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Area studies
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A Reexamination of Rockefeller Foundation
Program in Area Studies

Area - 2

by C. B. Fahn

The development of Far Eastern and Russian studies was one of the objectives pursued when The Rockefeller Foundation first established a program in the Humanities in the early 1930's. The work then initiated has been expanded over the years to include other major areas of the world, has been participated in actively by the Division of Social Sciences, and has remained a sizable element in Foundation program ever since. Policies were thoroughly reexamined by the officers in 1947 and 1948. By 1954, however, The Rockefeller Foundation had been in this field for more than twenty years. Since the War the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation had also supported area studies with sizable appropriations. There were some signs of unemployment of Ph.D. graduates and a number of the programs started with Rockefeller Foundation assistance had failed to achieve the degree of stability and local support originally hoped for. A variety of reasons, therefore, led the officers to undertake in the summer and early fall of 1954 a reexamination of policy in this field. A special effort was made to consult University administrators and professors as to how the situation now looked from their points of view. While time has permitted calls at only a sample of the interested institutions these visits together with normal officer contacts give a reasonably good picture of the situation. Tentative conclusions are outlined here.

From the inception of aid in the 1930's, the problem has been to find ways in which the scope of our education, our research, and our intellectual grasp can be expanded to meet the needs of the shrunken and interdependent world of the second half of the twentieth century. Since American education has been primarily oriented toward western Europe this has meant special concern for studies of eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America and other "unusual areas." The initial objective was primarily cultural but as the international crisis developed in the late 1930s the programs which The Rockefeller Foundation had sponsored became important assets in the development of language and area training for the Armed Forces. Since the War, with the United States catapulted into world leadership, it has been necessary to pursue simultaneously the dual objectives of cultural enrichment and the strengthening of national capacities for sound foreign policy. Training of experts, support for research, expansion of undergraduate instruction, and changes in the scope of the established disciplines have all been involved.

The complexity and magnitude of the problem should not be underestimated. What is required is the restructuring of intellectual and research concerns on an unprecedented scale. While interest in Arabic studies in England goes back to Roger Bacon (he was accused of being pro-Saracen), on the whole the geographic expansion of humanistic interests has come late: Byzantine and American came to importance only in the twentieth century. The educational problems of the world era now upon us cannot be met merely by superimposing new courses or institutes but will require rethinking of curricula in ways which perhaps cannot now be foreseen. It is entirely reasonable that such a development should require much more than twenty years. Progress has been impressive even though it falls short of national needs and officer hopes. The original objectives seem more urgent than ever before and there appears

to be no acceptable alternative to continued perseverance and slow advance.

The question can still be raised whether this should be a continuing Rockefeller Foundation responsibility in view of the pioneering we have already done and the recent entrance of others into the field. A number of reasons lead the officers to believe that the Foundation should continue to be active: there are few state, business or individual sources for funds for this work and there is ample room for the three foundations now active; The Rockefeller Foundation has the longest experience and probably the most extensive staff knowledge; we have something in the nature of a moral commitment to scholars and institutions we have encouraged; close relations with competent scholarships in the United States on foreign areas is an important asset in our work overseas.

Liaison with the two other major foundations has always been good in the area studies field although there has been no concerted policy. Liaison continues particularly necessary in considering major new centers of graduate training and research. Carnegie and Ford are both already active in African studies and it is recommended that The Rockefeller Foundation enter this field only if we undertake more extensive projects in Africa itself which make a deeper relation to studies in this country seem desirable. The other major foreign area most neglected in the United States is India-Pakistan and here we recommend major RF action if the officers should find a suitable location before Carnegie or Ford should do so. Where an India-Pakistan program should be undertaken cannot now be predicted since it requires a crystallization of institutional and faculty interest which has not yet taken place. Additional limited help for work on smaller neglected areas - e.g. Korea - will also be necessary and is particularly appropriate for us in those cases in which such work can logically best be developed in connection with larger centers in which we already have an interest. Foundation initiative is still needed in encouraging concern for areas of national importance which nevertheless risk neglect by the American educational system because they seem of relatively low priority in any single University picture.

Much of the earlier assistance of The Rockefeller Foundation has been based on the assumption that after a limited period of Foundation support the recipient university will be able to continue and to develop the area project without Foundation aid. In a few cases this has been realistic. But at some other places personnel has recently had to be dropped or programs are now in a precarious position. While weakness in most cases is due to poor institutional planning and failure to limit commitments to a manageable number of areas as much as to lack of long-term foundation financing, it is also true that even at the stronger centers much remains to be done in subject coverage and adequate contact with the field. A more liberal financing policy is probably essential to secure attention to the more difficult areas. Even at the strongest of the present programs modest endowment would do much to assure continuity and give confidence to staffs by providing a focus for university interest, budget allocations, and current giving. In the few centers where there is good leadership combined with firm university support and a limited area commitment more adequate financing would also help to relieve the pressure on the Foundation for small grants. We recommend, therefore, as funds are available over the next several years, a limited number of capital grants to a few of the institutions at which the Foundation has supported area programs. Matching should not be required and the sums appropriated should be available for long-term financing or endowment at the option of the recipient.

Thus far the discussion has been primarily relevant to centers of graduate training and research. As already indicated, however, there are already signs of overproduction of Ph.D.'s in some fields - e.g. Chinese studies, Japanese studies, and even Russian studies. The problem has long been recognized by the officers but has been made more obvious during the last two years by a marked reduction in government employment of area-trained graduates. The only solution which appears feasible and the only one consonant with the long-term objective of broadening intellectual horizons is wider utilization in non-specialized undergraduate instruction of personnel trained on unusual areas. There appear to be three possible lines of development. The first is the recognition of an area major as one legitimate pattern of education for life. This would be something like the "Greats" course of classical studies at Oxford but applied to other areas than Greece or Rome. While this is in effect what results from some of the present undergraduate area majors (since specialized area jobs are few) such majors have generally been justified as training for special careers in relation to the area studied and the intellectual quality of the courses may be questioned. The second possibility is the use of area courses as part of required general education sequences which supplement rather than replace professional majors. Something of this sort is being tried at Occidental College and Colgate University but the concept has not been widely accepted. The third possibility is the wider introduction of material from non-European cultures into courses in the usual disciplines such as political science, economics, philosophy, history, and literature. Each of these possibilities has been explored by the officers during the last several years but results have been few and slow. There appear now to be increasing opportunities, particularly for the broadening out of the scope of attention in the established disciplines. Much of the progress during the next few years seems likely to come through the isolated efforts of young scholars with area training who find employment in the smaller colleges or universities without area programs where they must fight for a foothold for their special interests in departments which have initially at most a casual concern. This is a haphazard process and will result in considerable wastage of manpower and resources, but there are now many more young scholars in such positions than there were only a few years ago and wastage should be kept to a minimum. Help is needed on a very selective basis for the most promising of these men - particularly those well enough trained in both area and discipline to achieve a real infusion of new ideas into the latter. It may prove possible to provide some help of this sort indirectly through substantial grants to one or more of the major area centers. But on the whole there seems to be no way to avoid continued extensive direct Rockefeller Foundation activity of a retail character through fellowships, grants in aid and small grants.

Needs of this sort are not confined to the United States and in recent years The Rockefeller Foundation has assisted a number of area studies programs abroad, American studies in Germany, Great Britain and Japan being the outstanding examples. Abroad there is no competition from Carnegie and little along these lines from Ford. The problem for the officers is a complex one, however. On the one hand curricula and university organization, both formal and informal, vary greatly from country to country and the methods for absorption of new elements which are applicable in the United States may not be applicable in another country. On the other hand most of the experience in area studies is American experience and the officers may frequently recognize both problems

and possibilities which it is difficult for those without similar experience to see. There needs to be both flexibility to meet local situations and firmness in avoiding some of the mistakes which have been made here. On the whole the officers feel that the projects aided abroad have been successful and we should like to continue working internationally in this field.

The major changes in policy recommended here are few - principally greater readiness to consider capital grants at a few selected centers. We believe that the general course followed by the Foundation in area studies during the last twenty years has been a sound one. But the job is only partly done. The later activity of the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation should be considered a confirmation of Rockefeller Foundation judgment, not a reason for our withdrawal.

In recommending a continuation of support for area studies, the officers are not, however, simply expressing a vote of confidence in the program of the past twenty years. New areas (India-Pakistan, Africa) must be added to the American educational scene; new efforts must be made to increase knowledge and awareness of non-Western areas in liberal education at the undergraduate level; methods of improving the interrelationship of disciplines within an area-studies framework must be explored and aided. The applicability of procedures used in the study of the unusual areas to better known regions (such as Europe) deserves study. To these problems as well as to the more familiar ones experienced during that last two decades the officers propose that the RF turn its attention.

Charles B. Fahs

October 24, 1954