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A Research on Moral Education in American Colleges and Universities and Its Enlightenment

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Abstract:

Rooting in the larger moral education environment of the United States, contemporary American moral education in colleges and universities formed its own specific system. Through analysis of the main characteristics, the basic ways and the major content, this article learns experiences from American moral education and draws enlightenment on that of Chinese colleges and universities.

Keywords: the United States, moral education, research, enlightenment.

As an important part of American higher education, moral education in American colleges and universities has formed its own theoretical system and practice features during the development of more than 200 years. Research on it will help us to deepen understanding of the moral education in colleges and universities and gain experiences by comparison.

1. The Main Features of Moral Education in American Colleges and Universities

With its own features, moral education in American colleges and universities plays an important role in promoting implementation of moral education in the whole country, and has formed a theoretical system conforming to modern moral education. Its main features are as follows:

1.1. Giving prominence to inheritance and global vision

On the basis of the real demand of the students, moral education in American colleges and universities learn from the life model and moral ideals of predecessors with the purpose of helping students to solve the ethical problems by inheriting traditional virtues. In brief, it inherits, improves and develops traditional virtues. It has two main features. First, it guides teenagers to learn about their country's history and politics. Second, it requires teenagers to study

hard and improve overall skills to meet the challenge of future society with global vision because of the requirement of globalization.

1.2. Strengthening political nature and training qualified citizens

In order to ensure the following of basic political principles and directions, American government has made definite requirements to the content and target of moral education. In concrete terms, the government has made many hard and fast rules on the setting-up of political subjects. At the same time, it requires the principles of colleges and universities to be consistent with the spirit of American Constitution and the political claims of the country. Through teaching political and law courses, it urges the students to become a qualified American citizen through identifying with the rationality, authority and inviolability of the political and legal system of the country, understanding the rights and obligations as a citizen and observing laws and disciplines.

1.3. Emphasizing on pluralism and respecting students' personality

Americans respected the value of individualism which provides suitable soil for the pluralism of moral education. According to education law, educators should conform to specific situation and actual needs of each student through teaching them in accordance of their aptitude and bringing their personalities and potentials into full play. In this process, it is essential to combine educators and students as bi-subjects and allow them to play an active role to guarantee larger autonomy of education content and ways. On the basis of respecting students' personalities and giving them freedom to choose, educators should guide them to form moral values conforming to social requirements.

1.4. Focusing on pertinence and combining theory with practice

The contemporary moral education model of the United States has elaborately created a moral theory and put it into practice in the way of "practice-theory-practice". In that way, the theory is linked closely with practice. A famous American educator, John Dewey, has not only created moral education theory of pragmatism which representing the spirit of the state, but also founded the schools to implement the theory into practice. American moral education theorists also attach great importance to mobilize the participation of the educated. They pay great attention to not only the "cognition" and "emotion" of the educated, but also their "behaviour cultivation", thus enhancing the value judgments.

2. The Basic Ways of Moral Education in American Colleges and Universities

American colleges and universities implement moral education through the teaching and learning of social studies and humanities, various practical moral activities, life coaching, psychological counseling and extra-curricular activities. This type of moral education avoids disconnection

between moral principles and students' real moral cognition and moral behavior, and encourages the free development of all kinds of healthy personalities.

2.1. Combining moral education with general education

Classroom teaching is the main channel of moral education in schools. Moral education of American colleges and universities attaches importance to the combination of moral education and general education. The courses and lectures of history and citizenship including Citizen, The Constitution of the U. S., Western Civilization History, Modern Society, and Democratic Problem, as well as courses of language and humans, art and society, religion and ethics, exert an edifying influence on students' morality, moral judgment and consciousness of making choices. This kind of combination contributes to mutual promotion of intelligence, ethics, citizenship and politics.

2.2. Combining campus activities with social activities

Campus activities and social activities are rich and varied in American colleges and universities which have strong function of moral education. Campus activities mainly include sports and self management of students. As a great way of training loyalty to team and public sense, sports often lead to moral discussion of problems arising in the process. American colleges and universities emphasize students' self-management and set up "student leadership program" to provide opportunities for students to participate various campus and social activities. Each campus has a "student governments" and the judicial system. These activities are important for fostering students' sense of team cooperation, consciousness and capacity of consultation, public speaking and financial management skills.

2.3. Combining self-education with psychological consultation

Moral education in American colleges and universities attach great importance to self-education. In the process of teaching, teachers introduce some relatively stable moral principles and values to students, and raise the current ethical, social and political issues facing the community. Through some participatory approaches like discussion, debates, and simulations decision-making or negotiation, students make their own moral judgments. The main functions of psychological consultation are life coaching, study guidance, psychological guidance and career guidance, among which the psychological guidance is of the most noticeable function of moral education. Therefore, if American colleges and universities each have a specialized agency concerned with moral education, it will be the psychological consulting agency. Such institutions provide students with consultation of development, adaptation and obstacles to solve the psychological problems of students which are very beneficial to the healthy growth and moral development of the students.

3. The Main Contents of Moral Education in American Colleges and Universities

Since American higher education has a long history and American moral education theory has fully developed, moral education in American colleges and universities is rich in content, including patriotic education, legal education, ethics education and psychology and education.

3.1. Patriotic education based on the history

Patriotism is generally considered as one of the most essential qualities of American citizens. With a wide range of content and form, the patriotic education in American colleges and universities is mainly achieved through history education. According to American laws, each student is required to sign up for a required course of American history. History lesson has gradually become a very important way of patriotism education. Through introducing the history of the country, the historical spirit and values of developing the country and the culture is passed on to the students to achieve the purpose of patriotic education by arouse their sense of national pride and self-confidence.

3.2. Legal education with the goal of training qualified citizens

American colleges and universities offer courses in politics and law, aims at educating students to be loyal to the State, identifying with social and legal system of the state and learning to be a qualified citizen observing law and discipline. Based on reality, American legal education is very practical. In American colleges and universities, through learning the political system of “separation of the three powers”, the legal system, and citizens’ basic rights and obligations, students could understand the legitimacy, authority and inviolability of the legal system, and build up moral consciousness.

3.3. Integrity-centered moral education

Moral education in American colleges and universities mainly includes social moral education, professional moral education and academic moral education. Social moral education is achieved mainly through building up students’ social responsibility and social ethics by guiding their participation in social activities and their understanding of the society and life. In terms of professional moral education, American colleges and universities focus on implementing it in some required courses of professional ethics and morality. From the very beginning of university period, students have been being educated with academic integrity. The educators regularly check students’ compliance with academic integrity, and focus on building a good environment of academic integrity.

3.4. Personality-centered psychological education

In the United States, free consciousness, optimistic and enterprising spirit and a good healthy personality are the main content of psychological education. The major ways of psychological education in American colleges and universities are psychology teaching and psychological counseling. Psychological education not only provides methods of enhancing mental health and

avoiding and reducing mental problems, but also helps students with mental illness to get rid of the heavy feeling of mental illness. As an important way to ensure students' healthy psychology and personality, psychological education has been greatly recognized and rapid developed in the United States.

4. The Enlightenment of American Moral Education on Chinese Moral Education

Because of different social and cultural background, American moral education model and Chinese moral education model are very different and have their own advantages. Chinese educators should learn from the experiences and achievements of American moral education objectively and rationally to promote the development of moral education in China.

4.1. Setting clear objectives of moral education

Aiming at training qualified citizens, American moral education has clear objectives and layers. The current objective of moral education in China is to help the educated to build up right worldview, outlook on life, and values, to know virtues and do good works, and to develop moral character and healthy philology. In that way, the educated will become responsible men with ideals, ethics, culture and disciplines who could contribute to the construction of the country. The lowest layer of Chinese moral education is to train qualified citizens while the highest layer it to train exemplary citizens who would devote themselves to the people and the modernization construction of the country, thereby gradually improving the pragmatality of moral education.

4.2. Updating moral education ideas

Traditional Chinese moral education in colleges and universities stressed too much on social values and ignored the shaping of students' healthy personality and the developing of students' personality, resulting in some weakening of students' independence, creativity and good psychological quality. The information-based society has increased demand for students' creativity and initiative, which requires moral education in colleges and universities to create a number of citizens with distinctive characteristics of the times, strong subjectivity, independent thinking and innovation when cultivating ideology and morality of students. Therefore, the idea of moral education should be updated, and the idea of people-oriented should be implemented.

4.3. Integrating moral education environments

Moral environment should be integrated. Under the conditions of market economy, governments need to give full play to role of macro-control, make suitable objectives, plans and contents of moral education, and integrate forces of school, family and society. Cultivating students' ideological and moral quality requires not only the school's moral education but also family education and social education. Combination of the three promotes moral education in colleges and universities to move towards opening up and establish a comprehensive, integrated and open

education mode. It is an effective attempt to combine forces from all sides for complement each other's advantages and comprehensive utilization.

4.4. Improving moral education methods

University Moral education in Chinese colleges and universities relies heavily on instilling and lecturing in regular courses taught in the classrooms. Despite the required “two courses”, moral education in Chinese colleges and universities is lacking in educational methods and falls short. In order to perfect the process of moral education, it is necessary to use a variety of educational methods. In addition to the traditional “two courses”, each professional course should include the permeation of ethical awareness. College students are required to not only master the knowledge and professional skills but also understand certain professional ethics and morality.

4.5. Respecting moral education subjects

Due to the influence of traditional Chinese culture, Chinese moral education to some extent neglected the cultivation of students' subjectivity. Traditional moral education mode only requires the educated to unconditionally accept the content of moral education content, and asks them to sacrifice and dedicate themselves to the society. Inheriting the cognition of ethics and morality, modern moral education brings the enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of the educated into full play, and recognizes and respects the principal role and personality of the educated. In that way, the educated could have more independence, creativity and initiative. Once the educated participate actively, the grammaticality of moral education would be greatly enhanced.

4.6. Attaching importance to moral education teams

Moral education in Chinese universities consists of two teams. One is made up of political theory teachers; the other is made up of staff dealing with student affairs. Compared with that of the United States, the two teams are less stable due to low pay. Moreover, many of them are lack of expertise. There are fewer talents of scholar-type and expert-type in the field of moral education. Besides that, the relevant school leaders do not pay enough attention to moral education of teenagers. It is urgent to build up a moral education team with good moral education quality, great professional skills and noble moral characters which could meet the needs of the quality education. Only then can Chinese moral education become more vigorous and effective.

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