

The Liberal Arts in Colonial Colleges of British North America —— Its Characteristics, Causes and Functions

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ABSTRACT. *The establishment of colonial college in British North America was driven by religious purposes as well as the puritans' sense of cultural mission. In order to purify their religion and culture and make knowledge serve their religious beliefs, the puritans established colonial colleges under the extremely difficult conditions at that time, which enabled the traditional educational ideas to take root and sprout in the North American continent, and initiated the precedent of higher education in the United States. British colonial college in North America is the inheritance and development of liberal arts in the west, which forms a unique higher education system in combination with the free soil of America. The establishment, preservation and development of colonial college had a great impact on the formation of the United States and the establishment of the American higher education system. The purpose of this paper is to sort out its formation characteristics, influencing factors and functions in order to reproduce its important historical value.*

KEYWORDS: *Colonial college of British North America, Liberal education, College formation factor, Function*

1. Introduction

The history of higher education in the United States is longer than the history of the nation. From 1607, the first permanent British settlement in North America, Jamestown, to the American Revolution (1775-1783), each major town and almost every denomination had its own college -- nine colleges, Harvard College, William and Mary College, Yale College, New Jersey college, Philadelphia College, king's college, Rhode Island College, queen's college and Dartmouth College. Many characteristics of colonial college influenced the development of higher education in the United States and established its own university tradition for the United States.

2. The Characteristics of colonial colleges

From the establishment of Harvard College in 1636 to the independence of America in 1776, it has a history of more than one hundred years. Colonial college is shaped and influenced by various historical forces. Oxford and Cambridge provided the original model that colonial colleges tried to imitate, due to the heterogeneity of population, different religious sects have been established, and the college is also the purpose of each religion. So, on the one hand, patterns and traditions of higher education were brought from Western Europe and on the other hand, we found that conditions in the native America influenced and changed the development of these transplant institutions. Because of the interaction of these two elements, colonial college formed its own characteristics.

2.1 Religion as an important characteristic of colonial college

Higher education in the United States originates from religion and rises with the prosperity of religion. The clergy was the dominant force, and most of the clergy were priests. They represented the most important intellectual class in the colony at that time and were the main force in the birth of colonial colleges. The first three colleges in British North America followed the model of the European reformation, in which universities were jointly run by church and government. Although each college has a slightly different configuration, it retains common characteristics that teaching is conducted under the supervision of the clergy, and all learning takes place in a religious context.

The primary educational objective of Harvard College was to produce qualified clergy. A pamphlet in 1643 declared that the college's purpose was to promote learning so that it could be passed on to future generations, and never to send incompetent priests to the church. The statute of 1646 states that everyone should consider the end of his life and learn to know god and Jesus Christ, which was eternal life. The purpose of Yale College was to continue to cultivate learned and orthodox people, to defend and spread Christian doctrine with sincerity and enthusiasm, and to provide young people with a place to study art and science. With the blessing of almighty god, these young people can work in the public service in the church and the civil state. In 1754, the President of Yale University pointed out that the college was an association of ministers, which aims to train the talents needed for the work of ministers. The founders of William and Mary stated that the college was established to provide the church with a devout, well-educated young man with good literature and to spread the Christian faith among the Indians.

2.2 Implement liberal arts as the main feature of college education

This education, which was transplanted from the European continent and blossomed in America, is the inheritance of liberal arts in the west and the continuation and variation of liberal arts in Britain. Plato in his academy Academy teaching philosophy more than two thousand years ago, Aristotle's political science

lectures in Lykeion, Roman orator Cicero advocates free skill, the Renaissance humanist thinkers Erasmus advocate humanistic spirit values, Locke's education, a gentleman of the enlightenment education thinker Rousseau's natural education and so on should be free education or the mind free education. It is just the replacement of concepts in different contexts of time changes. The whole tradition of western education is liberal arts, or general education. This kind of education was designed for the governors and the leisure people, and seven arts is the main curriculum model. In the North American colonies, such education was combined with the geographical and cultural environment, religious belief and liberal and democratic atmosphere at that time, forming its own characteristics. It was transformed from the elite education function to the education of priests and political leaders, which was different from that in continental Europe. Although Harvard was founded by Oxbridge graduates in 1636, the early American colleges were a very serious place with a very solemn and important mission. As Frederick Rudolph pointed out, the puritans needed learned clergymen and educated men as leaders if they were to carry forward their Oxbridge heritage and achieve their original university goals. Therefore, the early colleges in the United States were different from the liberal education in the western countries.

2.2.1 Implement the liberal arts curriculum

In colonial America, institutions of higher education were mainly devoted to the pursuit of liberal knowledge rather than practical skills. Harvard College was founded to spread knowledge and kindness among young people. Dartmouth College's charter states that it was founded to teach religion to barbarians. In the process of implementing liberal education, classical education curriculum plays an important role. The courses of colonial college are mainly: three medieval subjects (grammar, rhetoric and logic), four subjects (arithmetic, geometry and astronomy music), and three philosophy (natural, moral and spirit). Students read in Latin and Greek, prepare and read a large number of classical works, and analyze logically from a series of articles. During morning and evening prayers, logical Greek, Hebrew and bible are practiced simultaneously. Logic is a basic subject, which provides methods for the art of thinking and an introduction to advanced research. In the 17th century, courses in Logic and Ethics were considered sufficient to prepare students for their responsibilities to the state. Politics and Ethics are part of the beginner's curriculum, but Politics means studying Aristotle's Politics. In its early days Latin was considered the language of scholars and textbooks, and academic papers were written in Latin, just as textbooks and lectures were debated. In this language, there is a very clear way of expression of philosophical knowledge, which can lead to the intrinsic and substantial meaning of things. The purpose is to familiarize students with the thoughts and methods of scholastic philosophy, and instill respect for the authority of the ancients.

2.2.2 Management by board of directors

The board of directors system of American universities was born under the special historical conditions of the North American colonies. That is, the legal person of the university, whose members are mostly off-campus persons, and the board of directors composed of laymen represents the public interest, which is also

the highest authority of the university. The primary governance responsibility is to select and supervise principals and to ensure that the university's financial situation meets the needs of high quality teaching and academic research. It is of great significance to maintain university autonomy and make higher education respond to social needs in a timely and flexible manner.

The Puritan college, established primarily for the purpose of religion, was devoted to the cultivation of ministers of their own faith in this barren area. In their institutional design of the college, academic freedom and intellectual development were not what the early immigrants pursued and yearned for. For the colonists, piety and orthodox religious belief were the primary goals of the colony, which inevitably required the college to be under the control of such devout people. The university models borrowed from Geneva and Edinburgh were built and controlled by government officials with biblical guidance, forming the lay governance of American higher education.

Most College Board members are drawn from the social elite and church ministers. Most of the College Board members were selected from the social elite and church pastors, because the formation of such characteristics originated from the unique frontier environment of the colony and was restricted by objective conditions. Although the founders of schools were different from those in political power, the very important support of the early schools in such a tough environment came from groups with strong religious leanings due to the theocracy society. Statutory churches and civic governments became the main sources of funding for the school, and this religious nature was reinforced even by individual donations. In contrast to the long tradition of academic development in the UK, this new world land did not have the demographic basis to form professional autonomous groups, so higher education institutions were controlled by externally governed organizations from the beginning. It was incorporated into the collegiate juridical system as the colony grew, and it developed into what scholars call the lay trustees. This special mode of college governance has exerted an important influence on the rule of law and corporate governance structure of modern American universities.

2.3 Cultivate rational and responsible citizens

North America was originally a settlement of Indians. At the end of the 15th century, westerners began to immigrate here. From 1607, the first permanent settlement of Jamestown built by Britain in North America, to the middle of the 18th century, 13 colonies with different economic, political and concept gradually formed, and most of the colonists were British. After a series of reforms and a short history of more than 300 years, the United States has gradually become stronger, moving towards the center of the world and becoming a real superpower in today's world.

What factors contribute to the rapid rise of the United States is worth pondering and studying. Alexander Hamilton, the founder of the American party system, begins his federalist papers by saying: Whether human societies are truly capable of good government through deliberate and free choice, or whether they are forever

destined to depend on opportunity and strength to determine their political organizations. Thomas Jefferson believed that if we choose the wrong role for ourselves, it should be the misfortune of all mankind and reason and free inquiry are the only effective forces against error. From the rational appeal of the founding fathers to the correct choice of constitutional strategy, we can clearly see that American history is not shaped by nature, but by choice through rational thinking. The rational thinking of the founding fathers of the United States is the result of the free education in colonial colleges and has been the reason for shaping the development of the rational mind of the American citizens.

The primary goal of a university is not to provide students with means to make a living, but to cultivate responsible social citizens. Adhering to their educational goals and maintaining an independent humanistic spirit is the foundation of a university. Leading the development of the university with the concept of liberal education, the formation of individual rationality is determined to be the guiding principle of liberal education. The purpose of university education is to train young people's intellectual ability and develop their rational consciousness, which provides a general foundation with western culture as the core for the cultivation of professional talents. Humanism and rationalism also provide guidance for colleges to select and organize their curriculum. The ascension of the soul requires the study of knowledge, through which the brain and mind are trained and brought to reason, so that the highest truths can be understood. Therefore, classical languages, classical humanities, mathematics and philosophy were more conducive to the training and development of reason in colonial colleges than those subjects that relied more on sensory experience.

3. Forming factors of liberal education in colonial colleges

3.1 The religious influence of colonial college in North America

Learning represents knowledge and truth in the educational thought of ancient western civilization. Scholar is the pursuit of knowledge and to explore the truth and use knowledge to guide people's life style, to regulate people's thought method with truth, and in an age of religious rule has dominated society. The pursuit of knowledge or the search for truth must be conducted under the protection and guidance of god and god. Oxford's motto is *Dominus illuminatio mea*, Latin for The Lord is my light (It's from psalm 27). Cambridge's motto is *Hinc lucem et pocula sacra*, which means: this is the place of enlightenment and the source of knowledge (From this place, we gain enlightenment and precious knowledge). The motto of Harvard is to be friends with Plato, Aristotle, and more importantly with truth. Yale's motto is *Lux et veritas*. All of these mottos include the core ideas of the time and the interdependence between god's truth and knowledge. This idea has become the core value of traditional British higher education represented by Oxford and Cambridge. This ideological origin of pursuing knowledge and exploring truth under the guidance of religious ideas has become the traditional symbol of British higher education, from Oxford to Cambridge, from Cambridge to Harvard, from Harvard to

Yale, and from Yale to the early universities in the North American colonies. As the mainstream ideology of the North American colonies, Christianity not only gave new importance to schools, but also directed the educational purpose beyond the pragmatic vocational education purpose to a deeper cultural goal and cultural responsibility. A number of codes from the 17th century proved that compulsory education laws flourished in the society at that time. These laws indicated that puritans were concerned about education and the desire for civilization, and even feared the regression of cultural level and the result that civilization might be buried in their father's grave. Therefore, to find out the situation of higher education in colonial colleges in North America, we must first understand the Puritan world. Only the key of religion can open and understand the formation, development and results of college education at that time.

3.2 The influence of European universities on colonial colleges in North America

Quite a few of the early settlers in North America were college-educated puritans who undoubtedly wanted to transplant what they considered the best mode of higher education in the world to the new world. Harvard College was founded almost entirely on the basis of the University of England, and Emmanuel College in Cambridge had a great influence on Harvard. During the decade 1670-80, large numbers of Scottish Presbyterians emigrated from Northern Ireland to North America, and Scottish scholars brought their university traditions to the new world. The first President of the college of William and Mary graduated from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. In 1768 the Scottish theologian John Witherspoon took over as President of the college of New Jersey. The educational idea of college is basically European, especially the educational thought of ancient Rome and ancient Greece. In addition to the teaching model of Oxford and Cambridge, its host country, the style of higher education in the middle ages also migrated to America, and classical knowledge was the main teaching content. Early courses focused on logic and godfather-philosophy, with Greek and Latin compulsory. Literature, law, theology, and medicine are the main subjects, taught mostly by lecture and debate. Teaching focuses on mental training, moral training and thinking training.

4. The role of liberal education in the three colonies colleges

4.1 Prepared political leaders for the founding of the United States

The liberal education in colonial college gave birth to a group of social elites for the formation of the United States, and cultivated rational political leaders for the formulation of the founding strategy of the United States. First there was Harvard, then there was the United States of America. This shows the great historical role of colonial college. 1751 John Adams, the second President of the United States, studied at Harvard college. James Madison, the fourth President of the United States and the father of the constitution, graduated from Princeton college. Alexander

Hamilton, the first secretary of the Treasury and founder of the American party system, graduated from King's College. Thomas Jefferson, the chief author of the Declaration of Independence, as the third President of the United States of America, mentioned in his autobiography that he studied at the College of William and Mary, where he was taught by a scholar of classical literature and the Reverend Mr. Murray. He was the mentor and friend of Dr. William Small of Scotland, a man of considerable attainments in most useful scientific departments, with admirable expressiveness, correct gentility, and great breadth of mind. It was with him that Jefferson got his first ideas about the development of science and the world.

4.2 Laid the foundation for the development of American higher education

Colonial college was the beginning of American higher education and the source of rational education development of American universities, which opened the way for American general education. What we now call general education was formed on the basis of liberal education. Liberal education is a kind of education that completely excludes practical education and focuses on classical humanities, while general education caters to the development trend of the society. On the basis of adhering to the basic connotation of liberal education, it abandons the hierarchical and purely classical tendency and incorporates all kinds of practical knowledge into the regular courses of universities. Both the 1828 Yale report after the founding of the People's Republic of China and Robert Maynard Hutchins, and other schools of eternal education are the adherence and practice of liberal education. The report by the American Council on Higher Education says a society that lacks common experience and knowledge is one that has no cultural roots, and an important task of higher education today is to provide a unified general education for young Americans. The Harvard Committee's report on general education in a free society states that higher education must provide students with a general education and provide a common body of knowledge to its members, without which society would fall apart, and a general education is urgently needed to guide young Americans to contribute to the future of our country.

4.3 Nurture the humanistic spirit of American universities

Since the establishment of American colonial college, a main line of education aimed at cultivating individual rational consciousness and training individual rational thinking ability runs through the history of American university. The primary goal of a university is not to provide students with means to make a living, but to cultivate responsible social citizens. Adhering to their educational goals and maintaining an independent humanistic spirit is the foundation of a university. It is the function of universities to enable students to draw on the best of human wisdom from ancient times to acquire eternal knowledge and values, and to develop rational reasoning and critical thinking skills. When college education is lost in the pursuit of utilitarianism and impetuosity, we should stick to the idea of liberal education and keep it on the track of education law through reform and adjustment. Leading

the development of the university with the concept of liberal education, the formation of individual rationality is determined to be the guiding principle of liberal education. The purpose of college education is to train young people's intellectual (mental) ability and develop their rational consciousness, so as to guarantee the foundation of good liberal education for American college professional education and provide a general foundation with western culture as the core for the cultivation of professional talents.

5. Conclusion

For nearly a century and a half, colonial college did adhere to an academic tradition based on a free learning system and took seriously its mission of training learned and devout clergy. It does actively pursue the declared goal of cultivating generations of political leaders committed to the common good. Thus, colonial college, as a type of institution, emphasized both learning and piety and erudition, emphasizing civic virtue over personal interest. With regard to these basic policies and objectives, the college persisted without qualitative change from its founding in the colonies of Virginia and Massachusetts in the early seventeenth century to the outbreak of the revolutionary war in the late eighteenth century and beyond. Moreover, despite all its shortcomings and shortcomings, colonial college was the model imitated by almost all the liberal arts colleges that emerged in the 19th century, and its historical value as the academic prototype of American higher education is difficult to measure.

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