

Comparison of Higher Education between China and America

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Abstract:

Higher education is the centralized embodiment of a country's comprehensive strength. The rapid economic development of China in recent years has promoted the rapid development of higher education, but there is still a gap compared with developed countries. The most mature education model in the world is still the American higher education model, which successfully cultivates many talents with strong independent consciousness and independent innovation ability, and the United States has many enterprises and talents leading the development of high-tech in the world today is a good example. The reason for the success of the American higher education model is that American universities have a comprehensive core curriculum, flexible and diverse teaching activities, an applicable and humane education model, and a diverse campus cultural environment. In contrast, China's higher education is in a critical period of reform, and there are many areas that need to be improved. With the strengthening of educational exchanges between China and the U.S., it is necessary to study the similarities and differences between Chinese and U.S. education and learn from the advanced international educational methods and concepts in order to improve the quality and international competitiveness of our education.

Keywords:

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1. Introduction

1.1. Basic situation of higher education in China

China's modern higher education is a huge and constantly developing system. According to the statistics released by the Ministry of Education in 2023, there will be more

than 2,800 colleges and universities in China, including comprehensive universities, colleges of higher education, vocational colleges, independent colleges, etc.^[1] and the number of graduates from colleges and universities has exceeded 10 million in the past two years, making higher

education a key field of concern reflecting the country's comprehensive strength. Higher education in China provides an important channel for training national professionals of all kinds, undertakes the important task of scientific research and innovation, promotes breakthroughs in knowledge and the transformation of applications in various fields, facilitates scientific and technological progress and industrial upgrading, and provides powerful support for the country's economic development, scientific research, and social progress. At the same time, it also serves as an important venue for the inheritance and propagation of the country's culture, humanistic spirit, and social values, and for cultivating a good humanistic culture and moral values for the society. At the same time, it has also become an important position for the inheritance and promotion of national culture, humanistic spirit and social values, cultivating talents with good humanistic qualities, moral qualities and a high sense of responsibility for society and helping to improve the overall quality of the society and promote the construction of social spiritual culture.

An important turning point in China's higher education occurred at the turn of the century when it introduced two favorable policies: (1) It helped to improve the operating environment of existing colleges and universities, expanding the size of their enrolment and greatly increasing the coverage of higher education; (2) It made things easier for privately-run colleges and universities, and in 1992 the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China promulgated a series of regulations conducive to the development of privately-run colleges and universities. In 1992, the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China promulgated a series of regulations favorable to the development of private schools, which led to the rapid expansion of private schools in China between 1992 and 2009. Within a short period of a dozen years, China's higher education has undergone a developmental change from elite education to mass education, accomplishing reforms that took decades or even centuries to complete in developed countries and laying the foundation for developing and improving the modern higher education system.

1.2. Basic situation of higher education in the United States

The development of higher education in the United States has gone through four broad stages.

1.2.1. Stage I: 17th century – late 18th century

The emergence of higher education in the United States. The colonial rulers first opened Harvard College, and before the victory of the American War of Independence in 1776, the colonial rulers established about nine colleges in North America, which became the origin of American higher education.

1.2.2. Stage II: 1776 – late 19th century

The United States won political rights and gained personal freedom through the War of Independence. In response to the country's urgent needs, the first state university was established in the United States in 1819, which belonged to the national public schools. During this period, American universities were freed from religious theocracy and became practical, secularized places of higher education.

1.2.3. Stage III: The American Civil War – mid-20th century

The United States gradually emerged land-grant colleges, and the United States Congress passed the Morrill Act in 1862, the state in the federal land, with the proceeds of the land to fund colleges and universities, greatly promoting the development of higher education in the United States, and at the same time for the development of the U.S. economy to cultivate a large number of industrial and agricultural and technical personnel ^[2].

1.2.4. Stage IV: From the mid-20th century to the present

Modern higher education in the U.S. has developed rapidly, focusing more on universal enrolment in higher education, international cultural exchanges, and improving the quality of education.

2. Similarities between Chinese and American education

2.1. Law guarantee

Both countries have granted equal access to education to their citizens through their constitutions or constitutional amendments. Both countries have adopted national education legislation to concretely constitute and improve the legal system of the right to equality in education.

Higher education in China and America is not compulsory. They all need to pay tuition. Both China and America use scholarships and grants to reward students with good academic performance and help those in need^[3].

2.2. Educational goals and philosophies

The goals and philosophies of education in America and China are very similar in that both countries aim to foster creativity, innovation and critical thinking skills in their students. At the same time, education in both countries emphasizes the development of social responsibility and good values in students. As U.S. President Jefferson said, “A good education will raise the people’s moral standards, open their minds, give direction to Parliament, provide guidance to industry, and strengthen the nation, prosper the community, and make the people happy”^[4].

2.3. Subject setting

There are many similarities between the subject offerings in the United States and China, including language, math, science, social studies and the arts. In addition, the subject settings of both countries are closely related to the needs of society and the times. For example, the subject settings in both countries have changed accordingly as emerging disciplines such as artificial intelligence and big data have developed.

2.4. Educational facilities

Both the American and Chinese education systems focus on creating the school environment. First, U.S. and Chinese campuses generally have infrastructure such as libraries, laboratories, gymnasiums and auditoriums. Second, both the U.S. and China are investing in campus construction to improve learning and living conditions for students. In addition, campus construction in both countries is constantly adapting to new technological developments to meet teaching and learning needs.

3. Differences between Chinese and America education

3.1. Education philosophies

Higher education in the United States is now recognized as the best in the world, while many people do not agree with higher education in China. The reason for this is that

China lacks the education to foster creativity, “learning more and understanding less,” and even the phenomenon of “high score and low ability”^[5].

First of all, there are many differences between the educational traditions of China and the United States. American higher education focuses on cultivating students’ knowledge application and practical ability. The classroom atmosphere is harmonious and lively, students ask questions on time^[6] and teachers do not care if their lectures are interrupted. There are many assignments after class, and students often need a lot of time to complete them. Plagiarism is never allowed.

Chinese higher education focuses on the accumulation and inculcation of knowledge, respect for knowledge and authority, and more on the inheritance of knowledge and the construction of the system. The classroom atmosphere is rather dull, and students’ active thinking is limited, so students’ initiative cannot be fully developed.

3.2. Education goals

All U.S. universities have their well-established core curriculum, which every student must take in the first two years of college. Students, regardless of their major, must take several courses in the humanities, arts, social and natural sciences to acquire basic humanistic qualities, learn to understand society as a whole on a deeper level, assume social responsibilities and obligations, and develop a holistic approach. Through the core curriculum, students develop comprehensive and mature public values. The U.S. core curriculum focuses more on developing students’ overall qualities and abilities than on specialized competencies, such as making rational judgments and applying a systematic and logical approach to problem-solving, learning to work effectively with others, understanding global issues, adapting to political, social, economic, technological and environmental changes, maintaining good physical and mental health, living an active life, and learning to express themselves creatively and aesthetically.

Due to the influence of the system and other factors, China’s universities have not had their core curriculum for many years and generally replace the core curriculum with public courses. The main courses are very limited, mostly a few courses designated by the Ministry of

Education and due to the limitation of class time, no other courses are available. This kind of curriculum, which lacks a certain number of courses and has little scope and depth, is bound to affect the correct formation of students' public social values and inevitably restrict the cultivation and improvement of students' comprehensive ability and quality.

3.3. Teaching method

3.3.1. Class atmosphere

In American university classes, students are more active and can ask questions to the teacher at any time, and the atmosphere of discussion is relaxed and free ^[7]. Teachers encourage students to ask questions and participate actively in the discussion and require students to share their questions with the class. Students in Chinese universities are used to the traditional way of listening to lectures and rarely ask questions and discuss with teachers in class. Chinese college teachers place a high priority on classroom discipline.

3.3.2. Assessment method

The assessment and training in American university courses are diversified, including laboratory and homework assignments, quizzes and midterm exams, project demonstrations, attendance and class participation, final exams, etc. This is a summary of the teaching experience of American university teachers for many years and it has been proven to be successful and effective. Each component is a small part of the course, but it is all intertwined and essential. The instructors have full autonomy in the development of the course assessment methods. A final exam paper does not determine the course assessment.

In this regard, teachers in China's universities do not have autonomy and all the rights are concentrated in the Academic Affairs Office of the university. Most courses are graded by one paper in the final examination ^[8]. Although the students' usual grades are taken into account, the proportion of the final paper examination grade is usually about 80%. Since there are few presentations in the course, students lack a variety of training sessions, resulting in students not studying hard during the week and reviewing before the final exam.

3.3.3. Diversification of teaching materials

The faculty at American universities usually assign lecture materials to students, and students can borrow books from the library instead of buying them. The teacher often tells students, "Google is your best friend." This open and unpredictable learning style naturally develops students' various abilities. In China, Chinese universities are required to use designated textbooks for their courses, and teaching beyond the scope of the textbook is, in most cases, frowned upon.

3.3.4. Web-based teaching

Almost all faculty members have their homepage on the U.S. university website, which includes their profile, research interests, contact information, weekly office hours, course descriptions, course progress, course assessment items and grading criteria, exam schedules, assignments, project requirements and class materials. Students can access the homepage directly on campus or off campus and can come to the teachers' offices during office hours to discuss problems with them or make appointments through the teachers' email addresses.

Due to network conditions' constraints, not many university teachers have teaching homepages. Even if they do, students cannot access them outside the campus. Many students are uncomfortable with this way of learning through independent access to teachers' teaching homepages to understand course requirements and contents. They are still accustomed to teachers' teaching in the classroom.

3.4. Teaching facilities

The laboratories and libraries of American universities are open to students 24 hours a day at no extra charge. The university pays more attention to the investment in laboratory equipment. The computer equipment in the laboratory is usually replaced once every five years, and the old machines that are replaced are donated to primary and secondary schools. The library is highly electronic and students and teachers have direct access to many materials through the Internet.

It is an indisputable fact that the equipment renewal rate of university laboratories in China is relatively low. The laboratories are basically closed except for usually scheduled laboratory courses. In many universities,

computer labs are managed for a fee by students who need Internet access.

3.5. The depth of thought in campus culture

The rich and colorful campus cultural activities have always been an important supplement to the teaching activities of colleges and universities^[9]. They are an indispensable and important part of university campus life.

American campus cultural activities include concerts, theater productions, art exhibitions, ball games, film screenings, and celebrity presentations^[10]. Concerts and performances are usually performed by a combination of students from different majors and clubs on campus, and professional arts groups are also invited to perform. Most of the films are organized by the teachers or the students' associations, and the films are shown with themes reflecting the deeper issues of society and culture. Since students and residents are in the neighborhood, the afterthoughts are shared by people of different ages and social backgrounds. This is a good education for the students and enhances their sense of social responsibility, independence and thinking. The school community also regularly organizes charity events such as charity sales or performances for the underprivileged and women and children in conjunction with various community organizations.

The campus activities in Chinese universities are also varied and colorful. Still, from the perspective of motivation, perhaps due to the national situation or the school management system, there are still problems, such as students' strong sense of utilitarianism in participating in activities, more recreational activities on campus and fewer ideological activities. Even if there are similar activities, they lack persistence, not to mention the participation of people outside the university. This reflects the lack of students' ability to organize and participate in activities.

3.6. Social influence

One of the functions of social education is to improve the population's quality and the nation's quality. This is even

more evident in American university education, where students are diverse in age and occupation^[11]. They can apply for admission and graduate after working and completing the required credits, and the school education directly influences their values. The school's core curriculum directly influences students, the rich variety of campus activities, and religious culture, and their education is largely aligned with social behavior^[12].

In China, although both university education and primary and secondary education aim at quality education, knowledge and technology are used instead of moral and humanistic education. The results of education are reflected in social life and behavior, but school education always deviates from society. Because of this, students do not comply with or even subvert the social and public values they have developed during their school years when they enter society.

4. Conclusion

The above comparison between the higher education systems of China and the United States shows that the development of the higher education system in China is formed on the basis of the economy of each country and cannot be unified. However, with the rapid development of China's economy and technology and the increasing internationalization of the education market, it is imperative to improve our higher education system.

In conclusion, due to the differences in social and cultural backgrounds and history^[13], there are inevitably differences between Chinese and American universities in many aspects. In contrast, American colleges and universities are more humane and reasonable in managing and implementing various aspects^[14]. The differences in higher education between China and the U.S. are bound to lead to differences in students' comprehensive innovation ability and Chinese universities should learn more from the U.S. universities in terms of operation mode and teaching philosophy^[15].

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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