

An analysis of American Citizenship Education

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Abstract—The United States is one of the earliest countries which have put citizenship education into effect. With decades of development, the contents of American citizenship education have been greatly extended, and a lot of socially qualified American citizens have been cultivated. IN this paper, the author is going to comprehensively analyze the main contents of the present citizenship education in the United States and the major achievements so far have been made. In general, American citizenship education is a big success and deserves other countries to learn from.

Keywords—citizenship education; the United States; qualified citizens; main contents; major achievements

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the foundation of the United States, citizenship education has been attached great importance, which aims at cultivating qualified citizens. American citizenship education is playing a very important part in maintaining American democracy and creating citizen culture fitting its democratic politics.^[1] The ways of American citizenship education are of great diversity, and in most degree, they have a great influence on the development of American education. It is not only going on in school, and it can also be seen in many aspects of people's daily life. For example, American kids are taught at a very young age at school the civic awareness to love their country and love their national flag. Generation after generation, American citizens have formed those good spirits. And every year, American government spends billions of dollars on mass media, radio and television to transmit their outlook on life, value and world view, which is also a key approach to educate their citizens. In order to let the kids receive American ideology, value and faith, the government also encourages their kids to visit museum, memorial hall, art gallery and other cultural facilities with great significance. As years elapse, the contents of American citizenship education have become richer and richer to meet the needs of social development in different era. Generally speaking, after decades of practice and development, American citizenship education has made a lot of achievements in cultivating qualified American citizens and has made great contributions to the prosperity of the United States. This paper aims at analyzing the main contents of the present citizenship education in the United States and its major achievements in order to give some enlightenment on the development of other countries' citizenship education.

II. DEFINITION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Firstly raised in the Greek era, the concept of citizenship education was aimed at cultivating indomitable warriors who were equipped with patriotism, national spirits and spirits of utter devotion. British scholar, Cole once put forward that citizenship education is a series activities to make citizens a sense of acceptance for their country and equipped them with democratic awareness, legal awareness, and correct moral sense. The so-called American citizenship education, which all legally citizens have access to, is a form of education with the characteristics of Concealment, Penetrability and Practicality. Citizenship education is one of the main contents of ideological and moral education. Citizenship education can be seen as a tool to shape citizens to adapt social life. And it exists in civic studying and living and will finally be realized by it. There are many researches on the definition of citizenship education, but most of them focus only on one or some aspects of it. In my personal opinion, citizenship education is the process in which a country or society carries out through different approaches to acquire the knowledge, attitude, emotion and skill so as to maintain the stability of the political system. Meanwhile, it is also the process for citizens to acquire civic awareness and quality so as to equip themselves with civic ability. In this way, individuals can have a harmonious relationship with the society and the government, and thus personal political, legal and moral socialization can be realized.

III. MAIN CONTENT OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

In terms of the contents of American citizenship education, as time goes by, it has become more and more abundant. Generally speaking, there are five main types of education in American citizenship education complex.

A. American Patriotic Education

It can date back to the late colonial period (when Jefferson created the Declare of Independence) that the United States started its citizenship education centered in patriotism. Such lyrical epic, which calls on people to love their nation infused patriotism into all Americans' mind, plays an important role in the triumph of its national independence. At present times, in order to elevate Americans' patriotism, the United States emphasizes the American spirits through history books, and educates its people to be faithful and confident to their country through different extracurricular practice, celebration of important festivals and visit of museums. For example, American flag which symbolizes the national integrity takes

deep root in Americans' mind. American flags hang on the wall of every American classroom. And students during the period of primary school to high school should sing their national anthem or make a pledge in front of the national flag. Every year when it comes to the Independence Day, the United States becomes a sea of flags and citizens always express their patriotism in different ways. All above are due to the American patriotism education.

B. American Religious Education

French enlightenment thinker Rousseau said that once people live in the political socialization, there must be a religion to hold them together. There is no nation which could survive without a religion. Even if it hasn't been given a religion, it would soon create one, or it would perish in next to no time.^[2] In the United States, religion penetrates into its education from the very beginning, and government takes it as a tool to maintain its dominance, therefore, its religion shows obvious hierarchy and political complexion. American missionary schools, which widely reach into different fields of the society and influence people on their faith and value conception, make up a certain proportion in its society. In the United States, religions have been playing an important and special role. They are seen as the base of freedom and the source of power. And God is taken as a symbol of unity. Many people who hold religious belief think that all who worship and believe in God must be of honesty, good manners and great respect. So we can see that through religious education, the United States attempts to restrain the morality and behaviors of its people and influence as well as cultivate civic moral integrity. The United States Federal Government puts religion in a very high position and takes it as a mass media in American citizenship education. For example, many American ceremonies are held in forms of religion just as the ceremony of the Independence Day and the president's inauguration. In this way, the U.S. government aims at cultivating its citizens' political identity.

C. American Right and Obligation Education

Right and obligation education plays an important role in American citizenship education, through which the American government hopes to make all American citizens know about all the rights they may enjoy and all the obligations they have to undertake. Generally speaking, The United States shapes its people's right and obligation concept through school education, family education and social education. Through these various educational forms, the American government aims at making its citizens realize that as a qualified member of the United States, one must be qualified with the right consciousness of vote, election, independence, equality, democracy and freedom; In the meantime, one should also fully understand social rules, comply with national laws, participate in democratic activities and comprehend the reasonability and inviolability of American social system. Besides these, American government also wants to take advantage of right and obligation education to better maintain and defend its current political system.^[3]

D. American Political Concept and Value Education

American bourgeois scholar Anthony M. Orum holds the opinion that all societies, in order to survive, must infuse their mode of thinking into every social member's mind, and make

their social members believe that the social system they are living in is the superior one.^[4] As for the United States, in order to let its people stand up for its current social system and meet the needs of its dominant national interests, the American government put a lot of emphasis on its people's education in political concept and value. In terms of political concept education, American schools of all levels have been continuously propagating the superiority of capitalism and hegemonies centered in power politics through different approaches, such as textbook teaching, class discussion and debating, and some extracurricular activities, through which makes Americans strongly believe the rationalization and inevitability of the current global setup of American dominance, and then prompt them to willingly devote themselves to such a great cause. In terms of value education, the key is to help students forge a strong belief of individualism, which aimed at stimulating Americans to have the freedom and motivation to determine their own life and strive for a bright and prosperous personal future, which will in turn lead to the flourishing of the whole nation.

E. American Integrity Education

The United States attaches great importance to its citizens' integrity education. In the phrase of primary and high school education, the textbooks highlight the content of integrity education, and extracurricular activities also try to strengthen the integrity education by carrying out some integrity-related activities, such as honesty festival and honesty story telling. As is known, Americans' school report is diversified. Entrance examination not only takes test of knowledge as its criterion, but also requires school records, participations of social activities and comments of teachers and classmates. And all those entrance application materials must be provide with honesty. If there is any falsification, the honesty of the person will be questioned, which will affect the life of this person for several years or even decades. In the phrase of university, the integrity education is conducted by means of strict honesty system, model demonstration, credit file and regulation of relevant departments. The core idea of university integrity education is the concept of honor. Students' integrity idea is cultivated through the concept of honor and their integrity behaviors are guaranteed through the honor system.

IV. ACHIEVEMENTS OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

So far the United States has already established a large network of citizenship education, and with decades of investment, reform and other efforts, the American citizenship education has made a lot of achievements, which contributes greatly to the cultivation of high-quality citizens needed by the social development. The main achievements are as the following.

A. Penetration of Americanism into American Citizens

Americanism is the core and soul of citizenship education, which determines the nature and direction of it, since the American citizenship has always been concerned with the education of the bourgeoisie to foster the participants whom the democratic constitutional system needs and who has the ability of taking responsibility for social and political participation^[5]. Analyses from both the historical development of American

citizenship education and its contemporary educational goal, educational content and educational method, its political aim are very obvious, and guided by this main aim, the American government has already successfully penetrated Americanism into most of American Citizens, which means under the current citizenship education system, most Americans now have adapted to the American political system, and their citizen's sense of national identity and enthusiasm for political participation have also been greatly strengthened. Therefore we may safely conclude that American citizenship education has made great contribution to the cultivation of its citizens' American spirit, and has maintained a long-term continuity and stability in the penetration of Americanism into its citizens.

B. Intensification of American Citizens' Civic Awareness

The cultivation of American citizens' civic awareness is one of the most important goals of American citizenship education. American citizenship educators all agree that the success of citizenship education firstly lies in the formation and intensification of all Americans' civic awareness and let them thoroughly know about their social rights and obligations as American citizens. Generally speaking, the education of American citizens' civic awareness mainly include two aspects, one is to put patriotism at the core of civic awareness education; another one is to put the cultivation of the spirit of serving others and society as the basic concept in civic awareness education. Guided by these two main principles, American citizens' civic awareness has been greatly intensified. For example, on one hand, patriotism has been deeply rooted in every single American's mind, and almost everybody has a strong faith in America's social system and no one doubts the founding principles of the United States.^[6] On the other hand, the awareness of serving others and society has also become an important part of most Americans' thought, and they all strongly believe that the realization of one's self-value not only lies in one's personal interest, but also lies in the undertaking of one's social obligations.

C. Enhancement of American Citizens' Global Awareness

Since the 21st century, with the constantly advancing process of globalization, international exchanges and cooperation among different countries have become more and more frequent, and any country or civilization cannot be self-isolated again. Under such circumstances, in order to hold on its dominance in global politics, economics and culture, the establishment of American citizens' global awareness and the cultivation of world citizens are gradually put on the agenda of American citizenship education. In order to cultivate world citizens under globalization, American citizenship education begins to foster its citizens with the international perspective to help them cultivate their global awareness, openness, and the ability to deal with global problems.^[7] With years of efforts, the American citizenship education has already succeeded in

educating its citizens about the global nature and informing them of the international relations and different roles of nations. Moreover, it has also become an important strategy for the development of global education and has extended the basic American ideology and social values beyond national scope. In summary, the present citizenship in the United States is not only confined to the settlement and coordination of national and ethnic issues within the country, but also has enhanced Americans' global awareness, which helps them cultivate the world citizens' ability to select absorptive capacity and critical resistance to cope with a diverse international environment.

V. CONCLUSION

As we all know, the United States starts its citizenship education earlier than most countries around the world, and has set up a well-established and relatively complete educational system, which has specific educational aims, detailed educational contents and practical educational approaches. In the process of citizenship education reform and development, a lot of achievements have been made, and in the meantime many good experiences could also be gained. These achievements and experiences are very valuable resources which deserves other countries to study and make use of. However, what shouldn't be neglected is that there still exists many shortcomings and problems in the current American citizenship education, which means when other countries want to use American citizenship education for reference, they have to be careful about the inappropriate parts in it. Only in this way can these countries effectively take advantage of the positive aspects in American citizenship education and largely get rid of the negative effects of American citizenship education on the reform and development of their own country's citizenship education.

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