

*Original Research Article*

## The Construction of New Liberal Arts Should Return to the University Spirit

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**Abstract:** New liberal arts is a hot topic about higher education, which includes essence, content and construction path. There are so many experts and scholars have different views and attitudes towards this issue that they can not agree with each other. The new liberal arts should foster such people, who Have extraordinary quality in ability and morality. It is precisely because of their uncoordinated relationship that the problem lies in the development of liberal arts. For the new liberal arts, It is necessary to return to the value of university itself, which can promote the coordinated development of human and society. Whether it is to establish interdisciplinary platform or interdisciplinary specialty, we must return to the value of truth, goodness and beauty in the university spirit.

**Keywords:** New Liberal Arts; Higher Education; University; University Spirit

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New liberal arts is the key direction of University exploration in the field of disciplines. In recent years, Since 2018, The Ministry of education actively promotes the reform of new liberal arts. In 2019, the Ministry of education, the Ministry of science and technology and other 13 departments jointly launched the plan of “six professional outstanding talents and one top-notch talent” plan 2.0, which takes new engineering, new medicine, new agriculture and new liberal arts as its main work. This plan can promote the reform of higher education more quickly and improve the quality of personnel training effectively. At the same time, it also provides a new direction for the reform of higher education institutions in different regions.

### 1. Understanding the time value of new liberal arts

The new liberal arts is relative to the traditional arts. Among the 13 disciplines designated from “Subject catalogue of degree granting and personnel training (2011)” by the Ministry of education. Philosophy, economics, law, pedagogy, history and literature all belong to liberal arts. In 2017, A university in the United States named Hiram college proposed a new liberal arts training program in the course of discipline adjustment and reform, Integrate new technologies from science and engineering into liberal arts courses, mix liberal arts courses and content with science and engineering effectively. This program aims to cultivate interdisciplinary talents who can master a variety of comprehensive and applied skills. In order to enable students to master the following abilities, such as communication and expression, critical thinking, systematic thinking and computer application. The whole plan redesigns the subject curriculum, adjusts and improves the discipline training program and training content, helps students learn to solve problems, encourages students to choose different professional courses, and enriches students’ knowledge system.” This model of education is called out come based education concept, which focuses on the expected effect of learning and organizes and implements teaching. Therefore, it is also called result oriented education or education based on learning output. This is also the direction of education reform in the United States, Britain, Canada and China.”<sup>[1]</sup> This project of exploration and reform is the origin of the concept of “new liberal arts”. The new liberal arts represents a kind of demand for talent training, which poses new challenges to higher education. With the popularization and expansion of the concept of new liberal arts, more attention has been paid to the new liberal arts.

Different people have different understanding of the new liberal arts, which also affects the development of new liberal arts. The Liberal Arts in Chinese generally come from English liberal arts.” but liberal arts is not the same as “liberal arts” in Chinese. Its connotation and denotation are much wider, which has been ignored for a long time. Most of the time, people always think that “liberal arts” and “humanities” are the same thing. “Liberal arts” is often translated into the humanities, and the humanities are often translated into liberal arts.”<sup>[2]</sup> Therefore, we can know that the concept of liberal arts is too general, which will mislead the understanding and interpretation of the new concept of liberal arts. The difference varies from person to person. Some people think that it is based on the knowledge system of liberal arts and absorbing the knowledge of other disciplines, that is, the reorganization of disciplines and the establishment of interdisciplinary or new specialties. Some people think that the integration of liberal arts and science will establish a new structural framework and knowledge system, thus forming a super discipline. Some people think

that the framework of liberal arts should be retained and replaced by the framework and knowledge of other disciplines to establish a new form and core of liberal arts. There is something reasonable about these views. When discussing the new liberal arts, many scholars only discuss its construction path, development direction and application value. In fact, they prefer to fill the content of liberal arts with new engineering and science knowledge, and implement “scientization” of liberal arts.” The new liberal arts is not a science based liberal arts, nor is it a philosophical literature or a literary Philosophy After the integration of Arts and science, we should pay more attention to and highlight the characteristics of literature.”<sup>[3]</sup>

The special attribute of liberal arts is to take human thought as the center. In eastern and western education, humanistic education is hidden in liberal arts education, which is the fundamental characteristic of liberal arts. It can cultivate sentiment and temper mind, increase wisdom, and at the same time, improve spiritual realm and rational thinking, which needs to master professional knowledge and other rich knowledge, enrich humanistic quality. Its essence is to make personality more perfect, the core is humanistic spirit. Humanistic spirit is the value requirement and embodiment of liberal arts.” Humanities play an important role in people’s knowledge, conduct, quality and spirit. Such disciplines as theology, literature, law and other disciplines can transform people’s spiritual world and regulate their behavior.”<sup>[4]</sup> Compared with other disciplines, the advantage of liberal arts is that it can transform people’s spiritual world, cultivate sentiment, improve personality, enhance moral character, promote intelligence and enhance ability. Liberal arts carries the common value standard system of human society, and has been enriched, perfected and developed in the process of generations of development. The spiritual civilization and material civilization of human society can be inherited and inherited together. The new liberal arts is not only to surpass and promote liberal arts, but also to break through the barriers of disciplines and achieve the goal of serving human society. In the era of knowledge explosion, humanities can help people enhance their ability of thinking, expressing, practicing and communicating, and help them meet the challenges of the times and adapt to the historical environment.

## **2. Balance ability and value in the process of cultivation**

The goal of new liberal arts determines the quality and direction of talent training. It is to cultivate comprehensive talents with compound abilities, who can meet the needs of social development. This kind of talents can not only master the professional knowledge and practical ability, but also have profound humanistic quality, moral sentiment and thinking vitality. They can master the knowledge of different disciplines and the thinking mode behind them. They can be skillful in scientific research and technological innovation, theoretical research, personality and moral demeanor and ideological level, and become outstanding talents in various disciplines. It can not only meet the needs of social development, but also meet the training objectives of higher education. There is still a certain distance between China’s higher education and this goal. Compared with foreign countries, the gap is more obvious in China. This gap is obvious in the following aspects: more and more subjects are set up, the students lack of humanistic spirit, they are more utilitarian when choosing subjects, and the gap between different disciplines is obvious. These problems have a direct impact on the future development of China’s higher education, restricting the level and quality of personnel training. The construction of new liberal arts should attach importance to the cultivation of ability, which has become an important reference for the evaluation of discipline level. Compared with other science and engineering subjects, liberal arts has no obvious competitiveness in terms of student source quality, professional evaluation, resource input or employment market. This leads to the “neglect” of liberal arts majors. Liberal arts can not create obvious value, especially wealth value, if measured by value standards. Generally speaking, it can only provide indirect or auxiliary support for economic activities, which makes many people prefer to attribute value creation to other practical majors. This is actually a huge misunderstanding of liberal arts. If one insists that the creation of wealth is mainly done by science and engineering, then we can see that liberal arts is also indispensable, and his thinking and judgment activities run through this process. His judgment system and thinking system are based on the humanities. Liberal arts and its humanistic spirit are the basis of practical activities and thinking activities. People’s social practice and spiritual production activities include thinking about various possible problems, formulating realistic goals and plans, and eliminating various risks. The activities of creating economic wealth can not only rely on professional knowledge. These abilities must be acquired through liberal arts education. The new liberal arts takes “knowledge + ability + quality” as the training goal, and should cultivate “diversified, compound and innovative” talents. In terms of knowledge, students should master the knowledge system of their own major and similar majors, and extensively learn other related liberal arts professional knowledge, which helps them to have a complete knowledge system and good humanistic quality. In terms of skills, they should master the abilities of experiment, research, thinking and innovation required by their majors, as well as the abilities of observation, association, empathy, empathy and cooperation.” In addition to mastering the necessary operating skills within the discipline, they also need to have the ability of autonomous learning and lifelong learning, so that they can analyze and solve problems from a comprehensive perspective and skills, properly handle personal life and communication problems and the relationship between natural and social groups, and improve the survival and communication ability of human groups.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Under any conditions, the core goal of education is to cultivate people’s comprehensive ability, professional ability and humanistic quality. If a person has noble morality and outstanding talent, then he is an excellent talent, which is the best evaluation of talent. In real life, we can see that this goal is not easy to achieve. Most people can only have outstanding achievements in one aspect. What is the reason? There are many explanations about this problem, but one reason can not be ignored, that is, the serious lack of humanistic spirit, which leads to many people with good professional talents, but lack of emotional connection with society, people and environment. They always regard technology, output, product and result in terms of wealth, usefulness and value. They completely forget that there are many things whose value cannot be calculated, such as kindness, love, beauty, peace, warmth, satisfaction, etc. As a result, people generally indulge in the illusion of material wealth, and lose their ability to perceive the world. Clean water, clean air, harmonious natural environment, peaceful human society, peaceful life, harmonious interpersonal

relationship, and kindness to help each other are not so important. People have lost their eyes and ears and can no longer talk to their hearts. When our material life is more and more abundant, our spiritual world is more and more withered. In 2015, UNESCO published a report entitled “Reflective Education: a change to the concept of global common interests”. According to the report, “humanism is the foundation of education. It evokes a sense of respect for life and human dignity, equality of rights, social justice, cultural diversity, international solidarity and shared responsibility for a sustainable future.” This concept raises humanism to a very high position. Without the inheritance of humanistic spirit, education will lose the soul of development. The people who are trained are the tool people who have no feelings and interests, and will not have a soul.” We are people, not machines. Because it is “human beings, we have special requirements for ourselves; because we are human beings, we must affirm the value of human beings and seek the meaning of human beings”.<sup>[6]</sup> The new liberal arts must re-examine the value of human beings, reflect on the idea of the supremacy of tool value, and endow people with new value orientation. In the process of practical reform, this is a very important work content. The new liberal arts is not to serve other disciplines or to be transformed by science and engineering. It is a solution about how to solve the crisis of instrumental rationality. All kinds of challenges and crises in human society are actually the crises of human beings themselves. People’s excessive pursuit of spiritual rationality leads to the overflow of instrumental rationality. In fact, the instrumental value is placed above the human value. Man is no longer the master of his spirit and body, but the slave of the material created by him. The new liberal arts reform is to awaken people’s sleeping consciousness through education, to wake up from material addiction and to become human again.

### 3. Return to university spirit

University spirit is the pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty. These values guide the progress of human society. As early as in ancient Egypt, ancient India, ancient China and ancient Greece, there were organizations similar to universities. The University in modern sense was born in the middle ages of Europe. Christian church schools set up “seven arts” to train talents for religious service. Objectively, it played a role in the inheritance of civilization and became the earliest prototype of modern universities. After the Renaissance, universities, as the most advanced educational institutions, stepped onto the historical stage. After World War II, the popularization of higher education accelerated, and the trend of getting a job through education was more obvious. The functions of universities have expanded from personnel training and academic research to serving the society and international exchanges. Cultivating talents is the original task of universities, but its functions have become more and more abundant. This has led to the fact that the attention and investment in people have been relatively decreased, which deviates from the original intention of university spiritual value in a sense.

Universities can influence and change society by cultivating and educating talents. Since modern times, one of the important reasons for the increasing scale of universities is the rapid development and progress of science. Universities have to expand the scale to meet the needs of social development. Correspondingly, with the increase of disciplines, specialties and knowledge system, different professional knowledge systems are becoming more and more obstacles to people’s cognition of the world. Professional knowledge improves the threshold of learning, knowledge system increases the necessary time for learning, and discipline division also hinders the formation of holistic thinking. Different majors are just different ways for people to understand the world. But it’s actually the only way to know the world. Highly differentiated disciplines and their knowledge system have formed a form of blocking the eyes. Knowledge is to serve people, not only to create wealth, but also to inherit the value and spirit of people. The excessive pursuit of knowledge leads to the overflow of technology, which deviates from the original intention of education. This is a representative example of the wide application of plastic products in the chemical industry, which caused the environmental problems have not yet been solved, and have threatened the living environment of human beings.

In the face of the knowledge ocean, whether integrating disciplines or building interdisciplinary platforms, the purpose is to reorganize the knowledge system, so as to improve the efficiency of learning and inheritance. The essence of discipline reform and exploration is to enrich and improve the existing knowledge structure. Developing interdisciplinary specialties, breaking barriers between different specialties and establishing close ties are effective measures to promote the benign interaction and development of disciplines. “In fact, the whole academic history is not only a process of discipline differentiation and specialization, but also a process of interdisciplinary and integration. The two processes are carried out at the same time.”<sup>[7]</sup> The humanities and natural sciences should be closely linked. If this kind of barrier is still strengthened, human society will inevitably face the tearing of pursuing tool and pursuing value. Knowledge represents the pursuit of truth, morality represents the pursuit of goodness, and harmony represents the pursuit of beauty. In today’s world, knowledge has overflowed, morality hesitated and harmony disappeared. The modern university has indeed deviated from the university spirit.

The construction of the new liberal arts should return to the university spirit, and give the representative humanistic spirit to everyone. Only with enough moral cultivation, moral sentiment, vision and self reflection, can people maintain their basic vigilance in the era of omnipotent rationality. In the face of an uncertain world, no one knows when and how the next crisis will come. We should be clear that the crisis and challenge we are facing is just a kind of reaction of our own survival and development crisis, and also a clear manifestation of the continuous deviation of education from the university spirit for hundreds of years. The original intention of university spirit is to promote people’s pursuit of truth, goodness, beauty, the value of life and the meaning of life. However, education has deviated from this goal for too long. In the construction of new liberal arts, it is time to revive the university spirit. University spirit returns to its essence. Whenever we encounter a crisis, we should reflect on whether it is the world’s problem or our own problem. The university is the palace where human beings pursue the highest and deepest knowledge, where we pursue the ultimate existence of value and significance. It represents thousands of years of human civilization heritage, we consume the material world, but also inseparable from the spiritual world. When the material world oppresses the spiritual world, we feel pain, helplessness, helplessness and anger. Only a strong spiritual world can balance the pressure of the material

world, which can only be achieved through the development of humanistic education.

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