



A Comparison and Research on the Sino-U.S Character Education

Baoren Su

Tourism and City Management College, Zhejiang Gongshang University

Hangzhou 310018, China

Tel: 86-571-8766-3687 E-mail: baorens@yahoo.com

Abstract

Character education seeks to develop virtue—human excellence—as the foundation of a purposeful, productive, and fulfilling life and a just, compassionate, and flourishing society. This study was taken in view of the growing importance of character education in P.R.China and United States. Significant differences and similarities were found in mechanism and perceptions about character education in these two countries. The underlying reasons that may account for such differences are discussed extensively.

Keywords: Character education, Educational teaching idea, Educational teaching mode

1. Introduction

With only about two hundreds of years in establishing its state, the United States is quickly developing into a modern country, becoming today's super power and playing an increasingly important role in the world's historical course of development. We know that there are many reasons for why the American society is growing so quickly in a variety of ways, but the one important reason we are sure of is its character education. What is the characteristic of America's character education compared with China's one? How does it make so much of achievement in this matter? As an integral part of modern education, character education has been vested with a fully new meaning in 21 century when many countries in the world are sparing no efforts in pushing for economic, political and social reform, and modern science and technology are playing decisive roles in the social progress and economic development.

Compared with the character education practiced in the advanced countries in the world, especially in America, China's character education is quite later in its development, and therefore, needs to learn to borrow America's beneficial experiences in its development and cultivation of character education mechanism. America is a superpower of science and technology and education in the world. American government has always attached primary importance to developing and improving character education mechanism, and established a complete set of nationwide character education mechanism supported in terms of financial assistance, legislative guarantee, and participation by people from all walks of life. Therefore, it is meaningful for us to make a comparison and research on the current situation and mechanism of Sino-U.S character education

2. The different roles played by American teachers and Chinese teachers in character education

In American education and culture, the function of teachers is to help their students to make a self-realization and to gain knowledge and skills in their studying process. American teachers would not get involved in helping design life future for students, but rather, they would play the roles of mentor of students – giving attention to students' daily learning problems, and offering their help and suggestions. American teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a "capacity for connectedness." They are able to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves. The methods used by these weavers vary widely: lectures, Socratic dialogues, laboratory experiments, collaborative problem-solving. The connections made by American teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts -- the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self. The American school itself embody a good character. It progresses towards becoming a microcosm of the civil, caring, and society we seek to create as a nation. The American school does this by becoming a moral community that helps students form caring attachments to adults and to each other. These caring relationships will foster both the desire to learn and the desire to be a good person. All students have a need to belong, and they are more likely to internalize the values and expectations of groups that meet this need. The daily life of classrooms as well as all other parts of the school environment is imbued with core values such as concern and respect for others, responsibility, kindness, and fairness.

While in Chinese education system, teachers decide students' future in some sense in school and influence students' lifetime to some extent. Chinese teachers are expected to play the role of not only teaching responsibility but also example of morality, which means that Chinese teachers need to be concerned about students' academic performance, take care of students' daily life and safety, focus on students' ideological idea and plan students' lifetime goals after graduation. Under the background of Chinese traditional culture, the Chinese teachers not only need to teach students but also need to "foster" students. That is why the good relationship between teacher and student is often dubbed as "relationship as good as father and son" or "relationship as good as mother and daughter". In some sense, the roles played by Chinese teacher is the overlapping roles of both teacher and parent, and idea of "respecting teacher as sage" is the common attribute for most of Chinese students and teachers. In contrast, what the American teachers do for their students in some more sense is to offer help and suggestions which usually focus on where teachers and students have common concerns and interests. They seldom go beyond the limits of working relationship between teacher and student to mold students in accordance with their own model of idea. In American education, a school's character education mission statement states explicitly what is true: Parents are the first and most important moral educators of their children. Schools also take pains at every stage to communicate with parents about the school's goals and activities regarding character development — and how families can help. To build trust between home and school, parents are represented on the character leadership committee, and all parents need to be informed about — and have a chance to react and consent to — the school's proposed core values and how the school proposes to try to teach them. Finally, schools and families will enhance the effectiveness of their partnership if they recruit the help of the wider community — businesses, religious institutions, youth organizations, the government, and the media — in promoting the core ethical values.

3. Different patterns of participation in classroom activities in Sino-U.S character education

American teachers like to encourage students to take vigorous part in the classroom activities and discussions whether for big class or for seminar, it is because they think students' participation in the classroom discussion is of inherent value and the best way to stimulate students' creative idea. That is why the group project or group discussion in classroom is integral part of the important forms of lecturing presented by American teachers, and the atmosphere of class is very active. American teacher pay much attention to cultivating students' practical capability, independent cognitive ability, and creative mentality. If some of students keep silent all the time in classroom, it will somewhat worry teacher, and he/she will try his/her best to arouse the students to speak out their comments or opinions and get involve in the classroom activities and discussion. In contrast, Chinese students are not quite used to raising questions or comments in classroom. There are seldom student who would put forward their different questions and opinions in classroom by interrupting the teacher's lecturing process. On one hand It is because the Chinese students have been instilled from the very beginning with an idea that teacher is academically authoritative which allows of no challenge, and on the other hand, it is because teacher are afraid that the students' participation in the classroom discussion would make teacher feel out of the control of class, and maybe even they are afraid that the students would ask some of difficult questions that teacher are not able to give an answer, which they feel face-lost. As a matter of fact, they mistakenly position their roles as teacher. They don't know that they are much of limits as a teacher, and they are not educational authority. What is more important for teacher to do is to lead students into a correct way of learning and thinking to arouse their creative capability.

4. Difference of examination system of Sino-U.S character education

In Chinese education system, examination is used as a primary standard to learn how well the students perform academically. It seems that the students' capability should be manifested and realized only through the form of examination, and the examination is the most ultimate authoritative teaching conduct for screening and selecting students. For most of Chinese students of high schools nationwide, to take a national examination of admission into university is their best choice and opportunity for good future life. Although there are different points of view held by many people towards the national examination of admission into university, so far there has been no a better means of selecting talented people than examination. The Chinese students have to continue to strive for good scores of examination, and teachers still have to make great efforts to make students achieve good scores of examination. The schools have to resort to every means to gain high percentage of students' enrollment of university.

In American education system, examination is a means used for teachers to understand students, find students' learning problems and communicate with students. It is used as a form by teacher to collect the information of feedback about teaching results. Generally speaking, American teachers won't assess their students' academic performance only by resorting to one class test, but rather, they would make their assessment of students' performance by means of whole term of homework, classroom performance, quiz, laboratory experiment report, mid-term and final-term examination results. For American students of high schools, if they want to go to study in university they have to take care of their scores made during whole period of term, which include test, homework, lab experiment, classroom discussion and class attendance. As such, universities would count on this comprehensive academic performance to decide the

enrollment of students. The cultivation of students' capability is not merely limited to the classroom, but rather, it is gained through many other different ways such as sports, extracurricular activities, community volunteer services and so on.

5. Contributing factors of development of Sino-U.S character education

5.1 The change of demographic structure leads to the new need for character education.

A great number of Americans receiving character education come from the different groups of people who are attending non-traditional school, and most of them are from various groups of immigrants who are naturalized as American citizens. With more and more immigrants moving to America since 1960s, the size of immigrant population has got huge expansion. However, as the minority group, they do not quite understand American language and culture because of their lower educational level. Therefore, they have very strong desire for learning to survive a new life environment. Meanwhile, the American social and economic development itself needs to transform them, a huge labor force, into human resources to help contribute to its further development. To do so needs American government to provide a certain degree of character education and training for them, including adult education, vocational technical education, long-distance correspondence education, community college education, T.V university long-distance education and so on.

With the increasing rise of American women's social and economic status in recent years on one hand and the gradual dwindling of American family size on the other hand, more and more American women have time to participate in character education. Most of them attend community colleges with two years of schooling to learn specialized technical skills so as to get jobs appropriate for them to do.

The other group of Americans taking character education are amateur learners of older age. With the coming of aging population of American society, many of them want to learn something which will be conducive to raising their health and cultural quality and improving their leisure activities.

5.2 The global economic competition makes character education an objective necessity.

To enhance the global competitive power of American economy has always been the main purpose of American educational policy. Education has been regarded by American government as one of the best means to enhance labor productivities. With the advent of global economic integration, how to make American original structure of labor productive technology and knowledge fit for the global economic competition has become increasingly urgent for American government to find a solution. All this means that a great amount of labor forces are to be reeducated and retrained for the new knowledge and new skills by means of character education.

Character education is the mainstream culture of American society. It has always been advocated by the mainstream culture of American society to achieve success through personal hard work and study. For more and more Americans today, old and young, male and female, the continuous learning in their lives has increasingly become an agreed-on social value as well as a shortcut in their efforts to make success. The traditional one-time education method can no longer meet what they desire to make their dream for personal success come true. Therefore, character education has not merely become a means to make a living in modern society, what is more, has become what they can count on in realization of their dream of life.

5.3 The development of high-tech makes character education a possibility.

1998, the former U.S president Clinton published his administration's report about realization of character education through long-distance information technology, the main idea of which is to take the advantage of the development of modern information technology to provide more and new education opportunity for more Americans in need. The advent of modern information technology has greatly changed people's old learning method and revolutionized the traditional space and time of education, which has made people's education not necessarily confined to a certain place and time. People who live in remote rural areas can enjoy the same level and contents of education as urban people through T.V and computerized long-distance education. Nowadays the providers of education are not only traditional schools and educational institutions but also those industrial and commercial enterprises as well as the organizations from all walks of society.

When making a comparison between China and America for the above-mentioned contributing factors of character education, we can see that while they have something in common there are something different in degree and in kind.

First of all, the China's reform and opening policy practiced since 1980s has led to a great change of China's demographic structure. The expansion of urban cities in size has provided the best possible opportunity for the rural peasants to migrate into cities to live and work as so-called peasant workers (*nongmingong*). The speeding process of urbanization of rural towns has turn huge number of rural populations into urban ones. The rural-urban inequalities signaled by the large income gaps between rural and urban residents, combined with the pervasive problem of labor surplus in Chinese rural areas, have spurred mass rural-to-urban migration since the economic reforms of the 1980s,

when the government started to loosen the control of the movement of population and free people to pursue new sources of income (Xu, 2003). The massive internal migration in the country had accelerated the process of urbanization, with the proportion of urban population doubling and increasing from less than 20% before 1980 to slightly over 40% in 2003. Meanwhile, the urban population increased by 452.1 million within 50 years, accounting for 63% of the total population increase. China's massive rural-to-urban migration has created a rapidly growing special group in the country: the "floating people." The term refers to the unsanctioned migrants: people who migrated to a new location where they do not hold official household registration certificates (*hukou*). The fifth China census shows the floating people in the country to be between 110 and 140 million, which accounts for about 10% of the total population (Liu & Wen, 2004). Either peasant workers or floating people, their educational degree as well as the mastery of vocational skills are relatively lower. It is difficult for them to compete with urban people to make a good living in cities. Therefore, most of them have very strong desire to get a certain degree of education as well as the skill training. Meanwhile, to turn the huge labor force of peasant workers and floating people into human resources fit for the new goal of economic development 21 century is a must for the Chinese government to take in earnest, and needs it to provide all levels and variety of adult education and training as kind of character education.

The economic tide of globalization has without any exception got China involved in the international economic competition. This type of competition, putting it in other words, is in effect a competition for education and for talented people with higher degree of education. In recent 10 years, in order to gear with the global economic competition and optimize labor productive forces, Chinese government has made a resolved and sweeping adjustment and rectification for its economic and productive structural systems, which unavoidably made a lot of employed workers to leave their posts. According to the relevant statistic of 2005, 13 millions of employed workers were forced to leave their working posts before the legal retiring age. Although most of them will get some types of compensations or government's subsidies, they still want to find the new jobs by receiving reeducation and retraining of vocational skills.

Character education is an advanced learning idea. With the development of China's economy and society, especially with the conceptual and ideological change of Chinese people, the idea of character education has been gradually accepted by more and more of them. However, comparatively speaking, Chinese educational idea is still predominated by an orthodox and closed-door school's educational idea, which takes that the purpose of education is just for the obtainment of diploma and degree. The old traditional idea of "education for one-time, useful for all one's life" is still prevailing in today's educational market, which make it very difficult to thoroughly popularize the idea of character education and to make it become the mainstream idea and awareness.

6. The Sino-U.S character education strategy of development

In order to constantly meet the changing demand of people from all walks of society for character education, American government has drawn up a series of flexible education measures and plans and developed a set of standing effective mechanisms of character education, which is characteristic of richness in contents, completeness in structure, and variousness in forms.

6.1 Allowing full play to the role of all walks of society in development of character education.

The American government always takes it seriously that character education is a huge systematic social project and needs various social organizations and industrial and commercial enterprises to get involved as the main providers of character education. The American government spares no efforts to intensify its financial support and policy support in promotion of character education. It stipulates that all social organizations and industrial and commercial enterprises can enjoy the preferential educational policy, the reduction of education taxation and non-interest financial assistance provided by three levels of governments on condition that they take part in opening and managing character education. According to statistics, American government's financial assistance for character education has increased from \$ 202 millions in 1990 to \$ 301 millions in 1997. The U.S government financial assistance also includes the character education scholarship, non-interest student loans, and subsidies of study.

6.2 Reinforcing government's management and research for character education

The character education is both a huge social systematic project and a complicated educational systematic project. Therefore, the American government reinforces its macroscopic regulation and supervision for character education, the purpose of which is to allow full play to the initiative of local social organizations in development of character education, and in the meantime, to reduce the blindness of people's engagement in education. 1996, the American government specifically drew up "national research plan for the development of priority" which set the character education as the subject of priority for development and research. The plan also lists some problems which are related with character education and need to be resolved.

In contrast, Chinese government fails to make an overall plan in mapping out the policy of developing character education, especially fails to establish a set of comprehensive character education laws and statutes with concrete workable measures, which has great bearing on the long-term healthy development of character education, the

guarantee of character education mechanism as well as the enforcement of character education policy.

It is due to the active response and participation of all walks of society that the idea of character education has gone deep and deep into American people's minds. The participation of Chinese social organizations in the character education is far from achieving the social effects as a whole, and much of efforts in developing character education have still been made by Chinese government alone, which is very difficult to accomplish the task of constructing a relatively perfect mechanism of character education.

The development of character education not only needs the support from policy and law but also needs financial support from government. It is because there have been so far no specific law and statutes for character education that Chinese government is not likely to map out the policy to financially support character education. The mechanism of management and research in Chinese character education remains much rooms for improvement. The first step of management mechanism is to set up and improve the system of educational assessment, which is a key link to verify and guarantee the quality of character education. Therefore, the Chinese government needs to establish a set of complete national scientific system of assessment for character education in order to promote the orderly and healthy development of it.

7. Conclusion

Educational systems today are focused on raising standards of academic achievement. However, as we consider the world in which we live, we understand the importance of helping students to learn much more than the subjects they study. Appropriate environments, activities, the arts, and service projects can help students to learn responsibility, compassion, integrity, civility, leadership and cooperation. These and other elements of healthy, well-developed character can be learned by example and opportunities to exercise them. Character education takes deliberate steps to cultivate moral and intellectual virtues through every phase of school life—the example of adults, the relationships among peers, the handling of discipline, the resolution of conflict, the content of the curriculum, the process of instruction, the rigor of academic standards, the environment of the school, the conduct of extracurricular activities, and the involvement of parents. Everything that happens in the life of the school is character education, because everything affects character. With China entering an intellect-based economic era today, the character education has been taken as a basic state policy to revitalize China by virtue of education and science. The importance of character education has gone beyond the significance of character education itself both in terms of its theory and in terms of its practice. It will be advisable for us to learn and make a research into America's character education, for there exist great differences between two countries on either teaching idea of education or teaching mode.

The different cultural tradition of America and China affects two countries' ideas and concepts of character education. Chinese education is centered on the book knowledge with academic examination as its major focus, which is not instrumental to the cultivation of creative capability. The American character education system has a lot of useful practices for us to borrow and learn. It is hoped that Chinese character education will get much improvement by drawing on the beneficial experiences of American character education system.

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