

A Brief Discussion of the Development and Characteristics of Modern Western Education

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Abstract—This paper explains the development of modern western education from three stages such as the western education before World War II, the restoration of education in western countries after World War II and the western education in 1960s~1980s. Further, this paper makes case analysis on several very typical countries or on several influential and representative education scholars and schools in different stages and then makes a summary on the characteristics of this period. Thinking and learning about the development of Western education in different stages can help us better understand and memorize the relevant content of modern western education.

Keywords—western educational development; modern west; characteristics

I. INTRODUCTION

"Education is a fundamental task for the coming generation". Knowledge-based high-quality talents are essential and must meet market demand to realize sustainable development of economy and technology of China. Meanwhile, deepening education reform is the only way to cultivate highly-educated and high-quality talents for the new era. The education in China has entered the crucial stage of comprehensive and deepening reform. With the expanding of the scope and field of reform, there will be more and more difficulties and challenges. At the present stage, there are many problems in the process of education development in China, and the causes of the problems are complex and various. In the new historical period, an in-depth theoretical thinking on the development of foreign education may actively promote the reference and implementation of the reform scheme. This paper mainly makes relevant research in literature method. Literature refers to all carriers that record relevant knowledge. Educational literature method is a research method to look up, analyze and sort out relevant literature and further explore educational problems and phenomena and reveal the laws of education. Literature method is one of the most common and most basic methods used in humanities and social science research and can help form a scientific understanding of facts by researching relevant literature.

II. DEFINITION OF MODERN WEST

Modern west refers to the western world from the early 20th century to early 21st century. This is a period of many

troubles. During this period, the western countries successively experienced many major historical events having deep influence on the international pattern, such as the World War I, World War II, and the Cold War between United States and Soviet Union. This concept includes not only developed capitalist countries in the West, but also developing countries in underdeveloped regions such as Asia, Africa and Latin America. At the same time, Japan and South Korea and other countries nearby China all belong to the same range of western countries stated in this paper. All in all, the western world stated in this paper mainly refers to other countries than China.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN DIFFERENT PERIODS

A. Western Education Before World War II

As most of the countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America were colonial countries before World War II, what mainly discussed in this section is the education in advanced, developed and independent capitalist countries in Europe and America.

1) *Child-centered theory became the key point in educational development of countries in Europe and America:* In late 19th century ~ early 20th century, the position of child in education was greatly highlighted due to the new education emerged in Europe, the promotion of progressivism education movement, in addition to a series of educational views put forward and some successful educational practices achieved by Montessori, Decroly and Dewey and other educationalists as well as the appearance of child research movement. The relationship between schools and children was gradually converted from "child should adapt to school" to "school should adapt to children". In this period of children education, a more free way was often adopted, namely to avoid interfering children too much in order to promote the healthy growth of children. However in the course of practice, there has been an exaggeration of the child's dominant position.

2) *Education was established on the basis of many disciplines such as genetics, biology and psychology:* Unlike the education of the previous period, education in this period basically relied on a firm scientific foundation. The

development of disciplines such as biology and psychology in the early 20th century also provided a new perspective for education reform. Educators successively analyzed the physiological and psychological characteristics of students in different stages from aspect of different disciplines and proposed educational methods suitable for students. This not only promoted the development of pedagogy, but also promoted the development of other related disciplines. Montessori is the representative of this feature. She has a medical background. In her educational concept, she always combines education with psychology and medical science. The integration among several disciplines is very helpful for the development of education. At the same time, it is also conducive to formulating an education system that is better and more relevant to the demands of the times.

3) *Education became more scientific*: In the education in this period, the practice of educational theory was carried out quite a lot times. It is worth encouraging whether the practice succeeded or not. "Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth." The emergence of experimental pedagogy broke through the monopoly thought that Herbart advocated to study pedagogy through speculation, and also provided a new possibility for the development of pedagogy. The practice of education is beneficial for educators to find out the deficiencies in their educational concepts so as to further improve their educational concepts. And the scientificization of education provided educational research with more specific standards. The introduction of empirical methods made educational theory more convincing and more acceptable to the public.

Indeed, it is also necessary to realize that educational experiments are not omnipotent and speculative research method is not absolutely useless. In confronting with this issue, it is necessary to learn to get the extent under control, to avoid being over paranoid; otherwise, you may get stuck in over extreme state. It is believed that it is ought to get experiments and speculation combined, collect data by making experiments during research, and get the conclusion with speculation method so as to better balance the relationship between the two methods.

4) *The changing from dual-track system to single-track system became the trend of education reform and the education democratization is in progress unceasingly*: With the progress of society, people's pursuit of democracy was growing and educational democracy has become an important issue of concern. With the promotion of comprehensive education movement, the single-track system was established in many countries and broke through the monopoly position of dual-track education, such as in America and Britain. However in some countries, the position of dual-track system was not changed due to historical reasons and international situations. But the system was affected by the new system in general, such as in France and Germany. The democratization of education provided more people with the access to education. Meanwhile, it also

promoted the progress of mass literacy work in various countries and also cultivated reserves and excellent laborers for the country.

5) *The Soviet Union still persists in exploration even in confronting with many education problems*: As the first socialist country in the world, the Soviet Union encountered many problems in the construction of education. Although the education policy of the previous feudal period laid a foundation for education of Soviet Union to some extent, there was still a gap compared with European and American countries. The establishment of education system in Soviet Union can be divided into three periods such as the initial period of October Revolution, the consolidation period in the 1930s~1940s and the period of the Great Patriotic War. The problems that Soviet Union encountered were far more than that of European and American countries. Although the Soviet Union successfully realized the secularization of education and realized the equality of men and women and the education of national equality, there were still many problems such as overemphasizing the role of labor and no studying on the characteristics of children's personality. The education construction still needed to be improved. In the constant exploration, Soviet Union gradually formed an education system with its own style.

6) *Fascist education happened in some countries*: In the 1920s~1930s, Japan, Germany and Italy carried out a series of fascist education to their people in order to satisfy their ambitions of conquering the world, invading other countries, and dividing other land. Fascist education is an educational countercurrent at that time and it is a kind of retrogression. Over this education, students were trained into war machines produced for aggression and ignored the desired development of students. Moreover, the arbitrarily provoked war also had a devastating effect on the education work in the country. In Japan, for example, due to insufficient military strength, young students were forced to go to battle and teachers and young children had to give up learning and engage in production and labor work. At that time, Japan's education system was almost paralyzed, which was a devastating blow to the Japanese student population in that era. Because of the war, they missed the best time to receive education. This is an irreparable gap. Undoubtedly, Fascist education failed and is not desirable. It will never promote the progress of education but cause regression of education.

B. Education Development in the Period of Education Reconstruction in Western Countries After World War II

After World War II, different western countries faced different educational problems. But in general, they had some common features as follows:

1) *Compulsory education was widely popularized, schools expanded their enrollment and the number of schools was increased*: Before World War II, some countries had implemented compulsory education but within restricted

scope. After World War II, more and more countries began to popularize compulsory education. Japan, South Korea, India, African countries and Latin American countries successively established compulsory education systems. As a result, the number of educated people increased and more and more students were incorporated into school. This is conducive to promoting the democratization of education and ensuring that everyone has the right to receive education. At the same time, the popularization of compulsory education also trained a number of reserve forces for higher education and stored a large number of labor talents with certain knowledge for the country. It also promoted literacy works in various countries, resulting in a significant decline in the number of illiterate people.

2) *Vocational education was actively developed*: Before World War II, it was lack of development in vocational education yet, there were not enough types of vocational education and there were limited quantity of such schools so that the development of vocational education was restricted. After World War II, various countries successively paid attention to the development of vocational education and incorporated vocational education into the education system. Hence, vocational education was combined with secondary education.

The upsurge in the development of vocational education was inseparable from the development of industries in various countries after World War II. The transformation of social structure and the development of modern science both contributed to the advancement of industry. Industrial development created the demand for huge number of high-quality technical talents. Therefore, each country actively developed vocational education in success. More over, the development of vocational education also promoted further development of industry. They were promoted mutually and formed a close link.

3) *Higher education was expanded*: After World War II, the demand for the expansion of higher education was growing, and all countries began to set up universities in success. During this period, the number of universities was increased considerably; at the same time, the number of majors in universities was also increased. More and more people entered universities. The expansion of higher education also provided spaces for cultivating high-quality research talents and high-quality management talents for the country and also created a good environment for the development of science and technology in each country. At the same time, higher education also welcomed women and the curriculum of education became more liberal.

In higher education, the development in India is undoubtedly eye-catching. First of all, India has its own unique characteristics in the academic system. Instead of adopting the conventional 6-3-3-4 system, it adopts the 10-2-3 system. Secondly, India still used English in academic field, which is conducive for Indian scholars to better keep in line with international frontier and more effectively absorb foreign advanced technology, research and scientific

achievements. And during the first five-year plan in India, the government invested a lot of money in expanding and transformation of higher education schools. In addition, the Indian government also attached great importance to equal opportunity and other problems in education and provided cram schools for poor students so that more and more poor students had the access to enter higher education schools. India's policy was beneficial to development of higher education and India's higher education also made some achievement in the international. The development of higher education not only made India's hi-tech industries (such as electronic technology) ranked top in the world but also broke through the isolation between Indian high and low castes, realized communication among different castes and promoted the social equity.

4) *Promoting the nationalization and modernization of education became a development trend*: After World War II, with the decline of western colonial countries, many countries in the third world eventually ushered in a period of independent peace and development. During this period, no matter in South Korea or in Africa, an urgent issue is how to build up an education that is compatible with its own nation. People appealed that education should cultivate the youth a sense of belonging to the nation and reflect its own history, customs, language and so on. As a result, the nationalization of education was accelerated, which is also conducive to the preservation and development of the culture of each nation and helpful to protect the diversity of world culture.

At the same time in colonized countries, the national education level was not that high in general because the education provided by colonial countries in colonized countries was of low level and was provided only for personnel working in lower work post. In order to adapt to the development of the times, the colonized countries began to establish a modern education system. More and more countries began to promote compulsory education. In Africa, there was also a phenomenon of "one country, one university". More and more people entered the classroom to receive education. As a result, the modernization of education developed rapidly in these suffering lands.

C. Western Education in 1960s~1980s

In 1957, Soviet Union successfully launched the world's first artificial satellite, which undoubtedly shocked the field of education reform. In the 1960s~1980s, the hegemony confrontation between America and Soviet Union got the world divided into two extreme patterns. The Cold War made the contest between the two camps intensified. This paper respectively elaborates on the educational connotation and extension in this period from perspective of the two camps (America camp and Soviet Union camp).

1) *America camp — genius education emerged, the education paid attention to learning knowledge and education equality was further developed*: Soviet Union launched the world's first artificial satellite so that more and more people get education connected to the dream of becoming a strong country. More and more people formed a consciousness of "education crisis". In this context, the role

of elite talents was further amplified, hence triggered genius education. America and the Federal Republic of Germany successively focused on the cultivation of gifted children. The Federal Republic of Germany even established specific schools for gifted children in order to better develop their talents. America focused on financial subsidies to ensure that gifted children have access to go to school even in poor family and also established tests to identify gifted children. Genius education adapted to the social development at that time to some extent and also provided students the opportunity to receive individualized quality education.

With the unceasingly rigorous situation of the Cold War, the past too "free" education mode was criticized. The educational thoughts of the educators represented by Dewey were considered to be "superficial", and the "life-adaptation" education became the target of public criticism. At the same time, critics appreciated Soviet Union's education system very much and believed that the education system of America camp was too unorganized and lacked clear educational goals. Under the voice in the society, education reform came into being. In order to change the shortcomings existing in previous education, the education reform represented by America began to pay attention to textbooks and textbooks emphasized more on "basic knowledge". In education, America emphasized on the teaching of basic knowledge. Schools established strict discipline. However, this reform was as much praised as blamed. Some people thought that the reform can enhance some of the abilities that students must possess, such as reading, writing and calculation; however, some people thought that it is too inflexible and made students lose their enthusiasm to learn.

In the 1960s~1980s, more and more people called for equal rights such as equality between men and women and racial equality. Under such a request, education was also moving toward equality. Providing assistance to poor families, providing men and women with equal opportunities to receive education and solving apartheid problems step by step were all manifestations of more equality in education. Among them, one of the most famous example was the "Brown case" happened in America. The "Brown case" finally won and the court held that: "The isolation of public facilities was essentially unequal." This provided a basis for schools to break through the racial segregation status and also incited the education status of "a clear distinction between black and white" at that time. The "Brown case" posed a tremendous influence on the entire American society and was the "Century Case" in jurisprudential circle of America.

2) *Soviet Union camp — the popularization of compulsory education, combination of teaching and labor production and education "de-religion" were realized and the old education mode was transformed:* During the Cold War, Eastern European countries and Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Pact. Different from European and American countries, Eastern European countries encountered even more severe education reform. Most Eastern European countries remained the feudal education mode left over and

had not established a modern education system. Therefore, the first task at that time was to get rid of the old system and establish a new one. The Eastern European socialist countries represented by Soviet Union popularized compulsory education in a very short period of time and rapidly developed secondary education. The reason why compulsory education could be quickly popularized is inseparable from the superiority of socialism. The popularity of compulsory education also laid the foundation for the followed series of educational reforms and works.

In the education in those socialist countries, the most distinct feature was the link between education and labor production. In the education reform after the launch of artificial satellite, Soviet Union emphasized that students must participate in socially useful labor within their capacity; meanwhile, vocational schools such as the Polish Technical School also conducted such activities in all efforts; Democratic Germany, based on the experience of Soviet Union, attached importance to providing occupational instruction to students in secondary education and providing them with vocational training. Those measures provided a large number of high-quality workers for these socialist countries and also provided a reserve labor force for the expansion of arms for US-Soviet hegemony. However, there were also some problems. For example, students might have over much time to work and over less time to study. As there were excessive contradictions and disputes, this policy had not been implemented for a long time in Soviet Union.

As aforesaid feudal remnants remained in the education systems of Eastern European countries, hence, the first task of the education reform was to get rid of the feudal remnants. In Hungary, for example, the church forces of Hungary took a place in school education. After the liberation of Hungary, the government began to expel religion from the field of education. To achieve the goal of "de-religion", the Hungarian government enacted a decree on prohibiting the church from offering compulsory courses in schools. But after more than 20 years, the government allowed the church to run secondary schools again. However in general, the "de-religion" and old education transformation project in education of Soviet Union camp still made a contribution.

IV. CONCLUSION

The view of this paper was explained and discussed by taking some obviously representative countries in different periods as an example, as the concept of modern western is relatively broad, involving a large time span and a wide range of countries. But no matter in which of the three periods, education democracy and equalization were always the major trends. This is inseparable from the progress of democratization and equalization of the entire world. The connotation and extension of education in different periods are inseparable from the political, economic and cultural backgrounds of the time. Over many times of repeated adjustments, western education continues to move toward a more balanced and democratic direction. In the 21st century, the two extreme patterns are ended and the world education ushers in new opportunities. Therefore, it is necessary to strive for better improving Chinese education by learning

from western education experience and history and in combination with the reality of China.

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