

Research on Top-Level Drivers and Grassroots Practices in the Construction of New Liberal Arts in China

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Abstract: Under the background of new era, new national conditions and new pattern, traditional liberal arts have embarked on the reform road of building New Liberal Arts under the impetus of the tide of change in educational theory and practice. The state has put forward the concept of New Liberal Arts in the "Six Excellence and One Pioneer" program version 2.0, and set up a basic framework for the construction of New Liberal Arts, which provides a policy impetus for the innovation of liberal arts education in China. Based on the review and sorting out of related literature and the deconstruction of the "four pillars and eight pillars" of China's top-level design for the construction of the New Liberal Arts, we elucidate the power mechanism of the national construction of the New Liberal Arts and the reform of the liberal arts, i.e. the power of integration and development led by the optimization of majors, the power of independent reform led by the improvement of curriculum, and the power of innovation and practice led by the innovation of models. On this basis, a cluster analysis of the practices of colleges and universities since the construction of New Liberal Arts reveals that the construction of New Liberal Arts in colleges and universities across the country has formed a New Liberal Arts construction boom with "a hundred flowers competing for color" and obvious effectiveness, and the explosive force of grassroots construction is strong. However, some colleges and universities are constrained by traditional education concepts and institutional mechanisms, and the progress of New Liberal Arts construction is slow. For this reason, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research on the theory of New Liberal Arts and the logic of innovation to help the national layout of New Liberal Arts construction take effect and realize the goal of "building a strong educational, scientific and technological, human resources, and cultural power" proposed by the 20th Party Congress at an early date.

Keywords: New Liberal Arts, Education Reform, Policy Integration

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th Party Congress points out that the basic and strategic support for the comprehensive construction of a modern socialist country is "education, science and technology, and talents". Colleges and universities are the highland of education, science and technology, and talents, they are also the foundation and guarantee for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The spirit of the 20th CPC National Congress has pointed out the direction for the modernization of Chinese education and the reform and development of higher education, and clarified the path for the traditional liberal arts to embark on a new road of reform under the background of the new era, new national conditions and new pattern.

In 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) clearly put forward the "four new construction" (new engineering, new medical science, new agricultural science, New Liberal Arts) layout of higher education development, and thus "New Liberal Arts" in the liberal arts education and teaching system of the "planning map" was born. In April 2019, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Finance and other departments jointly convened the launch conference of the "six excellence and one top-notch" program version 2.0 (hereinafter referred to as the "top-notch program"), and in November 2020, the Ministry of Education hosted a conference on the New Liberal Arts. In November 2020, the "Declaration on the Construction of New Liberal Arts" (hereinafter referred to as the "Declaration") was released at the working conference on the construction of New Liberal Arts hosted by the Ministry of Education, and the education departments of provinces, cities, autonomous regions and colleges and universities across the country have actively responded to the national call to explore the path of the construction of New Liberal Arts and to create a new situation for

the reform and development of liberal arts education, symbolizing that the construction of the New Liberal Arts has formally stepped from theoretical discussion to educational practice and entered the "construction period".

2. Literature review

The conceptualization of "New Liberal Arts" differs in the studies of scholars. Most foreign scholars believe that "New Liberal Arts" comes from the decline of traditional liberal arts in Europe and the United States, although the performance of the crisis in different countries varies, but the humanities as a whole is in crisis. J. Conley (1983) believes that "the confidence of the social sciences in the 60's has turned into despair in the 80's" in the United States^[1]. Jean-Francois Lyotard (2018) even radicalized that "the liberal arts are dead"^[2]. 2017, the Hiram College in the United States for the first time from the perspective of educational practice put forward "New Liberal Arts", advocating that the core concept of "New Liberal Arts" is the intermingling of arts and sciences, which is an important means of disciplinary reorganization, and through the effective combination of technology and humanities and social sciences courses such as philosophy, language, literature, and so on. It is possible to cultivate comprehensive talents and realize interdisciplinary learning. The theory and practice of this school is an early exploration of the New Liberal Arts.

Chinese scholars' exploration of the concept of New Liberal Arts is mainly divided into two stages. The first is the rapid development of philosophical and social science theories during the decades of China's reform and opening up, the rising quality of higher education, and the proliferation of liberal arts talents, but the practice of Chinese-style modernized economic and social development requires a higher level of talents with more composite qualities. Based on this, most of the research perspectives tend to read and interpret the New Liberal Arts from multiple perspectives in terms of the connotation of the era, the theoretical connotation and the core connotation, which are very Chinese. Fan believes that the goal of the construction of New Liberal Arts in China conforms to the trend of the new scientific and technological revolution and industrial change, transforms the inner vitality of traditional culture into external competitiveness, and promotes the development of liberal arts with integration and epochal character, with Chinese characteristics and international perspectives^[3]. The key to the new construction of New Liberal Arts lies in the breakthrough of the existing exploration and practice in terms of specialties, directions, modes, curricula, theories and so on. Huang and Tian define the concept of New Liberal Arts, emphasizing the difference between this and the concept of New Liberal Arts discussed by foreign scholars^[4].

Secondly, looking back at the research literature on New Liberal Arts in the past years, it is found that many scholars focus on the construction of New Liberal Arts in terms of epochal, theoretical, innovative and internationalization. From the connotation of the era, the New Liberal Arts is a product of the era. Duan and Cui believe that the New Liberal Arts is an inclusive disciplinary framework based on traditional humanities, transcending traditional humanities, and integrating many external disciplinary elements, such as science, engineering, etc., under the background of the new era, the new economy, and the new industry^[5]. From the perspective of theoretical system, the New Liberal Arts are cross-symbiotic disciplines. Long defined New Liberal Arts as a product of liberal arts clustering based on the symbiosis of disciplines^[6]. From the perspective of innovation logic, New Liberal Arts is an innovative construction. At present, the innovation of the construction of New Liberal Arts is reflected in the complementarity with natural sciences and applied disciplines^[7], but in the final analysis, "liberal arts" is still the most essential feature, so the core of the construction should focus on the "vision of education" and "innovative construction of education". Therefore, the core of the construction should focus on the "vision of education" and "innovative construction of education"^{[8][9]}.

To summarize, the construction of New Liberal Arts in China should be understood as the innovative development of liberal arts education, the core of which lies in integrating into the new development trend of the world by means of the convergence of arts and sciences and the integration of arts and technology, rooting itself in the traditional liberal arts, building core competitiveness by combining with the Chinese practice and telling the Chinese story, and committing itself to creating a new pattern of innovative development of liberal arts education in China. Researches on system construction and policy support for the construction of New Liberal Arts still needs to be further deepened, and the research results on the practice of New Liberal Arts are not common. Whether it is theory, policy research, or practice research, it can provide some theoretical and policy guidance and decision-making reference for the completion of systematic, innovative and practical tasks of New Liberal Arts construction. This paper is committed to make some modest efforts to this end.

3. Top-level design construction of the driving force of China's New Liberal Arts construction

As an important carrier for the development of advanced socialist culture, the "New Liberal Arts" born in the era of great social change can promote the cross-fertilization of philosophy and social sciences with the scientific and technological revolution, cultivate philosophical and social scientists of the new era, and the successors of the socialist cause, which is of great responsibility and significance in the construction of a socialist strong country^[10]. Based on this, in order to open up a new chapter of innovation and development of liberal arts education in colleges and universities in the new era, the State urgently needs to improve the corresponding top-level design. The Declaration emphasizes the urgency of the construction of New Liberal Arts, and clarifies the logical framework and strategic conception of the construction of New Liberal Arts from five aspects: enhancing comprehensive national power, firming cultural confidence, cultivating new talents of the times, building a strong country of higher education, and integrating the development of liberal arts education, so the "four pillars and eight pillars" of the top-level design of the construction of the New Liberal Arts have been gradually perfected. The details are shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1 Related policies of national New Liberal Arts construction

Policy orientation	Key words	Content Source
Specialty optimization	Expand the scope	Basic disciplines top talent training Program 2.0
	Combination of science and education	Opinions on Accelerating the construction of high-level undergraduate education and Improving the ability of personnel training in all aspects
Curriculum improvement	4 points of emphasis	China political and legal practice lecture hall
	3 Classic curriculum	Chinese Economy Lecture Hall
	Multi-dimensional expansion	Chinese news communication lecture hall
	Overall shaping	Chinese Art Lecture Hall
Model innovation	Personalized path	Opinions of the Ministry of Education and other six departments on the implementation of the Training Plan for Top students in basic Disciplines 2.0
	Improved standards and services	Opinions of the Ministry of Education on the implementation of the Excellence Teacher Training Program 2.0
	Multi-dimensional ability improvement	Opinions on the implementation of Education and Training Plan 2.0 for excellent journalism and communication talents

Source: Compiled according to relevant national documents.

According to the initial framework set by the Declaration, the current national policy on the construction of the New Liberal Arts can be summarized as a dynamic system driven by the synergy of professional optimization, curricular enhancement, and paradigm innovation (as shown in *Figure 1*).

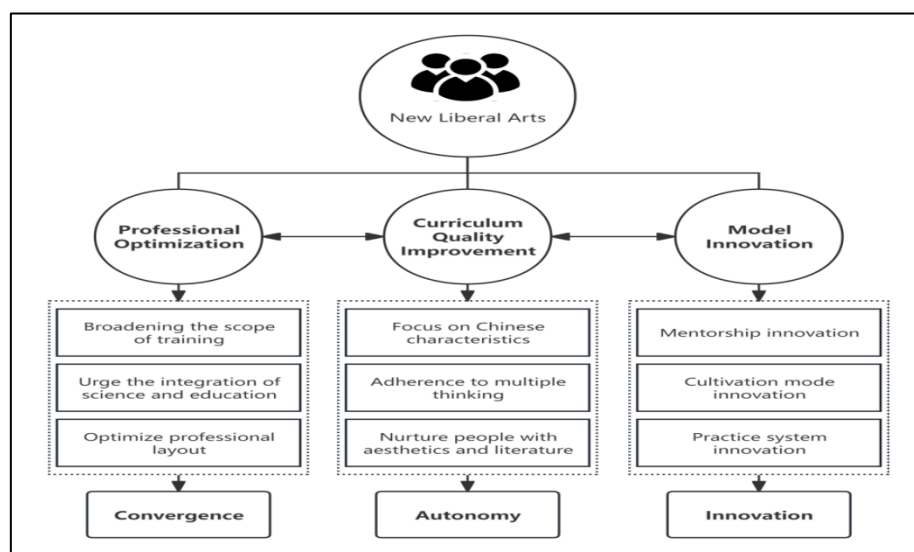


Figure 1 The Trinity Dynamics of New Liberal Arts Construction

As shown in *Figure 1*, grasping the "three major grips" and "four major breakthroughs" can

effectively lead the practice of the construction of New Liberal Arts. The optimization of majors provides the integration power for the construction of New Liberal Arts, in which the intermingling of disciplines and majors helps to break the boundaries of the original respective disciplines; the integration of science and education helps to promote the transformation of knowledge achievements; and the optimization of the layout of majors helps to put into practice the practice of a new type of state sponsoring system in the field of education reform. Therefore, to cultivate comprehensive talents with international vision, the integration of specialties is the way to go. Improving the quality of the curriculum provides autonomous power for the construction of the New Liberal Arts. Creating a curriculum based on the characteristics of Chinese practice is an effective hand for Marxism to cast souls and educate people; adhering to the multi-dimensional concept helps college students establish an autonomous and self-reliant view of learning and life; educating people with reason, beauty and literature helps lead the education of talents to all-around high-quality development; therefore, as a key curriculum in the construction of a high-quality higher education system, independence is the foundation of soul casting. Mode innovation provides innovative impetus for the construction of New Liberal Arts. Whether it is the tutoring system emphasizing on-campus and off-campus dual tutoring or the integration of "thinking, virtue and learning" in the cultivation method, all of them are aimed at promoting the double cycle of theory and practice through the innovation of diversified modes and assisting in the spiral rise of the quality of talent cultivation, so innovation is the basis of qualitative change.

4. Achievements in the construction of the New Liberal Arts in China

The first achievement in China's construction of the New Liberal Arts is the fast response time of the provinces, cities and autonomous regions. Around the national New Liberal Arts construction work conference, the provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions responded actively and quickly, by issuing a notice to organize to participate in the Ministry of Education's New Liberal Arts construction work conference and to carry out the New Liberal Arts construction work seminars in the provinces. At this period the policy support in general of the New Liberal Arts construction presents the characteristics of "fast, accurate, and deep". First, the response speed is fast and the documents are issued in time. Secondly, it is characterized by distinctive features and rich regional characteristics. Third, the content is detailed, and the reform initiatives are strong. The policies on the New Liberal Arts formulated by the education authorities of the provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions show rich regional characteristics, and present a "blossoming" of grass-roots outbursts.

The second achievement is that colleges and universities are actively practicing, creating many typical cases. After the National Working Conference on the Construction of New Liberal Arts set the tone of reform, all kinds of colleges and universities, as an important position for the construction of New Liberal Arts, insisted on taking the road of development of liberal arts education with Chinese characteristics, and formulated their own "construction plans" for the construction of New Liberal Arts. According to the division of disciplines in the Declaration, the following cluster analysis will be conducted from comprehensive, liberal arts, and non-liberal arts to observe the characteristics of New Liberal Arts construction in different types of colleges and universities.

The New Liberal Arts reform at comprehensive colleges and universities is characterized by a high degree of disciplinary convergence, shown in *Table 2*. As the number of comprehensive colleges and universities is the largest among the existing colleges and universities for the construction of New Liberal Arts, the routes for the construction of New Liberal Arts are also more diversified, among which the most central keyword is "cross-fertilization and fusion", which is closely related to the disciplinary settings and talent cultivation modes of the comprehensive colleges and universities. First, the professional settings of comprehensive colleges and universities of both arts and sciences, in the pilot reform of the feasibility of stronger, can achieve professional cross-fertilization and cross-fertilization of arts and sciences to maximize the advantages of the cultivation of composite talents. Secondly, the strength of comprehensive universities is stronger, to support the local demand for talent delivery is also more vigorous, integration of cultivation helps to change the idea of talent cultivation, more effectively meet the demand for high-level talent, to support the local economy play a role. Among them, Tsinghua University's "Double-High" program and Nanjing University's "Furnace Project" new system of talent cultivation, as typical cases of New Liberal Arts construction, are included in the book "New Liberal Arts Construction Annual Development Report 2020", which provides a certain new direction and reference significance for the exploration and practice of New Liberal Arts construction in colleges and universities.

Table 2 New Liberal Arts Programs in Comprehensive Colleges and Universities

categorization	universities and colleges	Documentation/meetings/projects	byword
Comprehensive Colleges and Universities	Tsing Hua or Qinghua University, Beijing	Implementation Opinions on Accelerating the Prosperity of Philosophy and Social Sciences and Promoting the "Double-High" Plan for Liberal Arts Development	Three Pathways + Three Turns
	Nankai University (Tianjin)	Action Plan for Quality Improvement of First-class Undergraduate Education in Nankai University (2019-2021)	Integration and synergy+ strategic development
	Renmin University of China	Cultivation Program for Top Innovative Talents of Renmin University of China; "Strengthening the Foundation and Cultivating the Top" Cultivation Program	Cross-fusion+ complex culture
	Sichuan University	Teaching Seminar on Undergraduate Social Work Education for the Construction of "New Liberal Arts" in Sichuan University	Geographical characterization+ complex culture
	Nanjing University, NJU	Nanjing University "melting pot project" construction work program	Furnace Engineering
	Shandong University	Shandong University New Liberal Arts Construction Work Program (2019-2021) Implementing opinions on promoting the convergence and integration of disciplines and cross-innovation	"The Four New Leaders

Source: public information on the official websites of the colleges and universities mentioned.

In liberal arts colleges, the concept of building New Liberal Arts and the concept of cultivating talents in the institutions can be effectively integrated and given a new era. As shown in *Table 3*, the key trends of the New Liberal Arts construction program in liberal arts colleges and universities are manifested in the following points. First, to promote the traditional advantages of the humanities to the new, where the new not only refers to updating the content with the trend of the times, but also refers to the internal dynamics of the excellent traditional Chinese culture and the new era to integrate the new vitality. The second is to promote the new configuration of liberal arts majors for the professional need to transform and upgrade in areas such as economics, linguistics, and other combinations of Chinese and Western ideas. According to the reality of the needs of the new era, in particular, the language personnel training goal is a multi-specialty, fine multi-composite high-quality talents, in practice, can effectively make up for the "One Belt, One Road" construction of the personnel. Thirdly, the training mode should be promoted to a new model. Liberal arts majors can effectively utilize the technological advantages of modern platforms to enhance the dissemination, and help college students to learn and practice through new media platforms and digital projects, so as to integrate and integrate.

Table 3 Specific Programs for Building New Liberal Arts in Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities

categorization	universities and colleges	Documentation/meetings/projects	byword
Liberal Arts Colleges And Universities	East China Normal University (ECNU)	East China Normal University Strong Foundation Program Student Training Management Approach; DREAM Action Plan	Teacher-based+ let the student be the source (idiom); let the student be the source
	Shandong Normal University	Shandong Normal University New Liberal Arts Construction Program (2021-2025)	two-bay (computing) maximize
	Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics (JXUFE)	Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics First-class Undergraduate Action Education Program (2018-2025); Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics first-class undergraduate program construction program	The four new drivers
	Shandong University of Finance and Economics	Shandong University of Finance and Economics First-class Discipline Construction Program	Three new features
	Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU)	Management of Experimental Classes for Top Talents (Trial)	four-component model
	Communication University of China (CUC)	Communication University of China Undergraduate Education Action Plan (2021-2025)	Open + Mission +Practice

Source: public information on the official websites of the colleges and universities mentioned.

Since the construction of New Liberal Arts is aimed at cultivating talents in colleges and universities

that are cross-fertilized by philosophy and social sciences and scientific and technological revolutions, colleges and universities of science, technology, agriculture and medicine should also enthusiastically join in the construction of New Liberal Arts. Judging from the response, the self-awareness of the New Liberal Arts construction is a bit weak among the universities of science, technology, agriculture and medicine, but there are still some colleges and universities that have integrated the concept of the New Liberal Arts construction into the cultivation of talents. As shown in Table 4, South China University of Technology has strengthened the cultivation of liberal arts on the basis of the advantages of traditional engineering, and cultivated a group of first-class liberal arts talents of "three-creative"; Dongguan Institute of Technology has grasped the strategy of regional innovation and development, and enhanced the soft power of culture around the service of the local community; Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine has constructed a curriculum based on the culture of traditional Chinese medicine. On the whole, the concept of New Liberal Arts in colleges and universities has a large space for construction in universities of science, technology, agriculture and medicine, and still has a long potential for development in the future.

Table 4 Specific Programs for Building New Liberal Arts in Science, Engineering, Agriculture and Medicine Colleges and Universities

categorization	universities and colleges	Documentation/meetings/projects	byword
Science, Engineering, Agriculture and Medicine Colleges And Universities	South China University of Technology	South China University of Technology Liberal Arts Undergraduate Education Reform Implementation Plan	Cultivating "triple-creation" talents
	Dongguan Institute of Technology	Implementation Opinions on the Construction of New Liberal Arts in Dongguan Institute of Technology	Highlighting reform and innovation
	Tianjin Traditional Chinese Medicine college	Wuzhen Declaration on Quality Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine	Curriculum + course cluster

Source: public information on the official websites of the colleges and universities mentioned.

5. Prospects and Suggestions for high-quality promotion of the construction of New Liberal Arts

5.1 Prospects for high-quality promotion of the construction of New Liberal Arts

Since the release of the Declaration, from the government documents at the provincial level to the specific programs implemented by universities, the "four pillars and eight pillars" of the top-level design of the New Liberal Arts construction have been set up, with a full driving force, and the localities have responded positively with a clear idea of development, and the grass-roots reform of the New Liberal Arts has shown an explosive force of "a hundred flowers competing for success" as a whole. The overall reform of New Liberal Arts at the grassroots level has shown the explosive power of "a hundred flowers competing". However, through the national policy and specific measures of each university, there are still parts to be strengthened, first of all, there is a difference in the pace of the construction of New Liberal Arts in each province, through the inquiry of the provincial government portal of the Ministry of Education, it is found that at present, some provinces have not yet formulated practical and specific policies and measures relying on the Declaration, and there are deviations in the progress of the practice in the provinces that have already implemented it, so that there is a need for continuous encouragement in the future process of promoting the construction of the New Liberal Arts in a high quality way. There are still some provinces that have not yet formulated concrete policies and measures based on the Declaration. Secondly, the existing New Liberal Arts construction in universities is characterized by insufficient support policies, insufficiently distinctive talent cultivation modes, and insufficiently diversified practice and cooperation platforms, and there is an urgent need to formulate a New Liberal Arts construction program that fits the characteristics of the universities themselves. It is worth paying attention to the fact that although universities of science, technology, agriculture and medicine do not belong to liberal arts colleges and universities, they still belong to the category of New Liberal Arts construction, and there is an urgent need to enhance the concept of New Liberal Arts construction and integrate it into the development of this kind of colleges and universities, which is of outstanding urgency.

5.2 Suggestions for high-quality promotion of the construction of New Liberal Arts

This study has profound policy implications. For the further acceleration of New Liberal Arts construction and the innovative development of liberal arts education in colleges and universities in the

new era, the following suggestions are put forward. First, increase the research efforts on the construction of New Liberal Arts. With the establishment of the first batch of New Liberal Arts research and reform practice projects in 2021, the construction of New Liberal Arts has entered a new stage from planning to implementation, which is a major initiative to increase the research efforts of the construction of New Liberal Arts, but it still needs to be further implemented and improved. For example, New Liberal Arts research institutes can be established in each province, city and autonomous region to conduct regular sharing and seminars on the construction of New Liberal Arts and explore the cutting-edge experience and theoretical support for the construction of New Liberal Arts. In addition, according to the current development of New Liberal Arts in colleges and universities, we can increase the investment of related scientific research funds to encourage colleges and universities to actively carry out research on the construction of New Liberal Arts. Secondly, the implementation measures of New Liberal Arts construction should be promoted in an orderly and powerful manner. Whether or not colleges and universities have New Liberal Arts programs, they should formulate New Liberal Arts construction programs in line with their own talent cultivation concepts and cultivation directions, and submit them to the provincial education departments for record, so as to provide basic data for the construction of the New Liberal Arts database; colleges and universities with New Liberal Arts programs should indicate the specific measures for the transformation and upgrading of the New Liberal Arts programs of the university in the future in the construction programs; and explore the opening of cross-college elective courses in the region, and linkage and integration of the New Liberal Arts construction in provincial colleges and universities. Third, expanding the coverage of New Liberal Arts construction. At present, the cross-fusion of disciplines is a general trend, and we should deeply promote the cross-fusion of disciplines according to the characteristics of each specialty and the needs of social development, and strengthen the cross-function of specialties such as "arts + engineering/science/medicine/agriculture/literature", for example, energy and climate economics, design and engineering, and the development of the New Liberal Arts. For example, the specialties of energy and climate economy, philosophy of design and art, bioethics, and big data management and application are all products of the cross-fertilization of various specialties. Educational authorities in each province should accelerate the expansion of the coverage of New Liberal Arts construction, get rid of the traditional paradigm of major construction, encourage and supervise colleges and universities to accelerate the cross-fertilization of disciplines, set up pilot New Liberal Arts majors, and strive to achieve that all colleges and universities in the country will have at least one New Liberal Arts major site within three years. At the same time, the promotion of New Liberal Arts majors in senior high schools should be intensified, and the number of students enrolled in New Liberal Arts majors should be appropriately relaxed in colleges and universities, in an effort to cultivate a group of New Liberal Arts majors within the next 10 years, who will be proficient in the specialized knowledge of the New Liberal Arts and be able to successfully integrate into practical work.

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