

The Speciality and Enlightenment of Top-ranking Universities --Based on the Analysis on Educational Philosophy of Harvard

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Abstract

It sees clearly that founding and keeping right educational philosophy is the key for these top-ranking universities to keeping a prominent status through analyzing and combing developing historical process of America's well-known universities. The article begins with a case analysis which is the successful example of higher education --"big and comprehensive"--the educational philosophy of Harvard University, aiming at working out the core elements on its process of growing up as one of the tops. Specialty that top-ranking universities equipped with is elaborated in this article in order to provide enlightenment and reference for China's deepening reform on higher education.

Key words: higher education, educational philosophy, Harvard University, references

In 19th century, Berlin University was regarded as the beginning of modern universities and copied as well as studied by universities worldwide which is resulted from its novel educational philosophy distinguished from traditional ones. Similarly, achievements of America's higher education are not accomplished that easily, even it had been a laggard far behind in education quality. However, it dare to challenge against traditional concepts and acted creatively by taking Britain's idea of college and German's idea of emphatically study for references and combining with background of times and contemporary situation of America, which results in prompting a period of prosperous development in education. Owing to that, a batch of influential top-ranking universities all around the world are formed.

1. The Summary of educational philosophy of American universities

Although there is not national public colleges and universities in America, the most outstanding characteristics of American higher education are diversity and pluralism which originates from various types and levels institutions of higher education established by different motivations and background, that manifest as multiple levels, various types and large quantities. With the diversity of the whole higher

education, American universities prominently reflect their creativeness and difference, thereunto, the most notable characteristics in the process of American famous universities' running is their distinct character and long-term adherence and then bringing their advantages into perfect, whether in the value of talent training, uphold academic freedom or practices of serving society. Actually, almost all of American universities focus on their own historical and unique orientation. But on the whole, the American ideas of running school mainly embody two kinds of tendency, one is the pursuit of dream and truth, such as, Harvard University: "Amicus Plato, Amicus Aristotle, Sed Magis Amicus VERITAS"; Yale University: "Lux et Veritas" ; Columbia University: "in thy light we shall see light" and so on. It is also originated from the effect of mediaeval western universities, because they were born for spreading the religion truths at the beginning. The other one emphasizes the universities' contribution to society and stresses the universities' service and practicability. One typical representative of this thinking is Van Hysen, the president of University of Wisconsin, who had vigorously advocated that university must serve for society and have an important impact in the early 20th century. His idea and practice of university had formed a systematic thinking--"University of Wisconsin thinking", and also formed the University of Wisconsin's distinctive educational philosophy--"university have to serve for the development of society". Stanford University is another representative of university's practicability, which advocated practical education and become the mainstay of Silicon Valley. In addition, the motto of Princeton University --"in the Nation's service and in the Service of all Nation" --also embodies the tendency of practicability.

2. Educational philosophy of Harvard University

In the year of 1636, as the world's earliest built university in the American history Harvard University was built. It was the earliest private university which aims at cultivating postgraduate students and taking on scientific research. Harvard is honored as the think tank for American government because it ranks the first in the list of American Universities. At the same time, numerous celebrities of political as well as academic fields were once accepted their education in Harvard including Obama the present president of America who had graduated from its' law school. The Americans conveyed their deep feelings for Harvard in the development of America in the words "Harvard comes first, and then there is America." along with its' development, Harvard has already become one of the most remarkable universities in the world. However, Harvard cannot distinguish itself from some 3000 universities in America and gain magnificent achievement without its' unique education ideal. As is said "Indeed, the education of Harvard owns its' distinctive quality in terms of guiding people to society, to success and to be an elite of the society."¹

2.1: For School Motto--The Pursuit of Independence and Truth

More than 100 years ago, the famous psychologist and philosopher William James said, Harvard not only allows but also encourages people to be mavericks. The first educational principle is the independence of thinking, and this principle has been advocated even today. The students who are newly entrance the school would repeatedly hear: "you are here, not to make money. You come here for thinking and learning to think!" Influenced by this kind of atmosphere and environment, students of Harvard University advocate equality but oppose privilege, dare to challenge authority, and stick to their independent personality so that

they are especially prominent to think and analyze problems. Getting a large number of Nobel awards and the Pulitzer prizes is the successful epitome of independent educational principle. As the symbol of the spirits of a university, the university motto is the crystallization of history and culture and the embodiment of the educational philosophy, and also is a vivid and concise expression of the university culture. The motto of Harvard University is written in Latin which means "Let Plato be your friend, and the as Aristotle, but let your friend be truth further." The badge of Harvard University is also written in Latin "VERITAS" which means "truth". Harvard University has been growing from a local college to the world first-class university, but the university badge and motto remain unchanged. The core of Harvard's culture is that thoughts are better than the authorities. If a university has such kind of a culture, it is likely to become one of the world's top universities.

2.2: For teachers--Knowledge Oriented and Strict Management

When asked "why can Harvard enjoy the long-term fame of the first-class university?" The twenty-fifth president of Harvard University Burke replied firmly: "To make our school always be in the forefront of universities, and the essence is to have good professors." J.B. Conant believes that the university achievements are not that it has many schools or a large number of students but lie in the quality of talent training, so the core is to have the best team of teachers. In the construction of teaching staff of Harvard University, it has always been adhering to the concept of strict management and the supremacy of knowledge. In order to improve the overall quality of students, Harvard University always try various means to attract the most talented teachers to teach in Harvard with the improvement of atmosphere of academic study and the living conditions for teachers. Harvard also pays attention to the service for teachers with the strict management at the same time. Leading by this concept, Harvard University has attracted a large number of famous scholars in different historical periods. At Harvard University, before an expert is appointed as a tenured professor, he or she should be approved by the whole school and even experts in the same field all around the world to ensure the quality of the teachers. The implementation of "Harvard University, non liter go" principle in the management of teachers is a rule for teachers which means an internal lecturer (usually 5 years) will be no longer employed if he is not improved at the expiration of the period. This implication both avoid the low level teachers to be lazy and make the outstanding teachers to get improved. "Because of the eternal pursue of high quality and high standard in selecting teachers in education, Harvard was able to become one of the world-class universities with a galaxy of talents and best minds."² Kissinger was once a professor at the Harvard University before he served as U.S Secretary of State. After he retired from the political position, he still wanted to return to Harvard. However, Harvard insisted not hiring him because it would be difficult for him to put his heart back to teach after he served on the national senior positions.

2.3: Advocating Open and Free Academic Atmosphere

Josiah Quincy is the first Harvard University principal to elaborate on the issue of academic freedom. He maintains that only with academic freedom can academic prosper. His idea is shared by Principal Charles W. Eliot, who advocates "freedom within educational field" "All the previous Harvard's presidents' efforts in protection of academic freedom, enables Harvard University to stick to the principle of academic freedom,

creates a good academic development environment and contributes to the rapid development of Harvard University.”³ Freedom in Harvard University is not only reflected in academic research and innovation, but also in teaching and learning, which demonstrates a free, open and democratic atmosphere. One example is that students’ freedom to choose their courses. Elective system advocated by Eliot lay an emphasis on the freedom for students to choose their courses of study and to pursue their own talent in a certain subject. Thus, students can be more independent from teachers in learning. Harvard students have their own freedom to select from core courses besides that to choose from selective courses. They are allowed to choose their courses in a range based on their own needs. So far, Harvard University provides thousands of selective courses for students, which greatly meets needs of students’ development. Despite much freedom in selecting courses to study, a specific amount of courses are required for students to complete. For undergraduate students, they have to accomplish 32 courses in four years, 8 of which are core courses and 12 of which are major studies and the rest of which are selective.

2.4: Keeping an Inclusive and Symphysic Global Perspective

Promoting international communication and cooperation is a characteristic of higher education in the U.S. It is also an internal part of U.S. administrative systems and a contributing factor to quality of U.S. colleges. Educational globalization is noticeable in globalized courses and researches in Harvard University. Firstly, Undergraduate courses, graduate courses and professional college courses show globalization tendency to some extent. Harvard offers language courses of 60 languages and provides courses on foreign affairs and international issues for undergraduate students. Secondly, Students of Harvard come from around the world. According to a survey, nearly 2800 degrees are earned by students from 125 countries except America and among which nearly 1000 students are from Asia. Another indicator of globalization in Harvard is its academic research which is beyond the America with 3,000 students of 180,000 doing different researches in 100 countries overseas. Meanwhile, Harvard encourages and supports overseas studying, regarding world as a class for Harvard students. Many organizations in Harvard provide intermediary service for overseas studying. They offer work placement, scholarship and donation for students willing to go abroad to study.

3. Inspirations

Educational philosophy is the soul of a university.⁴ The educational philosophy of a university guides the direction of university’s development. If we have a glance of the history of famous universities in the U.S, it is easy to find that the fast development of them should attribute to both internal efforts and external boosters. From external boosters, society will have some requirements set for the universities; at the same time, society also builds a good environment and atmosphere that benefit the development of universities. Internal efforts refers to the measures universities implement to satisfy the requirements of modern times; universities try to find their own suitable developing route and under the guidance of correct educational philosophy, thus to develop itself and at the same time meet the needs of society. The most eminent feature of American universities is diversity. The types of the first-class universities are multilevel, the universities there are characterized not only by “big and comprehensive” but also “small but refined”.

Wang Jianhua holds the opinion that the most important educational philosophies in western

universities are autonomy of universities and academic freedom.⁵ Analyse the statistics we get from the case study of Harvard University with the experience viewing American universities' history as a whole, we find that self- management and academic freedom are being greatly valued by the educational philosophies of those universities. They promote academic freedom, pay attention to the cultivation of talents, emphasis democratic and equality, insist on being open and diversified. In this way, they can not only inherit the traditions but also be creative according to the development of the society. "The report form the board of directors of the National Science suggests that we should combine teaching-related activities with all kinds of research activities, and we should give support to all those activities".⁶ American universities not only pay attention to the two activities mentioned above but also stress on serving society. "Universities should meet the needs of society but not its desires."⁷ Internationalization should also be mentioned when talk about the features of famous American universities. Early in the year of 1980, Clarke Kerr, the president of Policy Research Council of Higher Education, has proposed that: "Nowadays, social problems and the structure of knowledge have been internationalized , we need a totally new educational philosophy that excel the tradition ones. This new concept calls for higher education to meet the needs of the world, or to say that we should internationalize higher education."⁸

As the U.S. holds the biggest education system in the world, it has cultivated the first-class universities in the world. Henry Rosovsky, the former dean of the college of arts and sciences in Harvard University once said: "Some parts of American higher education should make every American to be proud of. Actually, it is safe to point out to the critics that we have so many talents of this kind, and most of them are in the best universities in the world, while three-quarter of the best universities are located in America."⁹ As the strategic base and the main innovation base of America to cultivate senior talents, those universities matter a lot in the development of American society, economy, science and technologies, even their development and reform will influence that in the whole education system.

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End Notes

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