major. The local context implies that disciplinary English is accustomed to the socioeconomic development in the local areas of China (Han, 2022). The Chinese factors and the communistic values are also required to be integrated into English teaching and learning. Two English courses *Understanding Contemporary China* and *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* have been officially required to be taught at the universities in China since 2022. Take *Understanding Contemporary China* (A Reading & Writing Course) (Sun, 2024) for example. The first unit is about the mission of Chinese youths which is illustrated by the reading material about the May 4th Movement of Chinese youths protesting against the unfair treatment inflicted on China at the Paris Peace Conference. The social movement showed Chinese youths' strong patriotism and communist faith in the era of the Republic of China. The reading material aims to encourage Chinese youths to carry forward the spirit of the May 4th movement so as to take the mission of realizing national rejuvenation in contemporary China.

Take Business English reform in tertiary education in China for example. Business English was founded as an independent discipline at the universities in 2007 to cultivate the interdisciplinary elites for the socioeconomic development in China (Wang and Cui, 2020). It involves the intersection of two majors: English and Business (Zhang, 2008). The curriculum is designed to balance business and English knowledge teaching and learning for the cultivation of business English elites. The pedagogical practices vary at different universities. For instance, business English at Xi'an International Studies University is both language-oriented and discipline-oriented (Sun, 2016). At Zhejiang Yuexiu Foreign Languages College, business English course subsumes textile English course and practical English course for exhibition and trade fair both of which are designed to contribute to the local development of Zhejiang province in China (Chen, 2023). Its curriculum features the innovative cultivation mode, such as cross-border e-commerce classes and international business exhibition virtual stimulation experimental project (Chen, 2023). The integration of Chinese factors into business English teaching foregrounds the socioeconomic consideration of English educational reform in China.

Distinction of disciplinary English from ESP, EMI and CLIL. Apart from disciplinary English, other pedagogical approaches also focus on disciplinary knowledge teaching and learning in English as a second or foreign language, for instance, ESP, EMI and CLIL with different emphases. ESP takes English as a second or foreign language. English proficiency is discerned as an end since ESP highlights "the language of a set of specific disciplines" (Wilkinson, 2008, p. 60). Its aim is to enable the learners "to use English in a particular domain" (Paltridge and Starfield, 2013, p. 2) appropriately. Compared with disciplinary content, ESP is closer to language. EMI takes English as a medium in some countries "where English is used as a lingua franca…among students and teachers from different linguacultural backgrounds" (Murata and Iino, 2018, p. 404). EMI is content-led and focuses on academic subjects learning and teaching. The language in CLIL is taken as "a means to an end, rather than an end in itself" (Deller and Price, 2007, p. 6) as well as "one part of the process" (Deller and Price, 2007, p. 6) even though both content and language are highlighted as "a joint curricular role" (Nikula, 2005, p. 28). English is one of foreign languages in CLIL, which is quite different from ESP and EMI. CLIL (content and language integrated learning), as the term suggests, has dual research objectives: language acquisition and subject knowledge learning, or "the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Marsh and Wolff, 2007, p. 5). As a newly-emerged pedagogical approach, disciplinary English takes both disciplinary and English knowledge as the end and the process. Concerning the disciplinary knowledge, it is required to be recontextualized in English as an important part of the curriculum, and to be reproduced as the pedagogical activity according to Maton's epistemic–pedagogic device (2014). As far as the status of English is concerned, it is not just the process, but also an end. As the sociocultural knowledge in the indigenous context is taken into account, English functions as a variant of world Englishes. The differences of these pedagogical approaches can be encapsulated in Table 1.

Besides, there are some similarities among these four pedagogical approaches: (1) language plays an important role in learning and teaching; (2) they are located in the scope of ELT; (3) disciplinary knowledge education falls in the research scope of these four approaches since "in reality…content and language are inextricably entwined" (Airey, 2016, p. 73); (4) these four approaches more or less got governmental support before or after their emergences, and push ELT toward the new stages.

To illustrate the orientation of disciplinary English, it is beneficial to add it to the model of approaches to language and content teaching and learning developed by Galloway and Rose (2021) (see Fig. 1). In the revised model, disciplinary English is positioned between CLIL and EMI owing to its theoretical consideration and its practical implication: (1) both language and disciplinary content are considered as the teaching and learning objectives; (2) language knowledge is systematically taught in junior years while disciplinary knowledge is taught in senior years at most universities in China, for example, at Xi'an International Studies University (Sun, 2016). The revised model visually displays the difference of disciplinary English from ESP, CLIL and EMI.
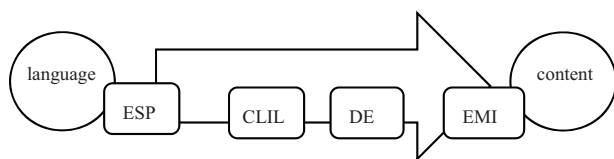
Fig. 1 The revised model of approaches to language and content teaching and learning in English education.

Disciplinary knowledge is not fixed, but dynamic. Thus, disciplinary English is a dynamic concept which requires to be adjusted according to knowledge-structures and knower-structures in knowledge construction (Maton, 2014). Take Economics for example. Recently, the new branches have been developed within this discipline to meet the demand of cultivating the specialized practitioners for the indigenous socioeconomic development, such as Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, and Behavioral Economics and so on. The dynamic of disciplinary boundary expands the studies on disciplinary English, which provides disciplinary English with the energetic and promising future from the phylogenetic perspective. For example, Behavioral Economics and English can be integrated to Behavioral Economics English as a branch of disciplinary English. As English and Behavioral Economics are categorized as horizontal discourses with strong grammar "based on explicit, formally articulated concepts, relations and procedures" (Bernstein, 1996, p. 174), epistemic relations are strong and social relations are strong in specialization code (Maton, 2014). Thus, the teaching materials can be edited according to horizontal knowledge-structure. The students' attributes are supposed to be taken into account in the interdisciplinary teaching activities. Apart from the merits, disciplinary English is faced with the potential challenges, for example, the risk of creating a new form of localized hegemony, which may diverge from its original goal. Since disciplinary English aims to cultivate the interdisciplinary elites for globalization and regionalization, it is necessary to coordinate Chinese and western cultures, and develop the multi-cultural awareness (Hu and Zhang, 2022). Gao and Xu (2015) also pointed out that the flux of globalized context and the prevailing of deconstruction put the indigenization of English in China at risk. The challenges push the studies on disciplinary English forward in the future.

Disciplinary English from systemic-functional perspective

Systemic-Functional Linguistics adopts a sociosemiotic perspective on English system that dovetails the implication of disciplinary English. From January 2018 to February 2025, 160 academic works have been published to explore disciplinary English from Systemic-Functional perspective by searching {[disciplinary English] OR [English education]} AND [systemic-functional] on China National Knowledge Internet 2.0 (CNKI 2.0). For instance, Shi (2020) made comparison among different disciplinary English in light of logical metaphor in Systemic-Functional Linguistics. The finding shows that "the transfiguration between the congruent and metaphorical modes of the logico-semantic relations provides an effective way of knowledge-building" (Shi, 2020, p. 87). Gao and Zhou (2022) explored the differences of semantic density and syntactic complexity in the abstracts of English academic articles written by Chinese undergraduates, postgraduates, scholars and native-English speakers in terms of technicality and nominalization in Systemic-Functional Linguistics. The result indicates that semantic density and syntactic complexity are two important factors of "assessing writers' capacity of knowledge coding" (Gao and Zhou, 2022, p. 67). The studies show that Systemic-Functional Linguistics can provide a theoretical foundation for the development of disciplinary English.

Disciplinary knowledge. As far as disciplinary knowledge is concerned, there are different knowledge structures in different disciplines (Bernstein, 1996). Genre is a key factor of exploring knowledge structures. Genre theory developed by Sydney School of Systemic-Functional Linguistics has been applied to reading and writing literacy in the primary and secondary schools (Martin and Rose, 2008), and to biological and linguistic education in tertiary education (Dreyfus et al. 2016), etc. Thus, genre theory can be used to analyze different disciplinary discourses "across academic curricula" (Rose, 2007, p. 1) to reveal how the academic discourses are organized in terms of stages and phases, which facilitates the Chinese learners majored at English to acquire how knowledge constructs in disciplinary English discourses (Peng, 2019).

Linguistic knowledge. As regards linguistic knowledge, Halliday (1993) criticized the viewpoint of taking scientific language or language of science as an expressive instrument on the ground that it "distorts the relationship between language and other phenomena" (1993, p. 4–5). He argued that linguistic knowledge contributed to actively constructing theories at the abstract and technical levels, especially by means of grammatical metaphor. Grammatical metaphor construes the experience of the world by reconstruing the meanings via "additional layers of meaning and wording" (Halliday, 2014, p. 699), which makes "modern science possible" (Halliday, 2014, p. 718). When English is used to produce disciplinary discourses, many metaphorical expressions and technical terms can be used to construct disciplinary knowledge through "multiple codings in the grammar" (Matthiessen, 1995, p. 31). Peng (2019) analyzed a metaphorical example of medical English *Median prostate-specific antigen nadir level in the eight patients with biopsy-proven local recurrence after initial low-dose rate brachytherapy was* 0.75 ng/ml to illustrate how grammatical metaphor works. He argued that *recurrence* was the nominalized marker which embodied the meaning of the action *recur*. Nominalization establishes "technical taxonomies of processes in specialized fields" (Martin, 1992, p. 328), i.e. medicine field in this example. The knowledge of grammatical metaphor can facilitate us to understand how English constructs knowledge in discourses in the aspects of semantic density and semantic gravity.

Contextual influence. A local context is an indispensable factor of analyzing knowledge construction in disciplinary English. Context is defined as a stratum above discourse-semantics in Systemic-Functional Linguistics. It subsumes context of situation and context of culture both of which constitute "non-verbal environment of a text" (Halliday, 1985, p. 47), and impact the interpretation of disciplinary discourses in English. Context of situation can be construed by field, tenor and mode to indicate "the semiotic environment of text" (Halliday, 1975, p. 126). It is affected by social factors, for example, the indigenous economic and political conditions. Context of culture provides "the institutional and ideological background that give value to the text and constrain its interpretation" (Halliday, 1985, p. 49). It offers the ideological values to the recontextualizing and reproducing processes of knowledge. The concept *context* has been applied to discourse analysis as well as the analysis of learning and teaching activities. For example, Martin (2013) applied *field* as an entry to the historical and biological discourse analysis in secondary school classroom. According to *The Teaching Guide for College Students* released by Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China Foreign Language Teaching Guidance

Committee in 2020, Chinese culture is the root of editing college English teaching materials, for instance, contemporary Chinese stories (Xiao, 2024), so as to cultivate college students to tell well China's stories in international communications. The foreground of the indigenous context in disciplinary English implies the resistance against western ideology.

Recently, Sydney School has done some researches on subject-based knowledge-building in terms of power trio (power words, power grammar and power composition) drawn upon the relevant theories in Systemic-Functional Linguistics (Martin, 2020; Macnaught, Doran and Matruglio, 2023). The researchers have attempted to explore the cumulative knowledge-building mechanism in terms of generic relations of different disciplines in secondary school from discourse semantic perspective. Though they focused on native language literacy in Australia, they offer some insights to disciplinary English reform and practices in China which have drawn the scholars' and educators' attention in China. For example, Prof. Gao at Peking University has been doing research on disciplinary English from the perspective of grammatical metaphor in Systemic-Functional Linguistics supported by Beijing Social Science Foundation since 2020 (Gao and Zhou, 2022). Her research is oriented to disciplinary knowledge construction in English in tertiary education in response to New Liberal Arts in China. Gao and Zhou (2022) illustrated that syntactic complexity indicated power of grammar and that semantic density manifested the degree of knowledge compression, which unraveled knowledge encoding. Their findings showed that different disciplinary English embodies different knowledge-structures. The application of genre theory to disciplinary English teaching is an attempt of improving genre education in English education in China (Gao, 2022).

The above discussions illustrate that Systemic-Functional Linguistics is one of the theoretical choices of exploring disciplinary English in terms of disciplinary knowledge, English system and the local context. But there are some limitations, for example, how to balance English and disciplinary knowledge in pedagogical practices, and how to balance Chinese and western cultures. As English educational reform under the heading of New Liberal Arts is at the initial stage, the educators, the teachers and the scholars have attempted to use other theories to conduct disciplinary English reform and practices, for example, Activity Theory (Chen and Lü, 2024; Zhang and Xiong, 2023), Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (Wang, 2022) and Educational Ecology Theory (Lu, 2024), which contributed to achieving the goals of cultivating the interdisciplinary elites for the socioeconomic development in China. The diverse researches enrich the existing theories, and promote the developments of the theories within and across different schools.

Disciplinary English in new liberal arts in China
Diverse studies on interdisciplinary reform of English education in China. The educators and researchers had done the tentative studies on disciplinary English before the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China officially proposed New Liberal Arts in 2018. By searching {[English educational reform] and [specific research method]} on CNKI 2.0, the results show that 93 academic works on disciplinary English have been published by quantitative method, 79 via qualitative method and 173 by case study from January 2001 to March 2025 in China. The data show that case study is the prevailing method in the studies on interdisciplinary reform of English education in China, either on a specific branch of English major or at a specific university. The studies via case study provide the practical and detailed pedagogical implications for English educational reform at other universities in China. (1) Some encapsulated the modes

of disciplinary English reforms based on the pedagogical practices at the universities in China, for instance, music English at Sichuan Conservatory of Music (Zhu, 2022), military English (Wang and Fu, 2022), and maritime English at Dalian Maritime University (Meng et al., 2022). (2) Some showed the results or the achievements of disciplinary English reforms at the universities in China, such as Area Studies within English major at Shanghai International Studies University (Hu and Wang, 2021), Technical Communication which integrates English and information management at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (Zhang, 2020), and interdisciplinary reform of Foreign Languages and Literature at Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Chang, 2021; Hu and Wang, 2017). (3) Others explored some specific issues of disciplinary English practices, such as Chinese cultural awareness of the students in English learning (Zheng, 2024) and the teachers' knowledge construction at the universities in China (Jiang, 2019). They dovetail the objectives of disciplinary English reform: to develop the students' English proficiency, to expand their knowledge, and to accumulate knowledge in the indigenous context.

Interdisciplinary practices of English educational reform. To illustrate how disciplinary English works in practices at the universities in China, three case studies are analyzed in terms of educational philosophy, interdisciplinarity, indigenous factors, challenges, researchers' identities, students' perspective and broad implications (see Table 2).

(1) Meng, Luo and Zeng (2022) introduced the educational reform of Maritime English under the guide of New Liberal Arts at School of Foreign Languages, Dalian Maritime University. The reform started from November 2021, and aims to cultivate the "high-level interdisciplinary foreign language talents" (Meng et al., 2022, p. 12). They pointed out that curriculum system construction was driven by knowledge system construction in maritime English reform at the university. Apart from the traditional courses such as English literacy, English linguistics, translation theory and British and American literature, the disciplinary knowledge of maritime affairs, including maritime aviation, maritime law, foreign trade transportation insurance and maritime literature, is incorporated into the curriculum system. The indigenous factors are also highlighted by introducing the new course *Overview of Chinese Culture*, inviting the excellent interpreters to participate in the teaching program, editing the indigenized teaching materials, and cooperating with the Chinese port and shipping enterprises. The pedagogical practice aims to encourage the undergraduates to tell the China's story or the maritime story in English (Meng et al. 2022, p. 8). Meng et al. (2022) mentioned that many undergraduates had won the prizes in the national interpretation competition and that some graduates had pursued their M.A. degree in English major in the past five years. The achievements imply that the educational reform of maritime English at Dalian Maritime University works well and that some students were greatly motivated to learn maritime English well. The researchers who are the teachers at School of Foreign Languages, Dalian Maritime University also pointed out that the educational reform of Maritime English was faced with the challenges at Dalian Maritime University: how to effectively cooperate with other schools of the university, other universities and the enterprises; how to transform the national standard into the professional standard. The study provides a lens for English educational reform at other maritime universities in China.

Table 2 The summary of three case studies on disciplinary English at universities in China.

practice

aspect	educational reform of Maritime English	English education reform of cultivating top-notch talents	interdisciplinary reform within English major
educational philosophy	curriculum system construction is driven by knowledge system construction	need analysis theory and language acquisition management theory	English major is inter-disciplinary in nature
interdisciplinarity	English + maritime affairs	English + other disciplines (such as accounting, education, law, etc.)	vertical exploration of interdisciplinarity within English major
indigenous factors	courses related to Chinese culture; cooperation with local enterprises	courses related to Chinese philosophy, East-Asian international relations, etc.	courses related to Chinese philosophy; cooperation with local and national enterprises
challenges	further cooperation with other schools, other universities and enterprises; the transformation from national standard to professional standard	insufficient diversity of talent selection mechanism; curriculum integration insufficiency; insufficient implementation of tutor system	demand of redesigning postgraduate curricula; inquiry of solving coherence among the courses; lack of instructing the students' reading processes, etc.
researchers' identities	teachers at School of Foreign Languages, Dalian Maritime University	postgraduate at Institute of Linguistics, Shanghai International Studies University	teacher at School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Jiao Tong University
students' perspective	Some students were greatly motivated to study maritime English.	Students were satisfied at curriculum and transferring in and out, but not at tutor system and current selection mechanism.	More students became interested in English major at the university during the enrollment process; more students preferred to switch to English major.
broad implication	insight for English educational reform at other maritime universities	insight for the cultivation mode of top-notch foreign language talents at other universities	insight for the interdisciplinary practices within English major

(2) Jiang (2022) did research on the pedagogical program of cultivating the top-notch innovative talents who were majored at English at Honor College of a university in Shanghai, China. The educational program started in 2016, and aims to cultivate the top-notch interdisciplinary elites for the socioeconomic development in China. The Honor College takes the diversified cultivation modes based on "need analysis theory and language acquisition management theory" (Jiang, 2022, p. III) as the fundamental principle in the English educational reform. Besides linguistic knowledge of enhancing the students' English proficiency, the students were instructed to acquire other knowledge in classroom, for instance, accounting, global communication, education, law, anthropology, politics, foreign affairs, etc. The history of Chinese civilization, Chinese philosophy and thoughts, East-Asian international relations, and urbanization and development in Asia, were also taught as the obligatory courses to elevate the students' capacity of telling the China's story (Jiang, 2022). The results show that the students at Honor College were satisfied at the curriculum and the freedom of transferring in and out Honor College, but concerned about the tutor system and the current selection mechanism. Jiang who was a postgraduate at Institute of Linguistics, Shang International Studies University interviewed the teachers and the students at Honor College, and drew a conclusion that the pedagogical reform was faced with some challenges, i.e., "insufficient diversity of talent selection mechanism, curriculum integration insufficiency, huge impact of the epidemic on international courses, and insufficient implementation of the tutor system" (2022, p. III). The study offers the insight for the cultivation mode of the top-notch foreign language talents at other universities in China.

(3) Chang (2021) introduced English educational reform at School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Jiao Tong University. He specified that the interdisciplinary practice of English education at Shanghai Jiao Tong University started

from 1997 as it turned to the direction of financial business. While the courses of financial business were taught by the teachers at Antai College of Economics-Management, the curriculum at School of Foreign Languages was not equal with that at Antai College of Economics-Management (Chang, 2021). The graduates majored at Business English were not as competitive as those majored at Business according to the data of employment owing to their inadequate knowledge of business (Chang, 2021). The embarrassing situation forced the university to cancel Business English, and to turn back to the vertical exploration in English major (Chang, 2021). But it does not mean that the interdisciplinary reform ends at the university. As English major is interdisciplinary in nature (Chang, 2021), English educational reform at Shanghai Jiao Tong University has been moving towards interdisciplinarity within English major, for instance, speech-language pathology, foreign languages education, and AI translation since 2017. Though the courses such as linguistic pathology, neurolinguistics and computational linguistics fall within the scope of English major, they are interdisciplinary in nature. For example, neurolinguistics is an interdisciplinary product of combining "neurological/neurophysiological theory with linguistic theory" (Ahlsén, 2006, p. 3). The indigenous factors are incorporated into the pedagogical practices by means of teaching the courses related to Chinese philosophy and cooperating with HUAWEI, iFLYTEK, DATA GRAND, Shanghai Mental Health Center, Shanghai Sunshine Rehabilitation Center, etc. (Chang, 2021, p. 94). The great reputation of Shanghai Jiao Tong University attracts more social resources in the local context in China to support the indigenization of English education. After the new English educational reform was implemented in 2017, more students have shown a great interest in English major at School of Foreign Languages of Shanghai Jiao Tong University during the enrollment process (Chang, 2021). More students preferred

to switch to English major at the first year of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Chang, 2021). He also mentioned that all the linguistic graduates who were enrolled in 2017 had chosen to pursue M.A. degree in Linguistics, more than half of whom were specialized at Speech-Language Pathology or Computational Linguistics. Chang who is the teacher at School of Foreign Languages of Shanghai Jiao Tong University also pointed out that the educational reform at the university was faced with the challenges, for instance, the demand of redesigning Master's and Doctoral curricula, the inquiry of solving coherence among the courses, the lack of instructing the students' reading processes, etc. The study provides a lens for the interdisciplinary practices of English educational reform within English major at other universities in China.

Implicit resistance against English's hegemony in these pedagogical practices. While it was not explicitly claimed, the resistance against English's hegemony was implied in these pedagogical practices. Firstly, these pedagogical practices underscore the indigenous Chinese factors in the curriculum and the teaching material. For example, Chinese culture was taught as the compulsory course at these universities (Chang, 2021; Jiang, 2022; Meng et al., 2022). The teaching materials were edited by the native-Chinese teachers and rooted in the socioeconomic development of China (Chang, 2021; Meng et al., 2022). The undergraduates were immersed in the pedagogical activities featuring the Chinese ideological orientation, for example, the patriotic education (Jiang, 2022). The patriotic education is the fundamental element in moral education at the universities in China (Lü, 2022). Secondly, the dominant status of English weakens: the academic years of teaching and learning English were cut down (Chang, 2021); English literacy was cultivated in the lower grades of a university (Meng et al. 2022). Finally, the practical activities were organized to establish the close relations between English education at the universities and the local and national socioeconomic organizations, for example, organizing the students to visit the local Chinese enterprises (Chang, 2021; Jiang, 2022; Meng et al., 2022), which prepare the potential employees for these enterprises. These measures can be taken as the implicit resistance against English's hegemony and capitalistic values in English education at the universities in contemporary China.

As disciplinary English is a new pedagogical approach, it will take decades to test whether it satisfies the demand of cultivating the high-quality interdisciplinary talents for the socioeconomic development in China. It will be adjusted or innovated in terms of "curriculum system, core knowledge system and teaching management system" (Meng et al. 2022, p. 12) in the pedagogical practices in order to keep pace with the socioeconomic development in the national and international contexts.

Conclusion
While "globalization processes are strengthening English" (Phillipson, 2003, p. 66), the fight against Englishization continues. English educational reform in non-English speaking countries plays an important role of adjusting the status of English in their educational systems, for instance, reducing the credits of cultivating English literacy according to English educational practice at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China (Chang, 2021). Disciplinary English focuses on the integration of disciplinary and linguistic knowledge in the indigenous context in the teaching and learning activities. It breaks the boundary of knowledge structures between English and other disciplines, and promotes their convergence. Disciplinary English distinguishes

from other pedagogical approaches such as ESP, CLIL and EMI in light of the closeness to language and disciplinary content. As illustrated in Section 4.2, it is located between CLIL and EMI. However, it is still a tough issue to balance language and disciplinary knowledge in the pedagogical practices. Thus, it may overlap with ESP, CLIL and EMI in some cases. The pedagogical practices show that interdisciplinarity and indigenization were heavily loaded in English educational reforms at the universities in China, for example, integrating maritime affairs into English major at School of Foreign Languages, Dalian Maritime University (Meng et al., 2022) and adding two English courses *Understanding Contemporary China* and *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* into curricula (Li, 2024; Sun and Shi, 2023). The practices dovetail the requirement of cultivating interdisciplinary elites for the socioeconomic development according to *Education Powerhouse Construction Plan Outline (2024–2025)* released by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council of the People's Republic of China on January 19th, 2025. The spread of Chinese culture, to a certain extent, weakens the ideological invasion of the western culture, which weakens the impact of Englishization.

The above discussion depicts a more comprehensive picture of disciplinary English as a new pedagogical approach in China. It offers the theoretical foundation for the further exploration of disciplinary English. Though disciplinary English reform and practices are faced with the challenges, for instance, how to intersect disciplinary and English knowledge in the pedagogical practices (Jiang, 2022) and how to make different disciplinary courses coherent (Chang, 2021), many universities have been attempting to improve curriculum systems and innovate talent-cultivation modes in line with the local and national socioeconomic conditions.

The discussion offers the insight for the studies on curriculum designs in other educational reforms under the headings of New Engineering, New Medicine and New Agricultural Science at the universities in China, in which interdisciplinarity and indigenization are required to be incorporated into the recontextualizing and reproducing processes of knowledge. As disciplinary English has just started in China, it is beneficial to explore the long-term outcomes with the employment records and the graduates' feedbacks about their professional development for the further studies.

Data availability
No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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Additional information