

Liberal Education Traditions in the United Kingdom and United States: An historical perspective

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Abstract: The idea and practice of liberal education has been shaped in two forms in its historical development: the American traditions and British traditions. The idea of liberal education in the United States was borrowed from the United Kingdom and it was deeply influenced by British traditions in terms of highlighting classics and intellectual training. Over more than one hundred years from its Independence to the First World War, Americans began criticizing the aristocracy of British liberal education and gradually developed their own traditions, which were innovative in the idea, interpretation, courses and structure. In terms of the idea of liberal education, Americans highlighted the purpose of liberal education to train free citizens and to meet the demands of the civil society. In terms of the meaning of liberal education, American traditions tended to interpret “liberal” as “free” or “liberating” other than “gentlemanly” or “learned”. In course design, British traditions rarely emphasized broader range and multi-disciplinary. In contrast, course design in American liberal education is more encyclopedic, valuing both liberal arts and sciences and later developing a liberal arts course model combining humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.

Keywords: liberal education, American tradition, English tradition

Introduction

As is well known, liberal education is the common traditions in undergraduate education of the United Kingdom and the United States, a notion rarely highlighted by continental European countries if viewed from a cross-national perspective. As early as 1901, Prof. Arthur Twining Hadley, the then Yale President, pointed out that the United States and the United Kingdom featured a non-professional, liberal education that aimed to cultivate free citizen, which was not the case in France or Germany (Hadley, 1989, pp.145-146). American educator, Frank Aydelotte further elaborated in 1935:

Universities in continental European countries have no undergraduates, so they have no

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obligation to provide a liberal education. Instead, grammar secondary school, lycée or colegio should take the responsibility. Newman's *The Idea of a University* can only be written in the context of an English-speaking country. (Aydelotte, 1935)

Such liberal education traditions in both countries originate from the United Kingdom, with its long history of such traditions and a unique set of liberal education theories, not to mention the excellent example of Newman's *The Idea of a University*. A number of scholars believe that the United States, lacking its own traditions, completely inherited its general education or liberal education from the United Kingdom. Hence, a question: have American educators created liberal education traditions and theories of their own?

There are three views in the academic world regarding this question. The first one is a negation view. For example, Thomas Green denies that there exist American liberal education theories (Orrill, 1995, p.xxi). The second group of academics are revisionists. Bruce Kimball is a typical example. For a long time he believed that there only existed two traditions: eloquence and philosophy, but later he changed his point of view and turned to the belief that a new tradition rooted in American pragmatic philosophy developed in the United States at the end of the 20th century (Orrill, 1995, p.xxi). The third view is somewhat extreme. They believe that no other countries except the United States have liberal education, as the 20th century witnesses the United States' increasing emphasis on liberal arts education, or general education while fewer people remember the traditions of the United Kingdom. A. Whitney Griswold, Acting President of Yale between 1951 and 1963, pointed out, "I do not know if there is any other country emphasizing liberal education as hard as the United States" (Purcell, 1971). In a 1991 essay entitled "The Exceptionalism of American Higher Education", the famous American higher education researcher Martin Trow was "conveying the notion of liberal or liberal arts education to all (or the majority of) undergraduates" is a manifestation of American exceptionalism (Trow, 1991).

This paper argues that neither the negation nor the extreme view can be taken. Moreover, both the United Kingdom and the United States have unique liberal education traditions of their own, and there is an evident difference in the expositions of liberal education between the two countries. However, different from Bruce Kimball's revisionist view, this article believes that American liberal education traditions, or in other words, the difference between the American traditions and the British ones took shape in an earlier period. Furthermore, after the War of Independence, the United States began criticizing British education traditions and developed liberal education traditions with American characteristics based on such criticism. Such a difference can partially explain why the United Kingdom gradually abandoned its original liberal education models in the 20th century while the United States was able to retain its traditions.

The formation and decline of liberal education traditions in the United Kingdom

In a classical sense, liberal education refers to an education towards free people and is often interpreted as an education aimed at gentlemen in the British traditions. William Francis Wilkinson, a 19th century British educator, said that although liberal education referred to an education towards free people, it was often interpreted as an education for gentlemen:

Education under the parental roof, conducted by parents with the aid of competent teachers, or in the family of a private tutor who is in loco parentis, or in public schools, is the highest kind of education possible among us; what we understand by a liberal education, It is important to inquire what is, or may be, or ought to be the course of an education so characterized. The phrase originally signified the education proper for a free-man, that is, one in state of enfranchisement, as opposed to slave or serf. It would now, perhaps, be generally explained to mean the education of a gentleman. Let us rather say it indicates an education such as shall qualify for the possession and exercise of influence, for the higher class of pursuits and offices, professional, mercantile, political...but, adhering to the principles I have before laid down, I would prefer to use the word liberal in a wider sense; and, considering it as the representation of *libera*¹ rather than of its derivative *liberalis*, would define a “liberal education” as an unrestricted education,-education in all subjects which, with ample time and means, can properly be made the subjects of the instruction and discipline of youth.” (Wilkinson, 1862, p.98)

Scholars in the United Kingdom have never referred to liberal education as being designed for free men. Instead, it is intended for gentlemen. In this sense, “liberal” is interpreted as “genteel, becoming to a gentleman, gentlemanlike, etc.” Here are some testimonies:

Liberal: Free, generous, bountiful; also honorable, or genteel; as A Liberal Education. (Phillips, 1720)

Liberal arts and sciences are such as are Noble and Genteel, vix, Grammar, Rhetorick, Musick, Physick, the Mathematicks, etc. (Bailey, 1724)

Liberal: (A) generous, free, communicative, charitable, noble, or gentlemanlike, from whence those arts and sciences that polish the mind, such as grammar, rhetorick, musick, etc, are called liberal arts. (Dyche, 1760)

Former Cambridge Vice-chancellor William Whewell (1794-1866) even defines liberal education as an education for the upper classes:

The education of upper classes is termed Liberal Education, and the Higher Education: the education of the middle classes will commonly be, in its highest parts, an imitation of the Higher Education, more or less incomplete; and the education of the people, when they are educated, must generally be an Elementary Education. (Whewell, 1850, pp.2-3)

As class-biased as his definition seems today, it fit well with the conditions in Cambridge at that time. Statistics show that among all the students registered at Cambridge between 1800 and 1849, 31%

¹ “Libera” means “free, unrestricted”.

were from landlords, 32% from priests, 19% from professionals (lawyer, doctor and teacher), 8% from the middle class (merchant, banker, public administrator and other profiting professions), and the rest 10% from other classes (Jenkins & Jones, 1960).

Therefore, liberal education in the United Kingdom has always been elite education. In the preface of his education essay collection, James Pillans (1778-1864), 19th century Scottish educator and professor in humanities at the University of Edinburgh, classifies education into two kinds: “Education for the Majority” and “Education for the Minority”. The former refers to education for the workings’ class, while the latter refers to “liberal and professional studies that a smaller number of parents and their living conditions allow them to give to their sons” (Pillans, 1862, p.vii).

In traditional views, Britain’s liberal education is linked with public school and university in particular. In 1818 John Bristed wrote: “Eton, Westminster and Winchester are the leaders of the liberal education in the United kingdom” (Bristed, 1818, pp.347-348). In the same year British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1843) said that, “the liberal education, that is, if it means anything, the having for a certain length of time, existed within the precincts of the University” (Bentham, 1818, p.416). But at that time, few people could receive a university education. There were only Oxford and Cambridge in England before the University of London was established in 1826, so many scholars were dissatisfied with it. British scholar William Daniel Conybeare pointed out in 1831 that England needed at least a dozen Oxford-like universities to meet the increasing demand from a larger and richer group of people. Therefore, he advocated that England should learn from Italy and Germany to build more universities (Conybeare, 1831, p.ix). Nevertheless, Oxford and Cambridge were reluctant to lose their monopoly in the country’s higher education. As a result, there were only four universities: Oxford, Cambridge, the University of London and Durham University before 1900 in England.

Among the four, only the first two can be considered as an ideal place for liberal education, as their residential colleges provided favorable conditions for young people. Different from German universities, regulations at Oxford and Cambridge required that students must reside on campus for a certain number of years before obtaining a degree. In the residential college system, students live together and teachers are also required to live with the students. The benefit of the system is that teachers and students share the same living environment and it is easy for students to be instructed and influenced by their tutors and peers. The first half of the 19th Century witnessed the climax of the system. When talking about the system, former Cambridge Vice-chancellor Eric Ashby put it thusly:

Obviously, Oxford, and Cambridge think the universities are intended for training service providers for the church and the government. In other words, they train men with virtuous upbringing, instead of intellectuals. A virtuous upbringing is more important than rich knowledge. At that time, they are practical workers rather than theoretical thinkers, bishops than theologian, politicians than philosophers, school administrators than researchers.....so in the first half of the 19th century in Oxford, each tutor is responsible for the students he or she chooses for three years. All the courses will be taught by the tutor. The training in morality

and value on life is equally important as Latin and Greek philosophy class. (Ashby, 1983, p.9)

The above discussion centers on to whom and where liberal education is offered. Then what are the courses for such a kind of education? The concept of liberal education means that “liberal” is related to the people being educated and the contents to be taught. “Liberal” embodies the meaning of “learned”, “generous”, “general”, “extensive” and “large”, etc. For example, Priestley used “learned or liberal education” (Priestley, 1783, p.64), and John Corry (1770-1830) used “general and liberal education” as can be seen in the following:

Caleb Evans ... was born in Bristol, in 1737. He acquired a knowledge of the classics and was instructed in the various branches of a general and liberal education. (Corry, 1816, p.331)

In his 1852 lecture series Newman used “large knowledge”, And Mill, in his 1859 work put large and liberal together (Mill, 1859, p.372).

Besides, as the traditional gentlemen society was gradually disintegrating in the second half of the 19th century, the connotation of “liberal” becomes more “large, general and extensive” than “gentleman-like, elegant and gentle”. Therefore, Mill used “general education” more than ten times in his inaugural address at the University of St. Andrews in 1867. He also used “liberal education” quite often so the two concepts were basically the same in his mind. It is worth noting that Mill did not define “liberal education” as an education for gentlemen like traditional educators. Instead, he defined it as “the education of all who are not obliged by their circumstances to discontinue their scholastic studies at a very early age” (Mill, 1867, p.19). Moreover, he used “citizen” in this address quite often (Mill, 1867, pp.34-36), which indicated his intention to transform liberal education from a traditional education for gentlemen to a modern education for citizens.

From the 1840s to the 1860s, many British educators still held the view that the mission of universities was liberal education instead of professional education. For example, Benjamin Jowett, famous Oxford classicist who translated *Plato's Dialogues*, Thucydides' historical works, and Aristotle's *Politics* and who was one of the most influential educators of his day, compared liberal and professional education in 1848:

True is that a liberal education is what the University ought to give, and professes to give, above all things; that strictly professional education cannot, and ought not to be given within the walls of an English University.....our students should still regard each other, not as candidates for separate professions, but as companions in the same University now, just as they will all alike be citizens of the same commonwealth hereafter. (Jowett & Stanley, 1848, p.21)

The point of this non-professional education is not to prepare the learner for a job, but a “discipline of mind”. According to Newman, the core of a liberal education is the “cultivation of intellect”, which he sometimes refers to as “discipline of mind”, “cultivation of mind”, “discipline of

intellect”, “refinement of intellect”, or “enlargement of mind” (Newman, 1994, p.xv,501).

During the 18th and 19th centuries, “liberal” meant “large, general, and learned”. According to then popular faculty psychological theories, this kind of large education will train every faculty of a man, thus making him well-rounded. As Oxford professor James Pycroft (1813-1895) puts it, “The object of a liberal education is to draw forth all the faculties equally” (Pycroft, 1847, p.86). Former Cambridge Vice-chancellor Whewell wrote in his 1835 book on liberal education that “The object of a *liberal education* is to develop the whole mental system of man” (Whewell, 1835, p.5). In an 1845 work “Of a Liberal Education in General”, he re-stated this point and further took it as a reason for not omitting the study of classics and mathematics:

No education can be considered as liberal, which does not cultivate both the Faculty of Reason and the Faculty of Language; one of which is cultivated by the study of mathematics, and the other by the study of classics. To allow the student to omit one of these, is to leave him half educated. (Whewell, 1850 p.107)

British liberal education in this period featured a small number of courses but they were of high quality. There are two theoretical bases. First, the priority of a liberal education is for intellectual training instead of acquiring knowledge, so its purpose is not to master much knowledge. With a limited amount of knowledge, liberal education can also train a student well intellectually and develop excellent intellectual habits, with which he can easily and quickly master knowledge of other disciplines (Malden, 1838, p.12). Second, some British educators at that time thought that not all disciplines were useful in the intellectual training of students. They just needed to take some fundamental courses like philosophy, classic literature, mathematics and logic to shape their mind. Among these the study of classical languages and works is highly valued. In the British Public School, classics (Greek, Latin and classical works reading) filled the majority of class time. According to the Clarendon Report, about eleven out of twenty classes each week were classics, two were painting, and two were sciences (Goldhill, 2011, p.2). In Public Schools, mathematics had been long ignored. Before 1836, “there is not any form of mathematic class in Eton”. In 1851 the discipline became a regular course at Eton (Atkinson, 1865, p.35). Oxford and Cambridge had long focused on classics and mathematics (Mill, 1867, p.6). Therefore, examined from the courses, British liberal education in the 18th and 19th centuries was equal to classical education. If a student wanted to study at Oxford or Cambridge, he or she had to master classic Greek and Latin. However, few grammar schools could provide excellent instruction in classical languages. If one wanted to master the two languages, he or she had to spend quite a lot of money in boarding schools, namely Public Schools. In the end, learning classical languages became a privilege of the upper class, a label of their identity.

Many supporters of classical education held the view that classic languages and works were the best tools to intellectually train students. For example, Newman made this point in *The Idea of a*

University. The reason is that classic courses were difficult. The principal of a famous public school once told Mountstuart E. Grant Duff, a Scottish politician and former President of the University of Aberdeen that the only value of classic Greek was its difficulty (Grant Duff, 1867, p.5).

Apart from its emphasis on classical languages and works, it is worth noting that during the 18th and 19th centuries when the theory of liberal education was prevalent in the United Kingdom, mathematics, especially geometry, was also a focus in Cambridge's undergraduate courses and tripos, even more important than classics. Mathematics, geometry in particular, was highly recommended as the best tool for training one's logic and thinking abilities. The tripos took mathematics as the focus, which resulted in the relevant ignorance of classics and moral philosophy: "just like logic once being the dominant discipline in the old system, mathematics now became the queen of the undergraduate courses." (Gascoigne, 1984).

Therefore, British liberal education traditions focused more on the quality of the courses rather than quantity, with Oxford traditions more on the classics, and Cambridge traditions more on mathematics together with classics. Other disciplines like natural sciences, politics, sociology' and history were not valued in a liberal education. Influenced by Comte's theory of knowledge, Mill in 1867 proposed an encyclopedic liberal education plan in his inaugural address at the University of St. Andrews, and Huxley proposed a similar plan in 1874. However, the two plans were soon overtaken by the German idea of research and professionalization at the end of 19th century (Philipson, 1983, p.161).

From today's point of view, it is completely useless that Oxford valued classical languages and works reading courses while Cambridge valued classics and mathematics in their liberal education. Educators at the time also claimed that the study of classics was a general knowledge course, whose value was to provide intellectual training instead of preparing for a job, but as Victoria Tietze Larson pointed out, in the prime years of the United Kingdom (1815-1914), the study of classics was a channel to gain imperial power. At the time of the prevalent patron system, elite classic education helped one get work in the imperial nation. After India abolished its patron system in the civil servant examination in the 1850s, Greek and Latin were regarded as a discipline to be tested, with a full mark of 1500, the same as the English language, literature, and history and higher than other disciplines. Therefore, the knowledge of classics was essential to obtain employment in the country. Among the 458 people who passed the civil servant examination between 1855 and 1864, 101 graduated from Oxford, 80 from Cambridge and the rest 198 graduated from other universities, but between 1892 and 1894, the proportion of successful applicants for Oxford and Cambridge were 52% and 20%. Moreover, theories on the political systems in ancient Greek and Roman works were used to justify Britain's dominance over colonies. The rulers, deeply influenced by a classical education, were still fond of reading classics even though they settled down in the colony. As they compared the British Empire to the Roman Empire of their age, they often drew lessons on how to govern people from the classics (Larson, 1999). Judging from multiple aspects, the traditional British liberal

education featuring the residential college and tutorial system, with a focus on classical languages, works, and mathematics was a success. A great number of politicians and scholars came out of Oxford and Cambridge and a high percentage of the people admitted as civil servants in India were graduates from these two universities.

Liberal education was the most popular education concept in the 19th English universities, but in the 20th century, there have been fewer discussions among the British educators. In practice, university education is becoming increasingly professional.

Criticism of the liberal education traditions in the United Kingdom and the German system from the United States

Undoubtedly, America's undergraduate education and liberal education model were deeply influenced by the British traditions. They once focused on classic courses and took faculty psychology as the main theoretical basis, both of which were typical indications of influence from the United Kingdom. Before the Civil War, American universities highlighted classics in their undergraduate courses and their liberal education was established on the basis of faculty psychology. The debate for classic liberal education in the 1828 Yale Report was based on the study of faculty psychology.

After the country's independence, the United States increasingly became discontented with traditional British liberal education. The parochialism of British university courses was one of the aspects commonly criticized in the United States. James McCosh, former president of Princeton (then called the College of New Jersey), pointed out in his inaugural speech that Cambridge was famous for its liberal education through mathematics and classics, but this is not sufficient, because "many noble faculties are not trained sufficiently". Different from the Cambridge system, he thinks that natural sciences should become a part of liberal education (McCosh, 1868, p.63). At the same time, he said, some open-minded people in the British universities had already felt shameful towards the exclusive learning of classical Greek, Latin or mathematics (McCosh, 1868, p.37).

Meanwhile, American scholars held the view that excessive emphasis on classical languages in the liberal education in British universities was consistent with the interest of the privileged classes, and they criticized such a noble nature of the British liberal education. The 1828 Yale Report criticized the English monarchy for concentrating education in a few places, which resulted in a monopoly of knowledge:

It has been the policy of most monarchical governments, to concentrate the advantages of a superior education in a few privileged places. In England, for instance..... But in this Country, our republican habits and feelings will never allow a monopoly of literature in any one place. (Day & Kingsley, 1828, p.20)

In 1865, William Atkinson delivered a speech on at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

British education in public schools and universities in which he pointed out there existed a privileged class in the United Kingdom that owned such a large fortune that they did not have to work at all. Therefore, they hoped to have a way of speaking used exclusively by their class which would be “expensive enough and difficult to learn” so that inferior classes would have no easy access to it. Instead, they had to obtain it through a certain kind of study, which was “useless and shallow”. Therefore, the children of the privileged class spent almost all their energy learning the two ancient languages. However, the United States, as a republic, was different from the United Kingdom. They could not advocate classical language education by using the British privileged class’s way of speaking (Atkinson, 1865, p.33).

Another point in British universities criticized by American scholars was that Oxford and Cambridge were so conservative that they could not keep up with the times and thus were left behind by German universities in terms of academic research. For example, Henry Tappan said “Improvements are in progress... but it appears an indisputable fact, that the system of the English Universities has been lamentably deficient.” (Tappan, 1851, p.37). The universities focused only on fundamental training and paid less attention to higher academic fields; they failed to meet the requirements of the new age (Tappan, 1851, p.39); they failed to follow the trends in philosophical spirit and scientific development and failed to develop any school of philosophy like German or Scottish universities (Tappan, 1851, p.41), etc.

When interpreting the ancient Greek and Roman corresponding concepts to liberal arts or liberal education, scholars in the United Kingdom and the United States were also different. For example, in the Politics Aristotle proposed “*eleutherion epistemon*”. And “*eleutherion*” should be understood as “suitable for free men” or “noble” and in one sense, it could be “free”. British scholar Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893) translated it to mean “liberal arts” (Aristotle, 1943, p.321), while in the United States, Harvard Greek literature professor, William Goodwin, in one of his 1891 addresses, explained Aristotle’s concept as “knowledge suitable for free men” and “free studies” (Goodwin, 1891, p.27). Such a difference reflected to some extent the larger distinction between the United States and the United Kingdom.

In the second half of the 19th century, higher education developments in the United States such as developing post-graduate education, valuing scientific research, respecting academic freedom, etc. were largely influenced by Germany. Meanwhile, they did not follow the German model blindly. Instead, they criticized the Germany university system while learning from it. In Germany, students began their professional study directly after graduating from high school. For a long time, German universities had no bachelor degree and students either went directly to seminary, law school or medical school, or began reading for the Ph.D. in the college of philosophy which covered all the disciplines in the arts and sciences. From American scholars’ perspective, structurally there was lacking a bachelor college between high school and professional school in the German system, and in terms of the education idea, no “liberal education” acted as a linkage between fundamental and

professional education. At that time, some people supported the highly efficient German system because high school graduates could directly begin professional learning, but more people were against it. The American classicist, William Goodwin, who earned his Ph.D. in Georg-August-Universität Göttingen in 1855, pointed out that the German system did not provide a space between school and professional education for liberal education (Goodwin, 1891, p.33). He thought, although it might be difficult to survive between high schools and graduate schools, the university, as a place for liberal education and the mother of American higher education, must be reserved and carried forward.

The reformation and characteristics of liberal education traditions in the United States

After the nation's founding, one problem of higher education in the United States was how to transform the liberal education traditions which were historically related to the leisure class and gentlemen class to meet the demands of civil society. The country became a republic after the American Revolution, which was also its political tradition under which every citizen should enjoy equal rights to education. Moreover, the effective functioning of a democratic administration required participation of every citizen, and their effective participation depended on their education. Under such premises, traditional liberal education confined to gentlemen class was not sufficient, and it must transform into an education for the citizen to meet the demands of the new administration. Meanwhile, in order to make it compatible with the idea of a republic, knowledge must be spread on a wider scale. Benjamin Rush, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, pointed out that as long as education was limited to a small number of people, it would be definitely connected to dictatorship, nobility and slavery, etc. Thomas Jefferson said, people varied in their gifts, but those talented should be rendered by liberal education "regardless of their fortune, birth or other occasional conditions and environment", and defend the holy "rights and freedom" of their compatriots with education (Miller, 1984). In the eyes of the Founding Fathers like Jefferson, liberal education and civil education did not conflict with each other (Miller, 1984).

In his 1799 prize-winning article, *The System of Liberal Education*, Samuel H. Smith said that "one of the major aims of liberal education is to diffuse knowledge" (Kimball, 2010, p.245). He used the concept of "citizen" and indicated that as a part of liberal education, learning geography is a duty of every citizen (Kimball, 2010, p.247). He also depicted the ideal image of a citizen:

The citizen, enlightened, will be a free man in its truest sense. He will know his rights, and he will understand the rights of others; discerning the connection of his interest with the preservation of these rights, he will as firmly support those of his fellow as his own. (Kimball, 2010, p.249)

The emphasis on liberal education as civil education distinguished Samuel H. Smith's thoughts

from British thinking, as the British advocates such as William Whewell and Newman never used the word “citizen”. Although it was criticized for being too conservative by many, the 1828 Yale Report kept up with the time in agreeing that liberal education should stay in line with the republic administration, instead of becoming a privilege for a few people. The report also indicated merchants, manufacturers, farmers, and professional experts (lawyers, priests, doctors, etc.) should share the power of the country as a republic. Therefore, the right of receiving a liberal education should be brought to all these classes: “Our republican form of government renders it highly important, that great numbers should enjoy the advantage of a thorough education.” (Day & Kingsley, 1828, p29)

By the second half of the 19th century, more and more American scholars realized that the idea and practice of liberal education in the United States had developed different traditions than United Kingdom. In 1873 William Atkinson noted that “republicanism revolutionizes our very conception of liberal education.” In a republican government, as previously mentioned, all classes should share the power of the country and all the citizens were the “ruler”. There was no superiority of one job over another. All the people were free. As liberal education was carried forward to all the job positions and classes, liberal education thus became an education for all free people (citizen):

The final success of our republican institutions will depend, more than upon all else, upon success of our republican education.....in *educating the people*.” (Part of the text is italicized as the original text) (Atkinson, 1865, p.74)

This is a tremendous change in the historical thoughts of liberal education. Atkinson said liberal education, whether in ancient Greek and Roman, or in Britain, was intended for a certain privileged class. Actually many receivers of such an education in the United Kingdom performed the exclusive, closed so-called liberal occupations, or participated in politics, “the liberal education of the people, was a contradiction in items.” (Atkinson, 1873)²

British society during the 17th and mid- 19th centuries was largely a class society and “gentlemen” was a synonym for the well-educated class. In contrast, the United States in the 20th century was established on the principle of freedom and democracy. All citizens were free and so liberal education should be open to all the citizens. Historically speaking, an independent “gentlemen” class never existed in the United States. Transforming from a gentlemen class education to a civil education for all, this was breakthrough, or a revolution in the historical development of liberal education. In this regard, the key advocate of American liberal education Scott Buchanan knew much:

For various reasons the European citizen of the republic of learning would not have said that liberal education is for everybody. That is the great revolutionary American contribution to

² The Yale Report can be also referred to in terms of the relationship between liberal education and the republic administration.

our knowledge of what the liberal arts are, although many Americans do not yet know it. (Buchanan, 1944)

American liberal education focused more on democracy and conveyed the spirit of it. Different from the United Kingdom's control of higher education in the hands of a few universities, the United States rigorously developed higher education, during which time individuals, religious groups, social groups and the government were enthusiastic about building colleges. Between 1776 and 1800, 16 universities were established. By 1850, the United States had already built 120 colleges, which meant every state had four (Tappan, 1851, p54). As students in each state did not have to go to a faraway place for study, the cost of attaining a liberal education is naturally going down. One author from the American South wrote in 1840: "Little colleges, are the means of affording liberal education to numerous youth.....within forty miles of their walls, who would never go to Cambridge [Massachusetts]" (Potts, 1977; Blackburn & Conrad, 1986)

By the 20th century, the idea of allowing all the people to receive higher education prevailed unprecedentedly. In the 1930s, it became law in many states that their universities must admit all qualified applicants (Charters, 1937).

American traditions also differ from British ones when interpreting the term. As mentioned above, liberal education was defined from the two perspectives of "large, general" and "polite, genteel, gentlemanly" in the British tradition. But after the second half of the 19th century, American scholars tended to use "liberate, liberalized, free, liberalizing" and "free man" to define liberal education, diverting gradually from the British tradition. For example, when specifying the benefits of liberal education, the 1828 Yale Report read, "Educated in this way, besides the advantages of mental discipline which have been already mentioned, he enlarges the circle of his thoughts and his mind is thus far liberalized by liberal knowledge" (Day & Kingsley, 1828, p.34).

In the United Kingdom, liberal education is closely related to the image of a gentleman, while in the United States, it pointed to a free man. In 1873, MIT professor William Atkinson defined liberal education as "an education to cultivate an intellectual freeman" (Atkinson, 1873). Adler defined liberal education in 1951 as "is the education of free men" (Adler, 1951).

Moreover, compared with British liberal education, American liberal education covers a broader range of courses. Although higher education courses in the United States prior to the Civil War focused upon classics as the core just like England, there were a wider range of such courses.

Benjamin Silliman began teaching science courses at Yale in 1804, while almost in the same period Asa Gray did the same at Harvard. Former Harvard President, Josiah Quincy said in 1841 that there were 13 courses during the first three years: mathematics, classical Greek and Latin, history, history of nature, chemistry, modern languages, philosophy, physics, theology, English, Declamations and Forensics. Over one third of the three years was used for learning classical Greek and Latin (Quincy, 1841, p.24). This was more of a liberal education compared with the British model.

Besides Harvard, undergraduate courses in the colleges of New England were similar. Former President of Brown University, Francis Wayland in his 1850 book *On the Changes in the Collegiate Education* listed the courses of “the most ancient and famous colleges in the New England”, including Latin, Greek, mathematics, geometry, plane and spherical trigonometry, analytical geometry, ancient and modern history, chemistry, rhetoric, French, psychology, ethics, physics, logic, biology, political economy, evidence of religion, American constitution, mineralogy, geography, German or Spanish, speech, etc. Undergraduates had to take around 20 courses during the four years (Wayland, 1850, p.14). According to the American Almanac, around 120 colleges had such course arrangement in the United States then (Wayland, 1850, p.17).

American liberal education has a more characteristic structure. After the second half of the 19th century, the higher education in many countries began to turn toward high professionalization. German universities had no undergraduates for long. British universities, after the second half of the 19th century, gradually diverted from their liberal education traditions: undergraduate education was divided into different disciplines and apart from their professional courses, students seldom studies other courses. But in the United States, liberal education traditions were maintained in undergraduate education so that before receiving professional education, were exposed to a foundational liberal education.

Another outstanding characteristic of American higher education system is that medical studies, law, and theology had no undergraduate education in the system which developed at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Wilson said in an 1894 article that legal, medical, and theological workers had to receive liberal education first in universities (Thomas, 1959). Gilman, the founder of American research universities and former President of John Hopkins University, pointed out that medical education must be based on a broader knowledge in natural sciences and humanities, and he proposed an 8-year education program combining 4-year liberal education and 4-year professional medical studies (Gilman, 1898, p.232). Now such an arrangement is a reality and there are still no medical undergraduate majors. Similarly, the American undergraduate education has no law major. After the second half of the 19th century when research universities and post-graduate education flourished. American educators drew a clear line between undergraduate and post-graduate education so that liberal education found its place in the former one. Different from other countries, the United States has many colleges devoted specifically to liberal education. At present, there are more than 200, presenting a complete exhibition of liberal arts education.

In the United Kingdom, liberal education is no longer a topic of discussion among scholars, but in the United States today, it is still a topic frequently discussed and there is an academic journal, *Liberal Education*, specifically tailored to it.

Rediscovering the British traditions: United States borrows the residential college system, tutorial system and honorary degree system (1914-1930)

Since the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the United States has developed its own education traditions. During the second half of the 19th century, higher education reform followed the path of German research universities: highlighting research, building graduate schools, emphasizing academic freedom, which were carried out under the influence of Germans. At the beginning of the 20th century, the disadvantage of emphasizing research too much gradually emerged. As the conflict between the United States and Germany intensified with the outbreak of the First World War, more reflections and criticism of the German system were heard in American education circles. According to critics, the disadvantage of German universities was that they did not value liberal education. James L. McConaughy criticized the different levels of German education completely in a 1918 article: "There is little that the American wishes to imitate in German universities. They are exclusively professional. There is no such thing as an arts course corresponding to our B.A. Course" (McConaughy, 1918). Under the circumstance where its undergraduate education met a great number of problems, Americans refocused their eyes on the United Kingdom, a country with ample experience in undergraduate education. During the first three decades of the 20th century, some unique characteristics of the British liberal education traditions after some adaptation were gradually introduced to the United States.

In 1909, A. Lawrence Lowell followed Eliot as President of Harvard, and he was dissatisfied with Eliot's policy of optional courses. Soon after taking office, he made adjustments in the policy. In the 1909-1910 academic year, Harvard adopted a policy of "centralization" and "distribution" to replace the original optional course system. According to the new policy, students were not allowed to select and combine courses randomly and aimlessly, but were required to select six to seven courses within a field, which ensured that a student would know the field more completely and fundamentally. Apart from "centralization" in a certain field, students were also required to select six courses in social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences for "distribution". But later, Harvard discovered that such a policy could not guarantee the students' systematical mastery of the knowledge in one discipline or field. Therefore, in order to solve the problem, more academic guidance needed to be given. Then in 1914, Harvard imitated Oxford to bring in the tutorial system. Similarly, Harvard adopted the tutor-student talk in the tutorial system (Whipple, 1932, pp.48-49). In general, a student chose his or her interested field in the second year, and then the university would assign a tutor for the student to offer guidance to his or her study and get prepared for the General Examination required to graduate from the universities. On average, each full-time tutor needed to instruct 25 undergraduate students. If the tutor had to teach, then he or she could have fewer tutees (Hanford, 1935). In 1930, Harvard imitated the British college system and built a House system and each House would accommodate around 250 students, providing bathrooms, canteens, library, and study rooms and administered by a housemaster (Lowell, 1930). Yale built the House system after Harvard. Apart from the two universities, Princeton, the University of Chicago, Claremont College, the University of California at

Santa Cruz all borrowed the residential college system, but some succeeded while some failed (Duke, 1996). Likewise, the British honor degree system was also introduced to the higher education in the United States during this time (Aydelotte, 1935).

Conclusion

The idea and practice of liberal education in its historical development has been shaped in two forms: the American and the British traditions. Those traditions in the United States have undergone a three-stage development: inheritance, criticism and self-formation, and re-borrowing.

The idea of liberal education in the United States was borrowed from the United Kingdom and it was deeply influenced by the British traditions in terms of highlighting classics and intellectual training. Over more than one hundred years from its Independence to the First World War, Americans began criticizing the aristocracy of British liberal education and gradually developed their own traditions, which was innovative in its idea, interpretation, courses and structure. In terms of the idea of liberal education, for Americans the purpose of liberal education is to train free citizens, and the education has to meet the demands of the civil society. In terms of the meaning of liberal education, American traditions tended to interpret “liberal” as “free” or “liberating”. In course design, British traditions rarely emphasized the broader range and multi-disciplinary (except Mill and Huxley). In contrast, course design in American liberal education is more encyclopedic, valuing both liberal arts and sciences and later developing a liberal arts course model combining humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Structurally, American liberal education traditions are supported by several hundred liberal arts colleges, making it continue to flourish. Meanwhile, medical and law studies have no bachelor degrees; therefore, American medical workers and lawyers are open to a more liberal and broader range of education and thus reducing pressure from professionalization in undergraduate education. In terms of the length of the program, the United Kingdom has a “7+3” model, with a 7-year secondary school and 3-year undergraduate education, while the United States has a “6+2+2” model, with a 6-year secondary school and 4-year undergraduate education (the first two years are focused on liberal education) (Fujia et al., 2014).

After the First World War, Americans rediscovered the merits in British liberal education traditions and residential college and tutorial system were introduced to the United States. But strangely undergraduate education models in the United Kingdom and the United States are gradually leading to two different directions. British undergraduate education becomes more professional, for example, A. E. Morgan, a British scholar and then president of McGill University, pointed out in 1936 that “I myself am one of those who feel that in the English universities today there is an unfortunate tendency to narrowing the curriculum, with the result that even in our universities, indeed, even in our schools, we are training experts who are learning more and more about less and less.” (Morgan, 1936). But during the same period, liberal education, or liberal arts education are under reform and thriving at

the University of Chicago, Columbia University, etc. Historically speaking, the different development paths between the liberal educations in the two countries are attributed to the difference in the idea of liberal education over the more than one hundred years between the end of the 18th century and the First World War. In the first half of the 20th century, one of the important reasons why liberal education traditions were able to maintain their vitality was that Americans redefined and reinvented “liberal education” after the 19th century, making it a “liberating education” and an “education for free men”.

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