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The Experience of Humanities and Social Sciences Development in Developed Countries

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Abstract: Developed countries have made remarkable achievements in the development of humanities and social sciences, and their rich development experience is of great reference significance. Prosperity philosophy social science should be rooted in local contexts while engaging with the world, balancing theoretical and social value, solving the social realistic problems around the national strategic demand, attracting talents and encouraging innovation, so as to build the knowledge system of philosophy social science with the characteristics of the times and the world influence.

Key words: Developed Countries; Humanities and Social Sciences; Experience

1. Introduction

Throughout history, Western Europe has been the cradle of social sciences, nurtured by its profound philosophical traditions. In the 18th century, as capitalism emerged, the old social order collapsed while a new capitalist-dominated system was still taking shape. This social upheaval led to intensified conflicts and numerous social issues. Social sciences thus arose from the quest to understand modern society's characteristics and future. Pioneering thinkers from France and Germany played pivotal roles in this intellectual movement.

During World War II, Western Europe's social sciences experienced a downturn due to war devastation and social unrest, while the United States emerged as the global research hub for social sciences. After the war, to meet the demands of post-war reconstruction and societal development, social science research gradually revived and achieved unprecedented growth in the 1960s. Governments significantly increased funding for social science research, and numerous research institutions were established.

To date, the global leadership of developed countries in humanities and social sciences remains unchallenged. the Times Higher Education (THE) recently released its 2025 Social Sciences University Rankings, with the top 15 universities all located in the United States and the United Kingdom.

2. Experiences in the Development of Humanities and Social Sciences

2.1 Cultivating Humanistic Spirit

2.1.1The Power of Culture in Shaping Humanity

From Protagoras's "Man is the measure of all things" to Socrates' "Know thyself, " and through the Renaissance where humanistic ideals challenged divine authority, to the Enlightenment's establishment of rationalism, Western philosophy's evolution profoundly mirrors humanity's quest for self and the world. Developed countries' higher education, steeped in Western philosophical traditions, has nurtured a profound humanistic ethos. With its distinctive academic atmosphere and humanistic spirit, it serves as a cradle for cultivating future leaders and thinkers. As former President Neil Rudenstine stated, "University education is fundamentally a humanistic process—it is about values, not just information or knowledge. " [1]

In 2019, the Humanities Indicators project at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences conducted a large-scale survey on American public engagement with and attitudes toward the humanities. the findings were published in 2020 as the report "The Humanities in American Life. " the report provides a comprehensive definition of the humanities, encompassing not only academic disciplines associated with the field but also a wide array of activities in which Americans engage as part of their personal and work lives. the report reveals that over 90% of Americans consider humanities an important part of every American's education. the humanities not only help children and adolescents develop life skills but also enhance critical thinking and enable more effective,

creative work engagement. They enrich social connections with friends and family, adding meaning and happiness to life. Through humanities education, individuals learn to respect and understand those with different backgrounds, appreciate cultural diversity, and feel a sense of belonging to their communities. Furthermore, the humanities play a pivotal role in strengthening American democracy and driving sustained economic growth. (Figure 1) [2]

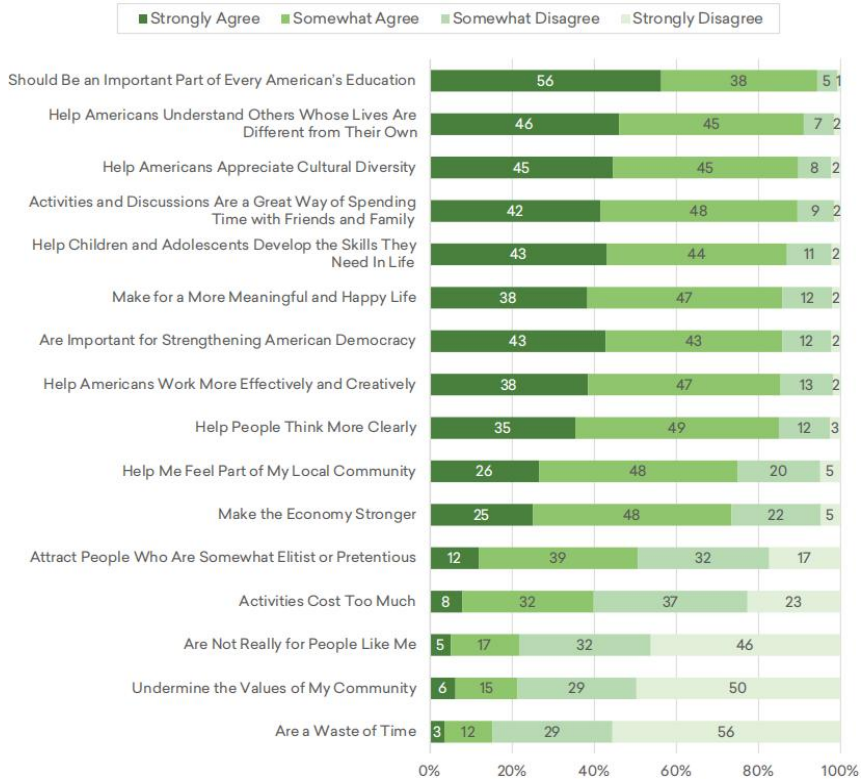

Figure 1. Estimated Shares of Adults Who Agree and Disagree with Statements about the Humanities

2.1.2 Cultivating Social-Cultural Environments

Beyond formal education systems, informal education plays a vital role in shaping and enhancing educational ecosystems. In developed countries, the potential of informal education has been fully realized through carefully designed social-cultural environments such as museums, zoos, aquariums, and botanical gardens. Through close collaboration among schools, teachers, parents, and other community partners, a comprehensive and supportive learning ecosystem has emerged. This system not only enriches classroom learning content but also nurtures personalized lifelong learning ecosystems. Within this framework, learning behaviors exhibit distinct voluntary and self-directed characteristics, driven by individuals' intrinsic curiosity, desire to explore, and eagerness to share experiences.

In the United States, museums and cultural centers have long upheld a tradition of informal education. In 1846, Smithsonian Institution was founded to "increase and disseminate knowledge, "which has grown into the world's largest museum, educational, and research organization, comprising 21 museums, 14 educational and research centers, and a national zoo. In 1969, the American Association of Museums (AAM) issued American Museums: the Belmont Report, which called for the Federal government to recognize museums both as educational institutions and as sources of unique educational services. In 1984, AAM issued another key report, Museums for a New Century, which posited that education was a primary purpose of American museums, as much as preservation and collection. To this end, AAM expanded its Committee on Education and issued the Museum Education Professional Standards. More recently, in 2001, the Committee on Education issued Excellence in Practice: Museum Education Principles and Standards to further inform museum education. [3]

On the other hand, various initiatives are organized to encourage public participation in cultural activities and promote the development of humanities and social sciences. the EU-funded "Citizen Heritage" project under

Erasmus+ employs citizen science methods to foster community engagement in cultural heritage preservation. the project encourages public involvement in the digitization and conservation of cultural heritage. [4] the University of Cambridge's research explores the impact of cultural heritage on individual and social well-being and found that heritage engagement promotes mental health, volunteerism, elderly pride, and active participation among young people. [5]

The National Endowment for the Humanities annually funds hundreds of thousands of events, including reading programs, literacy initiatives, lecture series, technology innovation projects, cultural heritage preservation, media programs, and regional historical research and promotion. These efforts enrich public cultural life, strengthen community cohesion, and enhance civic literacy. Notably, NEF focuses on marginalized groups, working to remove barriers to cultural participation. Data from "Humanities in American Life" reveals that 97% of U. S. adults engage in at least one form of humanities activity annually. [2]

Furthermore, it is crucial to systematically summarize and disseminate humanities and social science achievements to the public through diverse channels. In 2015, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) compiled a list of 50 landmark social science achievements, highlighting the profound impact of these studies on British society and public life over the past five decades which spanned key areas including economics and business, environmental studies, health and well-being, political science and governance, and public services. [6]

2.1.3 Emphasizing the Study of Human Civilization

Developed countries have always maintained a rigorous attitude of tracing the origins of human civilization, striving to uncover the deep-seated logic and connotations behind it. As early as the mid-18th century, the French Enlightenment thinker Voltaire conducted a meticulous examination of the history and culture of China, India, Egypt, Babylon, and other regions through his monumental work "Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations" He not only explored the customs and habits of various ethnic groups but also profoundly revealed the national spirit and psychological states hidden behind this practice.

In the 20th century, German philosopher Oswald Spengler, in his work "The Decline of the West, " identified eight civilizations—Babylonian, Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Apollonian (Graeco-Roman), Mexican, Magian (Arabian), and Faustian (Western)—each with its own unique morphology and lifecycle of birth, maturity, and death. He pointed out that "world history" is the "collective memory" of various cultures, and civilization is the declining stage of culture. the renowned British historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee explored over twenty forms of human civilization that emerged in world history, completing his monumental work "A Study of History. " Using civilization as the unit of historical study, he elaborated on the entire process of the genesis, growth, time of troubles, breakdown and disintegration of various forms of civilization through his theory of challenge & response, further refining the theoretical framework of Civilizational View of History. German philosopher Karl Jaspers, in his book "The Origin and Goal of History, " proposed the epoch-making concept of "Axial Age". By the 1990s, American scholar Samuel Huntington, in his work "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, " conducted an in-depth study and analysis of various civilizations in the contemporary world, first proposing the theory of clash of civilizations. He argued that the primary source of conflict in the modern world lies in cultural differences, and the global order will be dominated by "the clash of civilizations. "

Furthermore, research on human civilization emphasizes the balance between internationalization and localization, safeguarding and preserving indigenous cultural achievements through legislation and funding. the EU's Horizon Europe program prioritizes cultural heritage conservation and innovation. France has enacted the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts and Loi Toubon, establishing institutions like the Académie Française and civil organizations to promote and protect the French language. New Zealand government funds Maori language and culture research projects. Through laws such as the Māori Language Act, Māori Television Service Act and the Crown's Strategy for Māori Language Revitalisation 2018–2023, the government supports Maori language revival.

2.2 Emphasizing Social Application to Drive Economic Growth

As Derek Bok notes in "Beyond the Ivory

Tower", post-World War II universities transitioned from isolated ivory towers to become central to society, assuming vital social service roles. the humanities and social sciences expanded into the broader arena of economic and social development, providing effective support for political, economic, and societal progress.

2.2.1 Research Orientation of Utilitarianism

The utilitarian research orientation in developed countries traces its conceptual roots to the "Wisconsin Idea" of the early 20th century, proposed by Charles R. Van Hise, the distinguished president of the University of Wisconsin. He advocated that higher education institutions should serve regional economic and social development, emphasizing universities' public mission and social responsibility. Tracing back to the mid-19th century, the American West's agricultural sector faced unprecedented challenges, urgently requiring new agricultural machinery, practical farming techniques, and highly skilled professionals to drive transformation. the University of Wisconsin addressed this by establishing agricultural and mechanical programs, cultivating a large number of urgently needed agricultural technicians and promoting local agricultural development. Additionally, the university actively participated in regional economic planning, public health services, and educational consulting, becoming a "think tank" for state governments and injecting strong momentum into local economic growth. Similarly, the Mississippi Center for Social Sciences has long been committed to comprehensive state development, technological innovation, economic construction, security assurance, educational reform, and technological progress. Its research provides valuable consultation and guidance for scientific decision-making by state governments, leading regional development.

In the 21st century, humanities and social science research institutions in developed countries will increasingly prioritize market-driven approaches. the Horizon Europe initiative places social value at its core, emphasizing research that addresses societal needs, promotes public engagement, and fosters responsible research and innovation. This includes policy adjustments to ensure research better reflects social interests and guarantees that findings are socially acceptable and applicable.

Consequently, the practical benefits of research outcomes hold a pivotal position in the evaluation systems of developed countries' social sciences. the key criterion for assessing research is whether it genuinely serves the long-term development of nations and societies and effectively addresses real-world social issues. Taking the United States as an example, its humanities and social sciences research exhibits a problem-driven approach, prioritizing empirical rigor, practicality, diversity, and a strong emphasis on scientific methodology and innovation. This has significantly influenced government decision-making and social progress. Most research findings are openly accessible to the public, with citizen participation in evaluations. This mechanism not only encourages social engagement in research assessment but also substantially enhances the societal impact of academic work.

As the most mature university research evaluation system in Europe, the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (REF) assesses the quantity, quality, and cost-effectiveness of research across various disciplines. This system serves as the primary basis for the UK government to allocate regular research funding to higher education institutions. Among the three core elements of REF evaluation, "impact" is one of the key criteria. REF2021 defines "impact" as "an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia", assessed on its 'reach' and 'significance', while increasing the weight of the "impact" assessment.

The evaluation criteria cover two dimensions: reach and significance. REF not only highlights the international leadership of UK universities in research quality and output but also vividly demonstrates the real-world contributions of university research, emphasizing the positive benefits it brings to society.

2.2.2Focusing on Applied Discipline

Taking Economics as an Example. the University of Chicago, with its outstanding research capabilities and profound academic heritage, has nurtured globally renowned academic schools such as the "Chicago School of Economics" and pioneered the interdisciplinary field of law and economics, establishing itself as a world-class academic hub in social sciences like economics and law. Its flagship discipline—economics—has accumulated 33 Nobel Prizes in Economics,

exerting profound influence on the global economics community. the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) also demonstrates exceptional strength in economics. Among its 97 Nobel laureates, 34 are economics winners, accounting for over one-third. At Stanford University, 26 out of 83 Nobel laureates are economics winners, highlighting its robust economic prowess.

2.2.3Serving National Strategic Needs

Since World War II, the United States has deeply understood the importance of social sciences in serving national strategies, extensively recruiting experts and scholars in the field of social sciences to engage in war research and vigorously supporting the development of social sciences. During the Cold War, to engage in comprehensive confrontation with the Soviet Union, the U. S. government increased funding for social science research to support its Cold War policy studies, quickly surpassing the scale of support from private foundations. Experts in the field of social sciences played an irreplaceable and significant role in war research and Cold War policy-making, ultimately establishing the important position of social sciences in serving national strategies. the successful launch of the Soviet satellite undoubtedly sounded the alarm for the United States. the U. S. Congress passed the National Defense Education Act the following year, explicitly stipulating the need to study the language, history, economy, society, and geography of regions and countries that the U. S. urgently needed to understand, and providing financial support. At the same time, the act established the "Regional Expert Training" program to train and supply specialized talents in diplomacy, intelligence, and public policy for the government. Additionally, the U. S. Department of State, in line with the Cold War needs of the United States, proposed a series of research topics and thesis topics related to China and contracted them to social scientists through the Ford Foundation.

Amidst the profound transformations reshaping the world in the 21st century, the U. S. Department of Defense initiated the "Minerva Initiative" in 2008. This large-scale social science research program aims to conduct comprehensive studies on the social, cultural, and political dynamics of nations and regions with strategic interests globally. By doing so, it seeks to enhance the Department's understanding of these areas, develop more precise and effective countermeasures for military operations involving national security, and cultivate a new generation of researchers and policy analysts dedicated to addressing national security and technological challenges.

To serve national strategies, the government has assembled experts in the field of social sciences to form a "think tank, " which operates routinely to produce ideas, construct theories, provide methods, seek consensus, supply talent, educate the public, and serve as a "second channel" for government diplomacy. According to the "2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report" released by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program of the University of Pennsylvania, the number of think tanks in the United States reached 2, 203, firmly ranking first in the world, nearly twice that of China. Among them, 38 are from Western Europe and 16 from the United States in the top 100 list of leading think tanks. Regarding the recent important international issue of carbon emissions, the UK Research and Innovation proposed in February 2022 that social sciences will play a key role in achieving the UK's net-zero carbon emissions target by 2050. It also invested £6.25 million to support a five-year Collaborative Climate and Environment Social Science Programme, leveraging the role of social scientists in theoretical research and policy-making to develop innovative solutions for reducing carbon emissions and provide intellectual support to the government and industries.

2.3 Attracting Global Talents to Build World-Class Excellence

2.3.1Attracting Global Talent

Developed countries leverage their world-leading higher education systems to draw in the most promising young scholars worldwide. Jane Knight, in her analysis of internationalization in higher education, noted that the number of international students surged from 238, 000 in the 1960s to 3.3 million by 2008, with projections indicating a peak of 7.8 million by 2025. [7] These countries integrate the attraction of international students with national policies in science, technology, trade, and immigration, recognizing this as a critical component of 21st-century intellectual competition.

Developed countries have demonstrated remarkable foresight and inclusiveness in talent acquisition. Guided by principles of diversity,

equality, and inclusiveness, they attract innovative scholars with top-tier working conditions and generous benefits. A prime example is the U. S. Immigration Act of the 1990s, which introduced policies to attract global talents. the Outstanding Talent Program provides fast-track immigration for exceptional achievements in science, arts, education, and business. Specialized visas like H-1 visas target technical professionals with master's or doctoral degrees, addressing talent shortages caused by America's rapid information and knowledge economy. A significant number of talents flow from developing to developed countries. These nations build inclusive research ecosystems with interdisciplinary backgrounds, diverse work experiences, and cross-cultural perspectives. Through lifetime tenured positions, independent research grants, and long-term project support, they cultivate fertile ground for innovation.

2.3.2Constructing a Global Academic Organization

From a sociological perspective, Emile Durkheim posited in his seminal work "The Division of Labor in Society" that division of labor constitutes both a natural progression and outcome of human societal development. Its "true function" lies not in economic optimization but in achieving social cohesion. Durkheim argued that division of labor serves as both the wellspring of social solidarity and the bedrock of moral order. While specialization assigns distinct roles to individuals, the bonds between them remain unbroken—instead, they grow stronger through mutual dependence and reinforcement. This interdependent relationship ultimately forms a new social unifying force: organic solidarity.

As the embodiment of social division of labor in the realm of knowledge, academic organizations have evolved in accordance with this principle. With the continuous refinement and deepening of disciplines, academic organizations have emerged as platforms for scholars to engage in academic exchange, collaboration, and research. In developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, humanities and social sciences academic organizations have gathered numerous experts and scholars for in-depth exchanges and cooperation, collectively advancing disciplinary development. These organizations not only hold international academic conferences annually but also publish various academic journals, serving as vital platforms for academic communication and dissemination. Through specialized or comprehensive research, they stand alongside government research institutions and higher education institutions as a tripartite force, collectively driving the progress of humanities and social sciences. They are often referred to as the "invisible college. "

Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association is the world's largest academic organization in anthropology, uniting anthropologists globally to drive knowledge innovation, scientific research, and technological advancement through international collaboration. With 12, 000 registered members, the association hosts an annual conference featuring thousands of anthropologists worldwide and publishes 17 journals. Its 38 major divisions span interdisciplinary fields. [8] AAA's funding comes from diverse sources such as membership fees, conference revenues, publication income, donations, and revenue from divisions and seminars. These funds are strategically allocated to management, conference organization, publishing, marketing, institutional development, public education, and academic practice, ensuring the association's continuous vitality.

2.3.3Dominating Top Research Fields

Developed countries have established global academic leadership in multiple disciplines through their long-standing solid foundation in basic scientific research, substantial R&D investments, robust innovation ecosystems, and extensive international collaboration networks. the 2023 "Catalog of Discipline Classification for Overseas Universities (Humanities and Social Sciences)" conducted comprehensive evaluations across 13 internationally recognized humanities and social science fields, including Economics, Law, Philosophy, History, Literature, Education, Linguistics, Psychology, Sociology, Management, Political Science, Art, and Archaeology. the assessment revealed Harvard University's dominance in nine disciplines, while the University of California, Berkeley, Stanford University, Oxford University, and the University of Amsterdam each ranked first in four other fields. Additionally, according to the "2024 Research Frontier Index" report, the United States maintained its top position in research frontier heat in economics, psychology, and other social sciences, followed by the United Kingdom in second place, including regional contribution and regional influence. [9]

2.4 Harnessing Science and Technology to Drive Interdisciplinary Integration

2.4.1Application of Advanced Science and Technology

For decades, developed countries have leveraged their technological leadership to drive paradigm shifts in scientific research and shape its discourse frameworks. In 2007, as big data technology gained momentum, Jim Gray, a Turing Award-winning computer scientist, envisioned a transformative shift in scientific methodology, defining Data-Intensive Scientific Discovery as the "Fourth Paradigm" of science. [10] Social sciences subsequently embraced this new paradigm with unprecedented awareness and speed. In 2009, David Lazer and colleagues pioneered computational social science through their landmark paper "Computational Social Science" in the prestigious journal Science. [11] As an interdisciplinary fusion of social sciences and computer science, computational social science has profoundly influenced multiple fields including sociology, economics, political science, management, and psychology, driving methodological innovation across these disciplines. Recent breakthroughs in artificial intelligence have propelled scientific research into its fifth paradigm centered on AI. Social scientists are now actively exploring and rigorously testing AI-enhanced research approaches, creating a vibrant new frontier in social science methodology. [12]

In recent years, developed countries have made remarkable progress in the field of Digital Humanities, which employs computational technologies, big data analytics, 3D visualization, text mining, GIS techniques, and virtual reality to redefine the research paradigm of humanities disciplines, making them more dynamic, interactive, and visually engaging. American universities lead the world in the number, systematization, and diversity of digital humanities programs and educational research. [13]

Meanwhile, countries are stepping up efforts to build digital infrastructure for humanities, including establishing databases and open-access platforms. In 2009, Europe launched the Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities project. This initiative, involving partners from 14 European nations, aims to provide researchers in arts and humanities with a shared digital resource platform. the Synergy platform, funded by the Canada Innovation Foundation, is a collaborative project among 21 Canadian universities. Its goal is to create a national portal that consolidates scattered research findings, thereby enhancing the impact and accessibility of social sciences and humanities research.

2.4.2Promoting Interdisciplinary Integration

In the 1950s, social scientists led by Christian Aspalter developed an "disciplinary integration" strategy to secure funding from the National Science Foundation for social science research. By the 1960s-70s, based on highly specialized disciplinary systems, the convergence of disciplines became an inevitable trend in scientific development, ushering in what was termed the "era of interdisciplinary research. " In the 1990s, Michael Gibbons and his team conducted in-depth analysis of knowledge production, identifying fundamental transformations in its mechanisms and creatively proposing "Model 2" of knowledge production. [14] Compared to the traditional "Model 1, " "Model 2" emphasizes knowledge innovation through close "interdisciplinary" collaboration within "application contexts. " This new paradigm undoubtedly provides powerful impetus for interdisciplinary integration. Against this backdrop, universities in developed countries have established research centers and institutions dedicated to fostering cross-institutional, cross-disciplinary, and cross-domain collaboration, while continuously expanding interdisciplinary programs to cultivate high-caliber professionals meeting modern societal demands. In 2004, Oxford University established the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, which is renowned for its multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. It integrates perspectives from anthropology, economics, political science, history, international relations, and sociology, and is recognized as one of the largest communities of regional studies scholars in the world, boasting abundant academic resources and extensive international influence. Germany's "Exzellenzstrategie" initiative supports universities in establishing interdisciplinary research centers through "Exzellenz clusters" and Exzellenz allianzen. These clusters typically involve experts from natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, and other disciplines, covering a wide range of cutting-edge research fields. [15]

Table 1. Annual Changes in the Number of Programs within the 'Multi-/Interdisciplinary Studies'

Year	1985	1990	2000	2010	2020
Number	10	11	24	32	66

Meanwhile, universities in developed countries continue to expand interdisciplinary programs. According to the U. S. Classification of Instructional Programs, "Multi-/Interdisciplinary Studies" programs has grown from 10 to 66 by 2020 (Table 1), reflecting the trend of interdisciplinary integration and the rapid development of emerging disciplines. Additionally, interdisciplinary programs in social sciences are also increasing. the problem-centered knowledge production model has replaced the traditional discipline-centered approach, while the complexity and global nature of contemporary issues have deepened the integration of natural and social sciences. Notably, in 2018, the International Council for Science and the International Council for Social Sciences merged to form the International Science Council, which has become the world's most comprehensive scientific organization with the broadest membership and most diverse academic disciplines. Known as the World Science Alliance, this entity demonstrates the strong trend of interdisciplinary convergence in the global scientific community.

2.4.3 Cultivating Emerging Research Fields

In 2021, the European Union launched the major research and innovation initiative "Horizon Europe" (2021-2027), covering key areas such as green transition, digital transformation, biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation to address global challenges. the "Responsive Mode Funding" from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council explicitly prioritized the application and integration of artificial intelligence technology in social science research.

3. Conclusion

The development of humanities and social sciences in developed countries, based on the cumulative effects of history, focuses on supporting innovation and serving society. It promotes academic progress through interdisciplinary collaboration, international networks, and digital tools, with talent as the driving force. They delve deeply into cutting-edge fields and innovate in emerging areas, never ceasing to explore. Their experience shows that humanities and social sciences are not only carriers of cultural heritage but also key forces in shaping future society.

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