Differences of Family Education between China and the United States

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Keywords: Family Education, Difference, China, United States.

Abstract. The role family education plays in cultivating children’s comprehensive ability is of great significance, therefore, parents and scholars both in China and the United States pay great attention to it. Due to the different cultural traditions, family education in China and the United States exhibits huge differences in educational concept, objective and method. By comparing the differences of family education between China and the United States, it is hoped to give some enlightenments on the healthy development of Chinese family education.

Introduction

Family education, school education and social education are the three footstones of education an individual is supposed to receive. Since it is universally acknowledged that family is the very first school of an individual, the role of family education plays is utterly significant. Family education, which means the education that is given consciously by parents or older people in the family to children to solve their life issues and give them life enlightenment [1], is one of the fundamental stages of an individual’s education and has a non-negligible influence not only on an individual’s whole life, but also on the well-being of the entire society. It is generally accepted that the social behavior of an individual is more or less under the influence of one’s family education, therefore, good family education is not only a treasure of an individual’s personally growth, but also a fortune of the entire society’s smooth development.

Being the two largest countries with different histories in the two different hemispheres of the world, China and the United States definitely have a number of differences in education, from which the most different educational part is family education. There is a usual and interesting phenomenon that nowadays most Chinese parents are more likely to focus on their children’s test scores and they treat it as a way to show their concern about their children. They require their children to follow what they say, because they think parents are the authority of the family. However, parents in the United States weight less on the exam marks of their children and seldom put themselves in an authoritative position and emphasize more on democracy of each family member. Such huge differences have already been noticed not only by a number of scholars and educators, but also by many ordinary families and parents at home and abroad. This paper is aimed at clarifying the major differences of family education between China and the United States, which is expected to help Chinese families learn from the strong points of American family education and providing Chinese families with a better educational guidance.

Major Differences between Chinese and American Family Education

Although there are a great deal of differences both in Chinese and American Family education, the major differences are still able to be figured out. Based on some educational theories and the willingness and process of parents to teach their children, the major differences between Chinese and American family education can be divided into three categories: differences in educational concept, differences in educational objective and differences in educational method.

Differences in Educational Concept. As for the differences in educational concept between Chinese and American family, we can have a glimpse of it from the different understandings of family education. In China, most Chinese regard family education as a kind of education and...
influence that the seniors (parents) implement to the children in a family life, with the purpose of cultivating children to have a bright future.[2] Under such circumstances, most Chinese parents usually have high expectations and aggressive attitudes towards their children’s education. In order to guarantee that their children will not fail at the starting line of their life, Chinese parents always interfere a lot in their children’s study. They make study plans for their children according to their own aspiration, ignoring their children’s ability and interest sometimes.

Compared with Chinese, most American parents consider family education as a formal preparation aimed at developing intimate relationship between parents and children and helping children acquire appropriate family life knowledge and skills.[3] Under such circumstances, most American parents usually emphasize more on their children’s independence and individuality. They respect children’s personality, dignity and rights, encourage them to express their own thoughts, and create environment for children to explore themselves independently.

Therefore, we may conclude that in terms of educational concept, most Chinese families regard children as appendants and focus more on the influence that parents could exert on children in education, while most American families regard children as independent individuals and emphasize more on what children could benefit from family education.

Differences in Educational Objective. In general, the objective of family education is to cultivate a successful person. However, due to the different cultural values, the understanding of success is also different between China and the United States. In China, success means that one is supposed to have the ability to make his family glorious with one’s wealth and social status, while in the United States, success is regarded as having the capability to earn money and get high social status with that money.[4] Therefore, based on the different understandings of success, the objectives of family education in China and the United States definitely vary greatly.

As we all know, China is an ancient country with glorious civilization and profound culture. In order to inherit and develop Chinese civilization, Children begin to be taught traditional Chinese virtues since they were born, such as being filial, modest and moderate. For example, among all of the traditional Chinese virtues, filial piety is the most important one. People who are filial ones are always respected and praised by others. Therefore, Chinese parents always attempt to cultivate their children to have filial pieties. They not only select books on filial piety stories to their children, but also set good examples to their children and being filial to elders in their families. As for the personal development, Chinese children are more likely to be required to be knowledgeable. In China, both its educational system and job market take academic achievements very seriously, which results in that Chinese parents care more about their children’s academic achievements at school than their children’s ability to put theories into practice. What Chinese parents concentrate on more is whether their children have grasped the knowledge in books rather than the skills their children have acquired from school.

In the United States, people speak highly of liberty, democracy and equality, which reflected in family education is that American parents attach great importance to cultivate their children to be self-confident, honest and respectful. For example, American people advocate that everyone has the equal right to express his own idea. Thus children are taught to present their ideas in public since they were very young. In order to guarantee that their children could bravely talk in public, American parents always encourage their children to show themselves and their thoughts publicly to cultivate the ability of self-confidence. As for the personal development, American parents’ attitude is different from Chinese parents’. In the United States, parents care more about their children’s practical skills and their abilities to depend on themselves, because in American parents’ eyes, although children’s academic achievements are also important, it is not the only factor that decides their children’s future. Of course, it is the best if children can go to famous universities and get a decent job; meanwhile it is also acceptable if children can be educated to make a living without a college diploma. Therefore, American parents are willing to spend extra money sending their children to some training classes like cooking class, sewing class, and so on.

Differences in Educational Method. Generally Speaking, in family education, Chinese parents usually keep strict attitudes to educate their children. They always rebuke their children for their
wrong-doings, sometimes even using stick parenting to beat their children. In contrast, American family educational method is more moderate than that of Chinese. American parents would rather give their children encouragement than criticism, and they are more willing to act as their children’s advisers and guiders. We may take a glimpse of it from the different ways of treating children’s rebellion and failure.

As for treating children’s rebellion, when children enter into puberty, they will become more independent than before and do not want to follow the advices and rules of their parents. Sometimes, they are very disgusted with others’ warns and make trouble with intention. At this moment, Chinese parents will suppress their children in order to help them step into a positive life, and sometimes even choose to use physical punishment to force their children to live up to their expectations; while American parents are more likely to choose to guide their children, and they may be more rational in dealing with their children’s rebellion as they regard it as an unavoidable process that their children should go through. American parents usually help their children find ways to complete their plans on life.

As for treating children’s failure, in China, when children fail to accomplish something important, the first reaction of Chinese parents is usually to blame them for their failure. In some cases, in order to make sure that their children could keep the lesson in mind, sometimes, Chinese parents even criticize their children in public, which makes the children feel embarrassed and discouraged. On the contrary, in the United States, because of the adherence of equality and democracy in family education, American parents usually hold children in esteem and treat them as the equal and independent family members. When American children try their utmost to do something but finally fail, their parents will never blame them, instead they will receive their parents’ encouragement to try again. Besides this, American children are always encouraged by their parents to take adventures as well.

Enlightenments on Chinese Family Education

Based on the above comparisons above, it is safe to conclude that both Chinese and American family educations have their own strengths and weaknesses. In order to overcome its weakness and facilitate its health development, besides maintaining its strengths, Chinese family education should effectively from the strengths of American family education.

First of all, Chinese parents should appropriately change their educational concept, since thoughts decide actions, and improving the quality of family education must be guided by the continuously renewed ideas of family education.[5] Therefore, in family education, Chinese parents should abandon some outdated concepts and begin to adopt the idea that children are equal family members and parents’ major responsibility is to cultivate them to become independent individuals. This may help to promote communication between Chinese parents and children and enhance the ties and understandings between them, which is crucial to build up a harmonious family atmosphere. In addition, never sharp children into what you want. Everyone’s life is different, and children also have their own unique one. Life is out to explore, Chinese parents should give their children the freedom to embrace and experience their own life.

Secondly, as for the educational objectives, on one hand, Chinese parents should continue to let their children remember and practice traditional Chinese virtues; on the other hand, Chinese parents should also realize that to put the knowledge into practice is more important than the knowledge itself, and help their children to cultivate the problem-solving ability. In addition, Chinese parents should also not ignore the truth that rearing an individual with independent thinking ability is critical to one’s life success as well. A man with what he thinks can live a life with what he wants. There are uncountable opportunities in one’s life, and only those strong-minded and independent-thinking people could finally reach the pinnacle of their life.

Thirdly, when cultivating children in the family, Chinese parents should be more patient and more skilled in selecting educational method, and regard the mistakes made by their children as precious experiences in their life. In general, most parents’ biggest mistake is to stand in their own position to interfere with their children’s natural development.[6] Therefore, Chinese parents should
learn the perspective taking to stand on the children’s side to solve problems which occur during the time of their children’s growth and development, which means stick parenting is not the necessity of family education for children and being strict with children is not a bad thing unless the way it carries out is accepted by children. In addition, do not compare your children with other children, and praise them appropriately if possible. Children, as individuals, have their own dignity. Contrasting them with others and then rebuking them for a long time is a devastating blow to their self-esteem and self-confidence, which would transform them into a self-abased people and make them accustomed to deny what they actually are.

References


