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The Rockefeller Foundation and the International Funding of Science (1920s-1950s)

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The history of the Rockefeller Foundation's international science policy highlights the pivotal role American philanthropic organizations played in the knowledge-building process during the 20th century.

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The involvement of American philanthropic foundations in scientific research was just one indicator of how increasingly complex the process of constructing and using scientific knowledge was becoming in the 20th century. Charitable trusts participated in the new process, which involved growing numbers of players, increasingly sophisticated logistics, higher and higher amounts of funding and continuous internationalization. In the 1920s, their financial power made them leading players in the world of international science. Moreover, their pro-active networking helped put them at the center of a galaxy of stakeholders involved in constructing and using scientific knowledge.

The history of the Rockefeller Foundation's international policy highlights the crucial, complex role played by American philanthropic organizations. It underwrote funding for international scientific research that, in many respects, was a vehicle for exporting an American model considered in the early 20th century as an inspiration to the rest of the world. But seeing the RF as nothing more than a one-way conduit of Americanization is too simplistic. The history of its international policy is above all one of multiple interactions between the foundation and the recipients of its support. It combined financial power and geopolitical domination (in the interwar period but especially after 1945) with a relationship of trust and conflict between it and its partners.

An international scientific policy

The Rockefeller Foundation's main characteristic is that it sprang from, and owes its considerable financial resources to, American capitalism. In 1913, oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller chartered the charitable trust, which was endowed with $100 million in capital transferred from Standard Oil stocks. With others, such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Russel Sage Foundation, the RF ushered large foundations with increasingly huge endowments onto the national and international stage. They were followed by the Ford foundation and, more recently, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and George Soros's Open Society Institute.

Thanks to its wealth, the Rockefeller Foundation could implement a science funding policy on a global scale from the outset. The goal, set forth in the early 1920s, was to weave together an international network of strategically located institutions working in their fields of expertise to help solve global contemporary problems, such as endemic diseases, the international economic situation and scientific cooperation. Believing that scientific knowledge could be a vehicle of progress if managed by an illuminated elite that could guide humanity to use it rationally, the Rockefeller Foundation aimed to establish a government of science through various areas of intervention. At the time, it was the pinnacle of American philanthropy, which viewed itself as the primary heir of the Enlightenment. The shipwreck of Europe in the First World War only bolstered this belief. The government of science project was the core of the philanthropic ethos throughout the interwar period, but the massive use of science by the military and the Nazi ideologists shook philanthropists' ironclad faith in its ability to ensure human progress. Consequently, the idea lost much of its luster after 1945, but it remains an undercurrent in philanthropic culture and is still visible today in organizations like the Gates Foundation.

At first, the Rockefeller Foundation focused on public health issues, especially in Latin America, where in 1916 it conducted surveys in many countries, followed by programs to eradicate diseases such as hookworm, malaria and yellow fever. The largest of these took place in Brazil (1923-1940), Argentina (1920-1929), Colombia (1920-1929) and Venezuela (1927-1928).



"Sanitary squad with full equipment, Yellow Fever control", Guayaquil (Ecuador), 1918 (Rockefeller Archive Center, Rockefeller Foundation records, photographs, box 84, folder 1699). Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center

Source: Rockefeller Archive Center

In each place, the foundation was involved in raising awareness and implementing preventive health measures based on work by another Rockefeller organization, the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (founded 1901), which concentrated on finding treatments for those diseases. Between 1913 and 1950, the RF invested $100 million in health programs. During the First World War, they were extended to Europe, especially France, where a massive push to eradicate tuberculosis was underway from 1917, when the United States entered the conflict, to 1923.



Geo Dorival, G. Capon, « Il faut vaincre la tuberculose comme le plus malfaisant des reptiles », 1918 (Rockefeller Archive Center, Rockefeller Foundation records, photographs, series 500.T). Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center

Source: Rockefeller Archive Center

The foundation also mounted campaigns to wipe out malaria in other European countries, such as Greece and Italy. It used American methods (such as introducing fish that eat mosquito larvae), but also probably applied the experience it gained to Europe, Latin America and the United States itself, where it was involved in the eradication of malaria, still partially endemic in the South. From that point on, the foundation's global public health program became more a transatlantic loop than an export of American methods.

The foundation also brought its expertise to bear in the fields of medical research and education by underwriting the creation of institutions. However, the first large-scale project was not in the transatlantic space, but Asia: the Peking Union Medical College, which opened in 1921. The goal was to modernize Chinese medicine by establishing a bridgehead for disseminating American medical science in China through a corps of elite physicians trained at the new school. This strategy was also implemented in Canada (the program to support Canadian medical schools, launched in 1922), Latin America (the São Paulo medical school) and, from the mid-1920s, Europe, where the foundation conducted surveys on the state of medical education in most countries. Some of them led to helping medical schools build new facilities, equip their laboratories and libraries or create professorships in emerging disciplines. The most noteworthy examples are the hospital at University College London (completed 1923), the Université libre de Bruxelles (1928) and the Lyon medical and pharmacy school (1930). The 1930s Great Depression compelled the foundation to scale back its ambitions. The focus shifted to more modest and targeted

funding aiming primarily to support research projects, especially in the fields of medicine and the biological sciences. In the decade between 1929 and 1939, the organization funded over 120 institutions—two-thirds of which were outside the United States—in nearly 30 countries, mainly in Europe (Germany, Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Italy, Poland, Denmark).

This systematically applied policy made the foundation a conduit for the transnational circulation of ideas, practices and organizational models. One running theme was the implementation of an organizational model based on bringing three functions that had been separate in most countries until then—care (the hospital), teaching (the medical school) and research (the laboratory)—together under one roof. This model, which appeared in imperial Germany during the latter half of the 19th century, became widespread in the United States. It was the keystone of the Rockefeller Foundation's medical modernization program and applied wherever possible. In the 1920s and '30s, the organization earmarked substantial funds to reexport the model to the rest of the world, funding many medical schools in the United States, Europe, Latin America and, to a lesser degree, Asia, which met with varying degrees of success. The philanthropic institution was thus less a vehicle for exporting an American model that was itself in development than for re-exporting a German one. It helped lend the project international legitimacy at a time when Germany was discredited for its role in the First World War and no longer looked up to as the scientific model it had been seen as in the late 19th century. In this case, the foundation acted mainly as the conveyor belt for a model that undoubtedly underwent many adaptations in the course of its internationalization, not to mention outright failures, such as the aborted funding of a new medical school in Paris in the 1930s in which it planned to invest a considerable sum of money.

The foundation also carried out its international policy in the field of the social sciences. In 1924, another Rockefeller organization, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM), began funding the creation or development of strategically located social science institutes, including the London School of Economics (first funding in 1924) and the Institut Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales de Genève (founded 1927). In 1929, the LSRM was merged into the Rockefeller Foundation, becoming the Social Science Division. The new entity carried on as before, especially in two fields of study: the current economic situation and international relations. In this capacity, the RF funded dozens of universities and private institutes in the United States (the Foreign Policy Association, Council of Foreign Relations, Harvard and Yale), Canada (the Canadian Institute of International Affairs) and Europe (the Institut Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales de Genève, Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft in Berlin, Centre d'étude de politique étrangère in Paris and Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv).

The Rockefeller Foundation also actively cooperated with international organizations such as the League of Nations, which it continuously funded on a massive scale from 1922 until the organization ceased operating in 1946. This support was provided to technical sections, including the Health Organization, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) and the Economic and Financial Organisation. By funding these precursors of the UN's specialized agencies, the Rockefeller Foundation confirmed its integration into international scientific networks of which the League's technical sections quickly became the crossroads. This enabled the philanthropic organization to expand its activities in countries or fields where it only had a small presence, if any. For example, from 1935 to 1939 it funded the ICIC's International Studies Conference to expand research on the world economy and, after 1929, develop ways of dealing with the Great Depression. To achieve those goals, it did not just fund the ICIC but also underwrote support for many European countries (France, Great Britain, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria) to foster the emergence of interdisciplinary research

teams from different institutions working on international economic issues whose collaboration it sought to encourage. In this way, the Rockefeller Foundation also spurred the reconfiguration of national scientific fields by promoting synergy between disciplines and institutions, with varying degrees of success. Overall, its participation in the League of Nations' activities allowed it to become one of the world's leading scientific organizations between the wars. The foundation continued this policy after 1945, although less intensively, by collaborating with Unesco and other specialized UN agencies, on which studies would be welcome.

The Rockefeller Foundation forged long-term relationships with most of these national and international institutions; sometimes the funding spanned both decades of the interwar period. The Second World War interrupted most of these ties, but they were quickly reestablished. By autumn 1944, the foundation's officers were traveling the length and breadth of Europe, both East and West, to reconnect with institutions and researchers with which it had had a relationship before 1939. Most of them were in dire need of American money to rebuild their facilities and make up for the knowledge lost by the death or imprisonment of their researchers and the five-year interruption in the flow of scientific publications to libraries. They received support until the mid-1950s. Meanwhile, American laboratories were running at full speed. After 1945, then, the foundation's aid served to bring universities and laboratories up to standard, primarily in Western Europe after the Iron Curtain split the continent down the middle in 1947. In the latter half of the 1950s, the RF gradually turned away from Europe to focus on developing countries, especially in Asia, where, in association with the Ford Foundation, it concentrated on agronomical issues stemming from the green revolution.

Science management and the circulation of knowledge

From 1920 to 1960, the Rockefeller Foundation played a pivotal part in constructing, using and circulating knowledge not only through its funding, but, more importantly, as a science management organization whose flexible, complex technical and administrative structure served an intellectual project.

The organization was flexible because it was left to a sovereign Board of trustees—a balance of academics, businessmen and people with connections to the federal government—to decide how to disburse its financial resources. While completely independent of politics (the foundation relies entirely on privately funding), it always paid attention to how its actions, especially international ones, might affect American foreign policy. That was especially the case when the board included former or future government officials, such as business lawyer John Foster Dulles, who became chairman in 1950 between stints as an advisor to the Secretary of State and Secretary of State himself. There was one red line that the foundation would not cross: American national interest. But the organization and the government did not always share the same idea of national interest, and the two were at odds on several occasions. Two illustrative examples are its support for the League of Nations and its aspiration in the early 1950s to develop relations with Eastern European scientists at a time when the United States and the Soviet bloc were staring each other down.

The foundation's complexity becomes apparent below the board level. It had several *divisions* whose names changed between the 1920s and 1950s, although their program areas remained mostly the same: public health, medical education and research, the biological and social sciences and the humanities. This structure, patterned after the organization of universities into schools and departments, demonstrates that the foundation not only distributed money, but also participated in expanding scientific knowledge. The *divisions* were led by officers who were often, at least until the 1950s, trained academics (for example, Warren Weaver, who headed the Natural Science Division from 1932 to 1959). It was left to them to

identify priority program areas and fund institutions doing groundbreaking research in those fields. The officers nurtured relationships with scientists from dozens of countries and were constantly traveling to negotiate the conditions of the foundation's support with researchers, administrators and policymakers. Wearing different hats and straddling several different worlds, they were the linchpins of the foundation's policy, endowing it with a global dimension while sticking as closely as possible to the reality of local conditions, of which they sometimes had extremely detailed knowledge, if biased by their dual perspective as Americans and science managers.

Local conditions varied depending on the time and country, so the foundation based its science policy on a wide range of funding that changed over the course of decades but always encompassed the same three main areas. The first was the construction of buildings. This primarily took place in the early 1920s but was gradually abandoned, with a few exceptions, due to the high cost. Nevertheless, it had the symbolic advantage of concretely expressing the foundation's commitment to promoting "the well-being of mankind" (according to its 1913 charter) in brick and stone. The second was collective research projects, which began in the 1930s and continued throughout the following decades. Teams received more or less large sums of money to carry out specific programs. The third was the fellowship program, which began in 1917 and became one of the foundation's hallmarks. Promising researchers received funding for variable lengths of time (from several months to several years) to carry out projects outside their country of origin. Between 1915 and 1970, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded fellowships to about 9,500 individuals in 88 countries and invested nearly a billion dollars in the program: 5% of its total budget. It literally became a scientific travel agency, i.e., a key institution involved in increasing the circulation of knowledge during the 20th century.

The fellowship program was much more than a vehicle of American influence. Scientists from around the world went to the United States to become familiar with American methods and know-how before reexporting them to their home countries. But they also brought their knowledge with them, pollinating the American education and research system. Well before the brain drain, which began in the 1950s, reached its peak, the Rockefeller Foundation brought thousands of scientists to the United States, where they not only took advantage of the excellent working conditions in laboratories, but also contributed their knowledge. The fellowship program also served as an organizational model for many institutions, especially international ones, which adopted it almost as is. This began as far back as the exchange program for health officials set up by the League of Nations Health Organization in 1922. It continued after the Second World War with the United Nations Economic, Cultural and Social Organization (founded 1945), the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA, 1946), the World Health Organization (WHO, 1948) and similar UN agencies, especially those aiming to help developing countries.

All the Rockefeller Foundation's funding underwent a selection and monitoring process based on complex logistics. This allowed the philanthropic organization to be at the crossroads of players and flows and, consequently, to play a role in organizing the international scientific field. The officers were again at the heart of the machine. They were responsible for what is probably the Rockefeller Foundation's most recognizable trademark: personal relationships with its partners. Their many transatlantic trips and frequent visits to laboratories that were likely to receive or had requested a renewal of funding laid the groundwork for trusting relationships with some of the foundation's beneficiaries. Sometimes they even forged an "alliance" by advising them on how to submit an application that would probably meet with the trustees' approval. Lastly, they nurtured a large network of personal contacts by fostering ties with former recipients, who may occasionally have been asked to review new project proposals submitted to the foundation or to recommend young researchers working under them for a fellowship. In some cases, these

personal, long-standing ties led the Rockefeller Foundation to become a partner in maintaining or renewing local university dynasties. The personal relationship between the philanthropic organization and its recipients could blur the lines between national allegiances as well as between donor and beneficiary, although they never quite disappeared.

At the heart of science

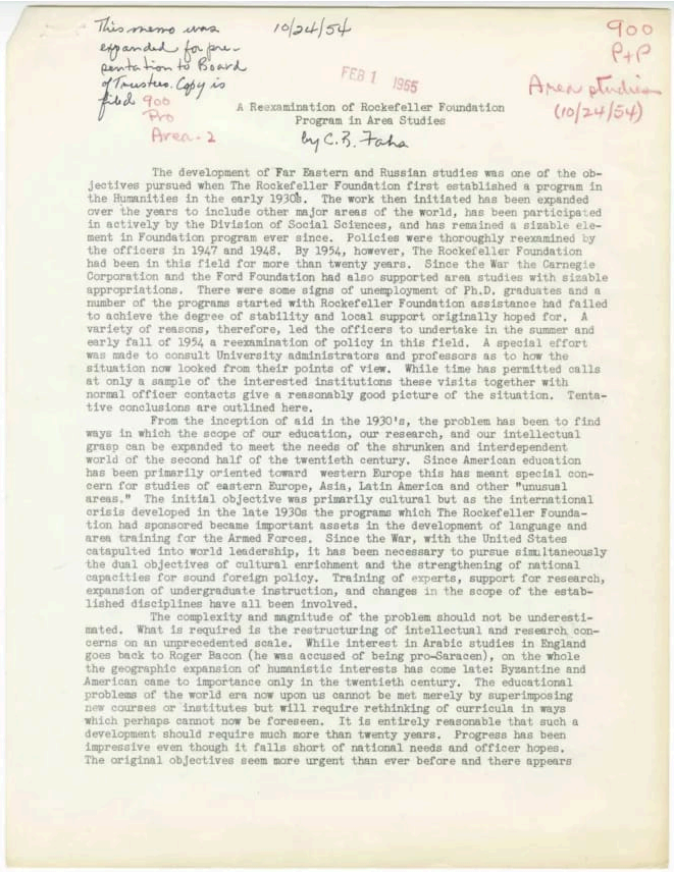
Between the wars, the Rockefeller Foundation's financial power and vigorous approach to building relationships made it a pivotal player in the reconfiguration of the natural sciences, the humanities and the social sciences in various countries. This was clearly the case in France, the foundation's main, but by no means only, theater of operations in Europe. More importantly, France is one of the few countries where the foundation's varied activities can be observed on a large scale over a long period of time. The RF had a continuous presence there from 1917 to the early 1960s, interrupted only by the Second World War. Its initiatives were part of several important processes. The first was the creation of a national public health policy by mounting the antituberculosis campaign mentioned above (1917-1923). The second was the RF's financial support for setting up a national public health agency. This was notably the case from 1925 to 1934, when it funded the Office National d'Hygiène Sociale (National Social Health Office), which played a role halfway between an epidemiological observatory and a national health policy coordinator. In the process, the Rockefeller Foundation made the case for the centralization of health policy. Sometimes, it was even more radical in this respect than the French were, at a crucial time when health was still seen as a private matter and the new idea of "public health" still marginal.

The foundation also played a noteworthy role in France by connecting two areas: medical education, by encouraging the inclusion of the biological sciences in medical school programs; and biomedical research, by funding collaboration between doctors and biologists to foster the growth of interdisciplinary fields that emerged in the 1920s, such as biochemistry and molecular biology. Its backing for researchers and laboratories in the 1950s largely contributed to the institutionalization of those two disciplines. So did the activism of its former recipients, who encouraged the trend when they reached policymaking positions at major institutions. In the mid-1920s, individuals and laboratories at the universities of Strasbourg, Marseille and Lyon, the Institut Pasteur, the Collège de France and the Institut de Biologie Physico-Chimique (Institut Rothschild) received funding. Several trailblazers in the fields of biochemistry and molecular biology, including Claude Fromageot, Pierre Desnuelle, Pierre Grabar and Jean Roche, were awarded fellowships. After 1945, the foundation continued funding universities as well as the Centre national de la Recherche scientifique (CNRS). In the late 1950s and the 1960s, other former foundation fellows, including biologist Jacques Monod, played a crucial role in putting molecular biology on France's scientific agenda, in part following the model of the California Institute of Technology, where he was a fellow in 1936 alongside Boris Ephrussi.

The foundation was also deeply involved in the social sciences. As early as the mid-1920s, its officers scoured Parisian universities looking for researchers likely to contribute to the development of certain fields (economics, political science, sociology). They especially sought to foster synergy between these academics and bring them together in a social science community sharing a common methodology. In the process, the foundation was as much a benefactor as an intellectual partner of Parisian universities, with which it maintained a sometimes-conflictual dialogue. In the mid-1930s, the effort led to a social science federation project that was more a co-production than the imposition of a hypothetical American model. Its broad outlines came into sharper focus as the foundation developed contacts with local players, notably

economist Charles Rist, anthropologist Marcel Mauss and University of Paris rector Sébastien Charléty. After 1945, the endeavor continued with other partners. From 1948 to the late 1950s, the Rockefeller Foundation was fully involved in the development of two major French university institutions: the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, where it contributed to developing the fields of international relations (with Jean Baptiste Duroselle) and economic studies (with Jean-Marcel Jeanneney); and Section Six of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), the forerunner of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, where its funding fostered the development of the "aires culturelles" under Fernand Braudel.

However, "aires culturelles" in France cannot be seen as the mere transfer of the American model of "Area studies", in which charitable trusts, especially the Rockefeller Foundation, were also involved. Acknowledging the provincialism of US universities, in the 1930s the organization began underwriting support for foreign civilization programs and granting fellowships to researchers focusing on Latin American, European, Middle Eastern and Asian studies. But it was mainly after 1945 that Area studies developed in the American university system. The Second World War's global dimension and the problems following in its aftermath, which the US government had foreseen since 1940, revealed the need for experts with knowledge of parts of the world where the United States anticipated intervening at one point or another. In 1946, 13 American universities had Area studies departments, a number that rose in the following years. They were interdisciplinary, including languages, sociology, history, international relations and other fields. The purpose was to train not only university researchers, but also future policymakers and diplomats. The leading philanthropic organizations actively backed these programs, which dovetailed with the internationally-oriented intellectual agenda they had pursued since the 1920s. In 1929, Area studies became part of the Rockefeller Foundation's Humanities Division, whose first fellow, in 1933, worked outside the transatlantic space because he was an Asia expert. The scale of support for Area studies changed early in the Cold War. From 1946 to 1954, the division invested $8 million in *area studies*, including $800,000 for Columbia University's Russian Institute, created in 1946 to train experts specializing in the United States' new nemesis. The Rockefeller Foundation was not the only charitable trust to underwrite support for Area studies. In 1951, the Ford Foundation entered the field with a record-breaking budget: until the late 1960s, it spent approximately $200 million on Area studies in and outside of the United States.



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Area studies (10/24/54)

A Reexamination of Rockefeller Foundation Program in Area Studies

by C.B. Fahs

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

Charles B. Fahs, “A reexamination of Rockefeller Foundation program in area studies”, 24/10/1954, p. 1/4 (Rockefeller Archive Center, Rockefeller Foundation records, administration, program and policy, RG 3.2, series 900, box 31, folder 165). Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center

Source: Rockefeller Archive Center

The Ford Foundation also funded Section Six of the EPHE, taking up where the Rockefeller Foundation left off when it disengaged from French universities in the late 1950s. But while philanthropic enterprises funded the development of "aires culturelles" programs as Braudel conceived of them, these were only marginally related to American Area studies. More than a Cold War intellectual instrument, they were above all the expression of the long-term world history project developed by Braudel in which the division of the world into areas of civilization has a key place. The historian wanted to set up specialized programs that would be the focus of individual and collective research. His project was far from a carbon copy of American Area studies, but it must not be interpreted as a form of "resistance" against the intellectual imperialism of American foundations that supposedly tried to impose the Area studies agenda, without success. Rather, Braudel advocated marshalling money from a famous American organization with an aura of modernity in order to implement an intellectual agenda based on long-term research. He also wanted to make the project coincide with a reform of the French university system of which he intended to be one of the architects. While the project never reached completion, American foundations did play a decisive role, for it led to the creation of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, but never to the Americanization of French universities.

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