



International Journal of Asian Social Science

ISSN(e): 2224-4441/ISSN(p): 2226-5139

journal homepage: <http://www.aessweb.com/journal-detail.php?id=5007>



THE SOCIALIZED EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES OF THE IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

The United States pays much attention to the ideological and political education. Through the media, various activities and environmental edification, the American civic consciousness and patriotic feelings are well developed, which has some important enlightenment for us to effectively carry out the ideological and political education.

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Keywords: The United States, Ideological and political education, Socialized education, Approach, Media, Activity, Environment

1. INTRODUCTION

The disconnections of theory and practice, school education and social education are the choke points of Chinese ideological and political education. In this aspect, the American educational methods are worth learning from. The United States is a multi-racial country. How to make the American people who have diversified value orientations have united racial spirit and basic value identity is the core question of the American ideological and political education. Therefore, the United States government not only sets up curricula of American politics and social system, American history and other related courses in schools and universities, but also attaches great importance to the development and usage of social educational resources. Through social education, the education elements in American social life are brought into American people's heads quietly. This paper introduces some social educational approaches of American ideological and political education.

2. MEDIA GUIDANCE

In the United States, there are about 1,800 newspapers and 18,000 periodicals, more than 1790 normal TV stations, over 1680 digital show TV stations, 9885 FM broadcasting stations, 5036 Short wave radios, and 4994 local TV stations and FM broadcasting stations. These mass media

have huge power of guiding ideological and public opinion orientations. The Associated Press and the United Press International are the biggest news agencies, which almost monopolize the American news resources. The New York Times and the Washington Post, to a great extent, control the news management. Therefore, the news contents, styles, explanations from American east to west coast are almost exactly the same. We can say the two news agencies, some national broadcasting nets and some newspapers dominate the whole American mass media. They can decide the report contents, how to see or explain the latest internal and external incidents. As Theodore H. White said, “the power of the American news circles is a native power. It decides the public discussion schedules. Furthermore, this kind of political power is not restrained by law. It decides what people discuss and think.....” (White, 1973)

American movies play a very important role in spreading the western democracy, freedom concept and values. It has strong ideological and political education functions. We can say the more than 80 years’ Oscar history, actually, is American Spirit History. The themes of some of our familiar movies, like “Titanic”, “Patton”, “Enemy at the Gates”, “Pearl Harbor”, “Saving Private Ryan”, “The Patriot”, etc., all advocate American spirits. So do the American books. Doctor Robert B. Downs, the famous American Library science scholar, published a work named “Books That Changed America” in 1970. From voluminous books he picked out 25 required readings for American people as the greatest influence to form American culture and civilization. “Common Sense”, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, “The Shame of the Cities” “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”, “The Jungle”, and “The Affluent Society” are all in the list, and these books narrate American spirits to people from different sides.

It needs to be emphasized that the actions American media mislead the socialist country’ public opinions are conscious and intentional behaviors, and are also one of the most important aspects of the ideological and political education in the United States. As we all know, many American media (including some great influential media) spare no effort in “demonizing China”. Many American people think China is a country of dictatorship and poverty. You cannot imagine how they misunderstand China. For example, some think Chinese churches can only engage in underground activities, and some doubt that whether Chinese people can send and receive emails freely. When they see the Tibetan separatist riots on TV, some will naturally think that the Chinese government is bad for the Tibetans. This kind of Chinese image in the American minds is contributed by the American media.

3. ACTIVITY INFILTRATION

American ideological and political education is throughout all kinds of activities, which can be classified into four parts. The first is festivals and ceremonies. Using different festivals and ceremonies to carry through ideological and political education is a usual method of the United States. There are ten federal statutory holidays in America. When every holiday comes, from the official to the folk, the U.S. will hold various ceremonies and celebrations. These holidays are almost all related to the history of the establishment and development of the United States. For example, the Presidents’ Day is to commemorate the two greatest presidents in the American history, Washington and Lincoln. To commemorate Washington is to make people remember the American Revolution which won the national independence; to commemorate Lincoln is to make

people remember the American Civil War which reminds people not to forget to protect the national unity. From the Flag Day on June 14 to the American National Day on July 4 every year is the time to express concentrated reflection of American patriotism that you can see decorations everywhere with the three colors of American national flag, red, blue and white. These festivals and ceremonies from the folk to the official can constantly arouse American historic memory. It is an adhesive of strengthening internal American social identity and uniform.

The second is political activities. American bipartisan campaign is often regarded as a political farce. While, it is effective in popularizing and propagandizing bourgeois political, economic, social propositions, values and other aspects. The theme of American presidential inauguration is patriotism. The famous sentence by John Kennedy in the 1960s which says that “don’t ask what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” has become admired by the American people. During the bipartisan campaign time, voting activities are launched in many places. For example, in Lyon County, Florida, there is an activity named “kids voting”. The aim of this activity is to promote kids’ voting habit and voting participation. (Circle, 2003) The children learn about the upcoming federal, state and local elections beforehand, and on the Election Day, they follow their parents to participate in the voting. Usually, there are special voting places for the children. When releasing the election situation, children’s votes are to be calculated and reported. This activity makes the concept of citizenship which the children have learned in the school become practical. At the same time it is a good kind of education to adults.

The third is social service activity. In the United States, there are lots of kinds of social service activities, like fund-raising, environmental management, serving the old and the disabled, providing foreign language training for the migrant children, charity, etc. Some states make it clear that students should participate in these activities, or they cannot get the graduation permit; some allocate special funds to support the activities. In Maryland, D.C., and Vermont, formal community service is required; in Chicago, Philadelphia and some other cities, community service is supported by legislation, while in South Carolina, Delaware and Kentucky, social service activity is regarded as an educational reform strategy. Service activity can make students apply knowledge learned in the class to society and lead ideological and political education into real life. Just as one educator said, In the social service activity, “kids learn through doing things”. (Tolo, 1999) Even the enterprises in the United States encourage their employees to participate in social service activities. For example, AT&T regulates that every employee could have one-day leave each year for personal affairs, which makes it convenient for people to join in different kinds of volunteer activities. The social service activities play a positive role in training American people’s social responsibility and good citizen consciousness.

The fourth is the religious activities. The United States is a religious country. Religion in the United States has a broad mass base. Here, there are not only churches across the country as the places spreading religious doctrines, but there are different activities related to the churches or churches’ subsidiary organizations. The religious spread network leaves no crack, and people in the United States are all affected by it. For example, in the United States, there is an organization called ICF (International Christian Fellowship) which mainly serves those foreigners who live or study in the United States. The organizer and the staff of ICF are mostly local church volunteers. Every year, ICF holds national meetings to tutor its branches’ activities. The activity form is just

like a “family gathering”, which is relaxed and casual, and its function of education is also very well. The ICF missionary activities have features as follows: first, it pays attention to the diversity and liveliness of the form, so to avoid tediousness. In these activities, there are free communications, Anthem singing and Bible interpretation; there are indoor and outdoor activities. Second, it emphasizes differential treatment in education. According to different individual cognition and attitude towards religion, as well as different familiarity with the Bible, it treats people differently to avoid the same education way to everyone. Third, it emphasizes on education rules, with no force and less lecturing. It takes some common interests and topics which can arouse emotional resonance to make people know about religion and accept American mainstream consciousness and the political system unconsciously. Forth, it pays attention to words and deeds. The ICF staffs are very kind and happy to help others. Many foreigners who have just arrived in America are helped in language learning, shopping, renting house, etc. This kind of help produces a good feeling which could serve as a base for further communication.

Actually, the American religion is a kind of political religion which serves the country and the nation’s policy. It is closely related to nationalism. It deifies the nation, makes the religion serve the nation’s benefits, and is the moral basis for American territorial expansion and cultural output. Josiah Strong writes in his book *Our Country*, “As a country with God’s mission, the United States’ responsibility is to spread American blessedness to the countries outside of America.” (Lateber, 1963) Therefore, no matter how individuals differ, everybody must obey the political purpose of the religion. Through religious activities, the American society has been remaking everybody in the “melting pot”.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL EDIFICATION

The United States is good at using familiar things in daily life to build the environment of ideological and political education. On October 20, 1996, for example, the United States congress passed the American commemorative coin act of 1996, and the U.S. mint was authorized to issue a new set of 25 cent coins. The coins are curved with letters of “liberty” and “in God we trust” at the front side just the same as the other coins, while the opposite side is curved with the nickname of every state. Like, Maryland is “the old line state”; Connecticut is “the constitution state”; Michigan is the “Great Lake state”; Texas is the “lone star state”; etc. On some coins are curved the famous words of some states. For example, some are curved with “virtue, liberty, independence” (Pennsylvania); some with “live free or die” (New Hampshire); etc. In the process of wide circulation, these coins remind Americans of their values, politics, religion and the natural scenery, historical tradition and anything worth American people to be proud of. It plays a significant role in education.

Since the establishment of the country, the American government has been building social education environment and places in many areas. Many memorial halls, technology museums and other cultural facilities with different sizes either use historic materials, pictures, models, and so on, to make people know the hard pioneering days and the revolutionary history of the United States, or use advanced modern technological methods to reflect the achievements of the American modern technology. For example, in Washington D.C., the Capitol, the White House, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, the Congress Library, Air and Space Museum and other large-scale

stadiums intensively exhibit the achievements of American material civilization and spiritual civilization, and become the political, ideological and moral education base for teenagers. In Boston, a traditional American city with a glorious history, the state government pays much attention to developing the resources of ideological and political education. In the subway stations of its main streets, introductions to local historical events and famous historical figures can be found easily. A road named "Freedom Trail" in front of the state government building has the historic revolutionary remains connected, which plays a positive role in helping people recognize the historic trend of development. In the Disney World, people can see the simulation scene that President Lincoln "is" making speech in the Capitol. Obviously, those material and spiritual shows and propagandas make American culture and spirits filter into every American's heart and make them form a concept of loving the country and its social system. This kind of education is not mandatory, but effective.

5. CONCLUSION

In general, the socialized education of the American ideological and political education is implicit, indirect and penetrating, while its determined purpose and diversified methods are obvious, which plays a positive role in fostering American people's civic consciousness and patriotic emotions. Of course, indoctrination is not almighty. The polarization of the American society, fragile democracy, and cruel realities caused by wars which were launched or joined by the United States have formed a sharp contrast with its matured educational methods. It causes trust breaks among the mass and produces unstable factors in society. Fundamentally speaking, the educational methods are always subordinate to the social reality. Only based on the public's fundamental interests, a country and a party could achieve long-term education effect by grasping the scientific educational methods.

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SPONSORING INFORMATION

This paper is supported by the key project of Chongqing key research institute of humanities and social science "the way the contemporary western developed nations guide different thoughts and its enlightenment" (13SKB012).

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