

# Research on Construction of New Liberal Arts\*

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**Abstract**—In the modern society with the rapid development of information technology, facing the booming development of emerging science and engineering majors, traditional liberal arts are confronted with the problems of "single education" and "knowledge education" and the utilitarianism and engineering trend of education have also been criticized by universities. As a comprehensive discipline that inherits the spirit of the Chinese nation, strengthens the cohesion of the people and enhances the soft power of national culture, traditional liberal arts should follow the new requirements of the new era, take scientific theory as the guidance, and promote the construction of new liberal arts with the help of the reform of higher education system, so as to realize the cross-border, problem-solving, innovative and general development.

**Keywords**—new liberal arts; connotation; move; concept

## I. INTRODUCTION

"Education is an important cornerstone of national rejuvenation and social progress, and a moral and political project that makes great achievements and benefits in the contemporary era. It is of decisive significance to improving the comprehensive quality of the people, promoting the all-round development of the people, enhancing the innovative and creative vitality of the Chinese nation and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."<sup>1</sup> As an integral and comprehensive discipline in the education system, the humanities and social sciences play an important role in educating people with moral integrity, improving the national quality, training builders and successors of the socialist construction and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Over the 41 years since the Reform and Opening up, as China has achieved rapid economic growth and major technological breakthroughs in many important scientific and technological fields, with the increasing national strength, the development of science and technology has become a "hot spot" in the society, and various emerging science and engineering majors have become the "favorites" of major universities. Although the humanities and social

sciences still occupy a place in the setting of university disciplines, their social status and professional influence are declining quietly, and the problem of incompatibility with the new requirements of the new era has emerged. Facing such a severe situation, the humanities and social sciences should adapt to the development background of the new era and meet the needs of modern society to carry out internal reform, so as to build a new development model in which the liberal arts and sciences that are integrated across boundaries and go hand in hand.

## II. THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW LIBERAL ARTS AND ITS SCIENTIFIC CONNOTATION

At present, the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the country have entered a critical period of the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the new historical orientation has put forward new requirements for higher education. The report to the 19th national congress of the CPC calls for accelerating the construction of first-class universities and disciplines and realizing the intensive development of higher education.

In a symposium on philosophy and social sciences on May 17, 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, "The development level of a country depends not only on the development level of natural sciences, but also on that of philosophy and social sciences. A country without a developed natural science cannot be in the forefront of the world, nor can one without a flourishing philosophical and social science be in the forefront of the world." In order to adapt to the new era of development of philosophy and social science put forward new requirements, the construction of new liberal arts needs to accelerate the overlapping fusion of humanities and social science with the new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation and cultivate an advanced culture with Chinese characteristics, color and style in the new era. In doing so, it can form a school of thought in the humanities and social sciences with Chinese characteristics, inherit excellent thoughts and cultural strength, cultivate high-quality personnel with critical spirit, creativity and pioneering thinking, and realize the sustainable development of personnel training and university running.

The new liberal arts embody the general characteristics of the humanities and social sciences, and at the same time it takes on some new features.

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<sup>1</sup> General Secretary Xi Jinping's important speech at the national education conference inspired educators — to accelerate the modernization of education and build a strong country in education [N]. People's Daily, 2018-09-17.

### A. Inheritance and Nationality

The inheritance and nationality of the new liberal arts are not confined to its own national culture, but based on the past and the present, running through China and abroad. The construction of new liberal arts should grasp the resources of three aspects: the first is the resource of Marxist, including the sinicization of Marxism basic principle and formation of the civilized achievement, such as Mao Zedong thought, the ideological system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the rules of party building, China's political, economic, cultural, ecological areas such as development idea, etc.; the second is the excellent traditional Chinese culture, such as the Confucianism, moral and ethical system, patriotism, etc.; the third is foreign philosophy and social sciences, including excellent achievements made by the world's humanities and social sciences.

### B. Originality and Modernity

The "new" in the new liberal arts refers not only to new space-time concept, it also focus on the innovation and originality in contents and the advancement with the times in terms of theoretical system. It is necessary to adhere to the "problem orientation", seek new materials, find new problems, put forward new ideas and construct new theories in the practice of reform and development; promote innovation of theoretical thinking through practice, and build a discipline system, academic system and discourse system with Chinese characteristics under the socialist environment with Chinese characteristics.

### C. Systematicness and Professionalism

The humanities and social sciences are a complex discipline system, including political science, economics, sociology, management, history and other fields of discipline content. At present, although the system of humanities and social sciences has been established in China, there are still some problems, such as disconnection between the setting of some disciplines and social needs, lack of sustaining power in the development of liberal arts, and weak construction of emerging disciplines. The construction of new liberal arts should "highlight its advantages, expand its fields, complement its weaknesses and improve its system". Based on the construction of Marxist disciplines, efforts should be made to comprehensively develop related disciplines, such as ethnology, journalism, demography and religion. The emphasis should be put on dominant key disciplines, the development of new and interdisciplinary subjects should be accelerated and unpopular subjects with important cultural value and inheritance significance as well as "unique knowledge" should be given due consideration to.

## III. VALUE AND CONCEPTS THAT THE NEW LIBERAL ARTS CONSTRUCTION SHOULD UPHOLD

The new liberal arts are the transformation, upgrading and optimization of traditional liberal arts. Centering on the historical background of reform and opening up and socialist modernization construction, the new liberal arts are committed to "cultivating people required by social

development, knowledge accumulation, cultural inheritance, national survival and system operation".<sup>2</sup>

### A. Disadvantages of Traditional Liberal Arts

Facing a new round of scientific and technological revolution, industrial supply-side reform, and the wide use of "artificial intelligence", "block chain", "genetic engineering", "virtual technology" and other emerging technologies, the "one-fold education" mode, "knowledge education", "fence education" of traditional liberal art and the "engineering" discipline construction have led to the homogeneity of major setup, formalization of formalization, and engineering and utilitarianism of education construction in liberal arts. This has led to the imbalance in the development of higher education and the "sub-health" of talents in colleges and universities, which seriously threatens the construction and development of national education.

1) *The mode of "onefold education"*: Traditional liberal arts tend to confine itself in the word "liberal arts" in discipline construction and major setting, thus it adopts single and elite education and pays one-sided attention to the extensive research and in-depth mining of the professional knowledge system of teachers and students, ignoring the popularization and integration of knowledge in other disciplines (such as informatics, engineering, biology, etc.). Therefore, a large number of "partial talents" and "geeks" are cultivated, which leads to the formation of barriers between liberal arts and other disciplines, which are difficult to compensate for. After the theoretical breakthrough, such talents often lack the development momentum due to the single knowledge system and the lack of depth and breadth of their knowledge. Lack of sufficient understanding and application of modern information technology (such as big data, cloud computing, cloud storage, etc.) leads to the problem of discipline research remaining in the traditional field and discipline research methods remaining in the traditional "small data" methods such as sampling and individual interview. This has caused the old and backward research subjects, high cost and low efficiency of liberal arts, resulting in the declining development of liberal arts majors.

2) *The concept of "knowledge education"*: Traditional Chinese liberal arts education emphasizes the focus on "knowledge", and judges individual academic achievements based on the depth and breadth of knowledge. Therefore, high achievers often appear as storekeepers of knowledge. However, this kind of knowledge-based education is based on the agricultural economy. In the era of inconvenient transportation and closed information, the possession of knowledge becomes an important indicator to measure the level of personal knowledge. However, in the modern society, especially in the information society, the launch of a large number of emerging scientific and technological

<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping's speech at the symposium of teachers and students of Peking University [N]. People's Daily, 2018-05-03.

products makes encyclopaedic intellectuals become "a thing of the past", innovative, application-oriented and interdisciplinary talents become demanded by the times, and the knowledge training concept of traditional liberal arts needs to be updated urgently. At the same time, the traditional Chinese liberal arts education mode is "preaching, teaching and solving doubts", in which teachers become the dominant and exporter of the teaching process, while students are passive receivers. Under the mode of "overvaluing teaching" and "undervaluing learning", the output and reception of knowledge become one-way transfer. Students cultivated by "textbook" teaching are not responsive enough to major theoretical and practical problems, resulting in their limited vision, innovative consciousness and practical ability, and they gradually become learning machines that are unable to effectively adapt to the rapid development and ever-changing modern society after graduation. In this way, the advantages of liberal arts majors cannot be highlighted.

3) *The mode of "fence education"*: Compared with the obvious academic achievements of science and engineering and the characteristics that can directly bring social benefits and increase social welfare, the social utility of liberal arts is more implicit and difficult to generate economic benefits and make industrial transformation. Since the utility of non-materialization of liberal arts cannot be quantified or fully displayed through data, it is often neglected in the construction of major majors in universities, and there are few or almost no practice platforms, teaching and research offices and experimental bases for liberal arts in universities. Teachers of liberal arts can only complete their teaching tasks in large classes, and students can only complete their academic tasks through classroom absorption and extracurricular literature reading. With the whole subject teaching process being completed in closed form in universities, and the theoretical teaching and practical testing are completely separated.

4) *"Engineering" discipline construction*: Under the background of fierce competition in the education market, colleges and universities are chasing all kinds of national education projects and special education programs. According to Yang Kerui and Cao Hui, "these seemingly highly rational engineering projects actually lead higher education towards utilitarianism intentionally or unintentionally."<sup>3</sup> In order to build the brand of the school, all kinds of national talents have become the object of competition among the universities; in order to increase the enrollment scale of colleges and universities, all kinds of popular majors and scarce majors are in the major list of colleges and universities; in order to ensure the competitiveness of colleges and universities, the academic celebrities in colleges and universities have become the

focus of attention, while the young scholars with less qualifications are generally faced with the problems of heavy teaching tasks and low overall treatment. Higher education is no longer a pure institution of talent cultivation. With utilitarianism and egoism corroding the construction of higher education, and national talent cultivation is in jeopardy.

### B. The Concept of New Liberal Arts Construction

Against the background of the global new scientific and technological revolution, new economic development and the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the new liberal arts will reform and optimize the traditional liberal arts construction system, providing students with interdisciplinary, pioneering, practical and basic education platform.

1) *The idea of integrated education*: Integrated education requires breaking the traditional knowledge and professional barriers of liberal arts. In the construction process of new liberal arts, the crossover, integration, penetration or expansion of humanities and social sciences and other emerging disciplines such as science and engineering are required to be promoted, and break through the traditional thinking mode of liberal arts. This is to break through the traditional thinking mode of liberal arts, from subject-orientation to demand-orientation, from professional division to intercommunication and integration, and promote the formation of a certain tension between disciplines and majors. For instance, management, ecology, system science and other disciplines should be integrated to focus on environment, ecology, climate and other major issues, so as to solve the problem of national survival; linguistics, sociology, engineering and other disciplines should be taken into consideration with a holistic view to explore the construction of cross-border projects, and study "the Belt and Road Initiative" and other major national arrangements.

2) *The concept of innovative education*: "Against the background of the fourth industrial revolution, 'artificial intelligence', 'mobile Internet', 'block chain technology', 'big data technology' and other technologies will promote the reform of social structure, and the technical means, educational objectives and characteristics of students will all change."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the construction of new liberal arts should focus on both content innovation and form innovation. In terms of teaching content, it is necessary to integrate the past with the present, learn widely from others' strong points, and embracing things even if they are different so as to make innovation on the basis of broadening the dimension and breadth of knowledge; in terms of teaching form, the concepts of "overvaluing

<sup>3</sup> Yang Kerui, Cao Hui. Undergraduate Foremost: The Endogenous Mechanism of Major Brand Construction of Higher Education [J]. Chongqing Higher Education Research, 2019, 7 (2).

<sup>4</sup> Hu Xiaoyong, Zhang Huayang, Liu Yi, Zhu Yan, Zhang Yan. From "Innovation for Education" to "Education for Innovation": A Review of GCCCE2018 and Li Kedong Symposium on Academic Thoughts [J]. Research on audio-visual education, 2008, 39(08): 114-121.

teaching and undervaluing learning" and "textbook teaching" should be transformed into problem-oriented and intelligent teaching, so as to realize theoretical innovation, mechanism innovation and mode innovation in the field of humanities and social sciences, and realize the transformation, reformation and upgrading of traditional liberal arts with the help of new discipline growth points. For example, efforts should be made to promote innovations such as "artificial intelligence law," "industry-university-research development of liberal arts," and "blockchain-based social governance.

3) *The concept of practical education*: Marxism holds that practice is the source of knowledge, the fundamental driving force for the generation and development of knowledge, and the only criterion for testing whether knowledge is correct or not. The education of new liberal arts should be combined with practice, so that students can understand and improve rational understanding in perceptual knowledge and integrate theories in practical operation. At the service of the comprehensive deepening of socialist reform in China, students should be required to think and solve the important theoretical and practical problems related to people's ideas and value choices, so that the adaptability and applicability of the new liberal arts can be improved. The social investment enthusiasm of liberal arts is far lower than that of science and engineering, because they are not easy to produce economic benefits and industrial transformation, and cannot be directly linked with the national economic development. In addition, the utility of non-materialization of liberal arts cannot be quantified, nor can it be fully manifested through data. Therefore, practical education needs to make use of the power of universities, governments and all kinds of social subjects, integrate various resources such as government policies, university teachers and social funds, and form an operating mechanism that is guided by the government, led by universities and extensively participated by all kinds of social subjects.

4) *The concept of "Undergraduate Foremost"*: According to Liu Zhentian, "undergraduate foremost" contains three levels of meaning. The first is "insisting on the most basic position of undergraduate education". Second, since scientific research and technology, public service and industrial incubation can bring direct economic benefits to universities, enterprises and society, the trend of attaching more importance to scientific research and less to teaching, and more to postgraduate education and less to undergraduate education, as well as the teaching ethos of "academic qualification only", "awards only" and "professional title only", has seriously affected the realization of the goal of cultivating educational talents. Therefore, higher education should adhere to the concept of "talent training is the core and undergraduate education is the center". The third is adhering to "the basic characteristics of undergraduate education, namely the

general, basic, academic and humanistic nature of undergraduate education."<sup>5</sup>

Chen Baosheng, the Minister of Education, said: "undergraduate education should adhere to the principle of 'undergraduate foremost, four aspects of returning-to'".

a) *Returning to common sense*: Education should focus on students' hard work and guide them to pursue true knowledge and skills.

b) *Returning to duty*: It is necessary to guide teachers to love teaching, love teaching, put heart to teaching and research teaching, improve the level of teacher education and teaching and pay attention to the construction of teacher ethics.

c) *Returning to original aspiration*: The correct political direction should be adhered to, to strengthen "curriculum ideological and political education and professional ideological and political education" and devote to training socialist builders and successors.

d) *Returning to dreams*: Efforts should be made to promote innovation in the concept, organization, management and system of running schools, and strive to realize the dream of making education serve the country and make education stronger."<sup>6</sup>

#### IV. CONCRETE MEASURES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW LIBERAL ARTS IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Based on the development of traditional liberal arts and the new requirements for the construction of liberal arts under the new era, this paper puts forward some suggestions on the construction of new liberal arts from the aspects of educational concept, subject structure, teaching mode, and the construction of production, study and research.

##### A. Concept Reconstruction

First, it is needed to continue to use the Marxist world outlook and methodology to guide educational practice and theoretical innovation, and Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era to guide major theoretical innovation and research on major practical issues. Marxism correctly reveals the essence, internal relations and development rules of things, and is an important tool for people to understand and remold the world. Marxism adheres to the combination of theory and practice and the dialectical viewpoint of materialism, which is the unity of revolutionary and scientific nature and has the theoretical quality of keeping pace with the times. Marxism has led China through the arduous journey of revolution, construction and reform, and has guided China to stand up, become strong and become rich. "Adhering to the guidance of Marxism is the fundamental mark that distinguishes contemporary Chinese philosophical and social sciences from other philosophical

<sup>5</sup> Liu Zhentian. The triple meaning of "undergraduate foremost" [J]. Journal of Soochow University (Educational Science Edition), 2008, 6(4).

<sup>6</sup> Adhering to the principle of "undergraduate foremost and advancing the four 'returning-to'" [J]. China University Teaching, 2008, 0(6).



and social sciences, which must be upheld with a clear banner."

Second, it's needed to stick to the principle of "undergraduate foremost" and strengthen undergraduate education. First, it is necessary to strictly control the entrance of enrollment to ensure the quality of student recruitment. Schools should make rational use of colleges and universities' right to recruit students independently, recruit talented people with real talent and outstanding abilities through multiple channels and forms, and build platforms for recruiting students at multiple levels and in a wide range of fields. Second, it is necessary to return to the essence of education and optimize higher education. The spirit of seeking truth and reality and diligently learning should be carried forward to improve teachers' moral quality and optimize teaching quality. Schools should keep establishing "golden courses" and eliminating "overstated courses" by setting up challenging demonstration course and build a comprehensive application course group that breaks through the gap between theoretical study and practice. At the same time, ideological and political construction should be throughout the teaching to train ambitious youths with national awareness. The problem-oriented concept should be adhered to, so as to guide students to use theory to think and solve social practical problems, and make comprehensive test of their ability to apply knowledge.

Third, it is necessary to adhere to the reform of "streamlining administration, delegating powers, strengthening regulation and improving services" in educational field to further deepen the reform of the educational management system. In the construction of new liberal arts, it is needed to give full play to the autonomy of colleges and universities in running schools, encourage them to carry out reform of personnel training models and school running systems so as to exert the initiative of colleges and universities in running schools, and release the vitality of the development of higher education. At the same time, a platform for exchanges among regional colleges and universities should be built to promote exchanges and sharing in the fields of interdisciplinary development, education reform and talent training, and realize the coordinated development of regional liberal arts education.

### *B. Structural Renovation*

It is necessary to promote the structural adjustment of university majors, make an incremental plan for liberal arts in accordance with market demand, and build new liberal arts majors. In accordance with the rules of discipline development, human cognition development and social development, the establishment of frontier disciplines that are in short supply should be explored, and unpopular disciplines should be reformed and upgraded. The first is to breaking down the barriers of liberal arts, science and engineering. Emerging disciplines, frontier disciplines, and interdisciplinary disciplines should be incorporated into the system of humanities and social sciences with Chinese characteristics, so as to build an all-dimensional, multi-tiered, and wide-ranging new liberal arts construction system. The second is to do a good job of discipline integration. It is

needed reorganize disciplines with high knowledge-related degree, such as management, political science, organizational behavior, etc., to break the overlapping status of knowledge systems among humanities and social disciplines and build a systematic knowledge framework. The third is to promote the upgrading of traditional disciplines or majors. Schools should foster a sense of the overall situation, build an international perspective, and pay attention to major historical issues concerning the future of mankind, such as ecology, the environment, and social development to refine indicative concepts, create new connotations and expressions that cater to the discourse system of the times so as to enhance the contemporaneity and innovation of traditional subjects.

### *C. Model Reconstruction*

In his speech at Tsinghua University, Hu Jintao pointed out that "we should pay attention to updating the concept of education, take promoting the all-round development of people and adapting to the needs of society as the fundamental standards to measure the level of talent cultivation, and establish a diversified talent training concept and the concept of cultivating everyone to qualified personnel."<sup>7</sup> It is needed to promote the transformation of traditional liberal arts personnel training mode and build a new talent training mode that can meet the needs of the new era. Efforts should be made to construct a build an education system of all-round development of "morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics and labor", and strive to cultivate a comprehensive and high-quality talent team that meets the requirements of the times and benefits social progress. First of all, colleges and universities should grasp the quality standards of liberal arts teaching. According to the latest national standard system for teaching quality of various majors, and referring to the relevant foreign certification standards, universities and colleges should revise their training program for professional talents of and improve the quality of discipline talents, so as to create a team of elite talents that are compatible with both domestic and foreign standards. Secondly, it's necessary to construct interdisciplinary composite professional courses. The "partial talents" under the traditional teaching style of liberal arts and science have not adapted to the current situation of high quality and high speed of economic development, and compound talents have become the demand of the times. The construction of new liberal arts should not only pay attention to the improvement of students' humanistic quality, but also pay attention to the cultivation of their rational knowledge and thinking logic, so as to build t-type innovative talents who study both widely and deeply in disciplinary knowledge. Finally, it is necessary to create a curriculum-sharing teaching model. Efforts should be made to integrate the knowledge points of courses to create quality courses and open online courses in colleges and universities so as to speed up the flow of new liberal arts knowledge and enhance the influence and popularity of new liberal arts in colleges and universities by use of the network information platform.

<sup>7</sup> Hu Jintao. Speech at the conference celebrating the 100th anniversary of Tsinghua University [N]. People's Daily, 2011-04-25 (02).

#### D. Promoting the Integration of Production, Study and Research in Universities

Practice promotes the development of knowledge. Knowledge originates from practice but guides practice. The integration of production, study and research in universities is a systematic process integrating knowledge production, knowledge dissemination and knowledge business. In the construction of new liberal arts, universities and colleges should strengthen the positive interaction with the talent market, carry out extensive exchanges and cooperation with enterprises, and effectively allocate various social resources such as human capital, knowledge and technology, capital and equipment in the integration of industry and education and school-enterprise cooperation. It is difficult for liberal arts majors to attract enterprises to cooperate actively due to its weak productivity and the particularity of research objects and methods. Therefore, it is necessary for liberal arts majors to change the traditional "going out" mode of thinking and establish the "going in" mode. The government, competent departments at all levels and colleges and universities must "take the initiative" to comprehensively utilize various social resources and college resources to attract relevant enterprises and industry experts to participate in the training of liberal arts talents in colleges and universities, so as to provide development space for practical teaching and provide more opportunities for students of liberal arts to practice and learn. Meanwhile, in the process of cooperation, focus should be put on exploring new subjects of humanities and social sciences, exploring new directions of liberal arts personnel training, and dynamic adjustment of liberal arts courses should be made according to market and enterprise development needs. For example, to pander to people's growing right-protection awareness, attention should be paid to the new changes in the forms of intellectual property rights, personal privacy rights and personal property rights in the Internet age, and new ways of rights protection in the new situation can be explored.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The construction of new liberal arts is an important part of the reform of modern education system. At present, with relatively few domestic studies on this field, information of new liberal arts construction mostly appears in the form of conference speeches, policies and systems organized by national leaders, ministry of education, universities and other relevant groups and organizations. The construction of new liberal arts in each region should not only follow the guidance documents of the government and the reference opinions and suggestions given by experts from all walks of life, but also explore the construction mode and scheme of new liberal arts with regional characteristics according to local conditions. As a systematic project, the construction of new liberal arts needs the help of the government, universities and social organizations.

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