

On the Integration of Ideological and Political Elements in the Course of “American Literature”

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Abstract. All courses should go hand in hand with the ideological and political course to form a synergy effect, and ideological and political elements should run through the whole process of education and teaching. College teachers should think carefully about how to integrate the ideological and political education into the classroom teaching skillfully. The course of "American Literature" not only covers a lot of information about American history, politics, culture and so on, but also reflects the national conditions and core values of the United States in various periods. It is quite necessary and urgent for the teachers of this course to carry out the concept of curriculum thought and politics according to the requirement of our country's talents training. By consolidating patriotic spirit, cultivating social responsibility, enhancing international vision, and promoting personal character, teachers might successfully integrate ideological and political elements in the course of "American Literature".

Keywords: American Literature; Integration; Ideological and Political Elements.

1. Introduction

At the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities in December 2016, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, proposed that all kinds of courses should go hand in hand with the ideological and political course to form a synergy effect, and that ideological and political elements should run through the whole process of education and teaching. Therefore, teachers of all courses in colleges and universities should think carefully about how to integrate the ideological and political education into the classroom teaching skillfully. The course of "American Literature" not only covers a lot of information about American history, politics, culture and so on, but also reflects the national conditions and core values of the United States in various periods. "When introducing foreign ideologies and cultures into the classroom, we should handle correctly the language ideology and its ideological and cultural values. We cannot merely focus on the translation of semantic meanings and interlingual communication between Chinese and foreign languages, but should stimulate students' interest in foreign language learning, and enhance their foreign language learning proficiency and language expression ability, and at the same time, we should place more emphasis on guiding and establishing positions, viewpoints, and value orientations." (Yang Jincai: 86) Therefore, it is quite necessary and urgent for the teachers of this course to carry out the concept of curriculum thought and politics according to the requirement of our country's talents training, and answer well the questions of "for whom to train talents, what talents to train, and how to train talents", so as to integrate ideological and political elements into the curriculum, and improve the quality of education.

2. Urgency of Integrating The Ideological and Political Elements in the Course

Generally, "American Literature" is a compulsory course for the third-year English majors. The course mainly introduces the general history of American literature, literary schools, representative writers, and analyzes some classic works. This course is an important part of the curriculum for English majors. It pays attention to the sound integration of English language and literature, and provides a good platform for students to master the theoretical knowledge of literature and improve their language skills.

The teaching goal of "American Literature" course should not be limited to imputing facts or conceptual knowledge, but focus on the universal knowledge of values such as humanistic spirit and

good ethics, which are embedded in the surface structure of literary works through their characters, plot and narrative perspectives. As is known to all, vitality, cohesiveness and appeal of national values determine a country's cultural soft power. Different from non-English majors, English majors are more frequently exposed to American values and culture, and are more likely to be influenced by western ideology, and thus, if not guided properly, are more possible to follow American and western values blindly, no matter they are good or bad. "Our students need to study American literature, and the basic starting point is not to amuse themselves, but to uphold the initial intention of serving the people, relying on their own professional advantages, and dedicate their studies to our national socialist cultural cause and higher education" (Wang Shouren, 2020:8). Therefore, it is quite urgent to arouse the attention of the relevant teachers and implant good values in their teaching plans.

In fact, if the learners look at the course of "American Literature" in an objective way, they may find a lot of good values can be integrated into Chinese core values. This course contains a lot of outstanding traditional culture, patriotic feelings and other ideological and political education contents. The resources and elements of ideological and political education in this course can be explored by studying the literary works such as poetry, fiction, drama, prose, and short stories. The influence and integration of the elements of cross-cultural communication and comparative culture in English learning can be exerted, the cultural value patterns contained in this course can be refined and transformed into the concrete and dynamic teaching carrier of socialist core values, and thus the spiritual guidance can be achieved without distaste. In this way, classroom teaching becomes not only the central link to impart professional basic knowledge and basic theory to students, but also the core link to practice and embody curriculum ideology and political ideas in professional course teaching. In the course of "American Literature", through subtle comparison of Chinese and American literature and culture, good values and corrupted ones, the students may proudly feel the breadth and depth of Chinese traditional culture, deeply think about the values while learning, gradually enhance their self-confidence of Chinese culture, thus become talents with both international vision and patriotic feelings.

3. Integration of Ideological and Political Elements in "American Literature"

Literary works are the product of times, society and the writers' values. In the course of "American Literature", many classic works are selected. Most of these famous works are full of the authors' progressive thoughts of patriotism, nationalism and social responsibility. At the same time, many writers' life experience and personal character are also beneficial to students' moral cultivation and the forging of willpower. Therefore, combining the authors' works in the course of "American Literature", teachers can dig into the elements of ideology and politics in this course, and help students form correct outlook on life, values and world view.

3.1. Consolidation of patriotic spirit

Patriotism is a person's affectionate love for his country and people, and a deep sense of identity, belonging, responsibility and mission to his country. In the history of American literature, many famous writers are patriots and nationalists. They have worked diligently for the sake of their own motherland and people, and for the advancement of mankind, leaving US with the classics that have been kept for ages. When learning these writers, teachers can integrate patriotism with the writers' personal stories, and inspire students to think positively. For example, while studying Walt Whitman's "O, Captain! My Captain!", students are often struck by the amazing beauty of the highly harmonious unity of the content and form of the poem. Teachers can guide the students to think about what spirit is revealed through Lincoln's experience, and why people show deep respect and mourning for President Lincoln. With class discussions, teachers may finally suggest that Lincoln's dedication, commitment, and his willingness to sacrifice in the national crisis help win him great respect from the American people.

Take another example of Thomas Jefferson's "The Declaration of Independence". Teachers should encourage students to consult the background, influence and significance of the American Revolution before class, and then lead students to appreciate the work, understand its content, style, and guide them to discuss what foundation "The Declaration of Independence" has laid for the birth of the American Dream and how different the American Dream and the Chinese Dream are, and in the discussion, students can realize the significant differences between American individualism and Chinese collectivism, then enhance their sense of shared destiny and national rejuvenation.

Leaves of Grass is a masterpiece of Walt Whitman, a great Romantic poet. This collection of poetry is considered to be the first in the history of American literature to have American national style and national spirit. Through these poems, from the bottom of his heart, Whitman praises the land, mountains, plains, grasslands, forests, animals, towns, villages of the United States, as well as the American people, especially the builders of all walks of life, which reflects his firm nationalism and his devotion to his motherland. While learning the poems of Whitman, students should be encouraged to do some research on those well-known Chinese poets like Li Bai, Du Fu, Wen Tianxiang, and make comparisons between American poets and Chinese ones and thus embed patriotic spirit willingly.

3.2. Cultivation of social responsibility

Some literary works have played a great role in promoting the progress of Anglo-American society, and thus have lasting impact on the rest of the world. Even today, the democratic and socialist ideas have not lost their value in promoting social progress, which is worth studying and drawing nourishment from. "The Slave's Dream" is a representative anti-slavery poem by Longfellow. The poem depicts the desolate situation of a king from an African tribe who was reduced to slavery, forced labor, and subjected to corporal punishment in the United States. This king-slave dreams of returning to his hometown as a free man, and the poem fully demonstrates the poet's humanitarian spirit and hatred for racial persecution. Published before the American Civil War, this poem was Longfellow's great contribution to the anti-slavery movement. In the course of appreciating, teachers should draw students' attention to Longfellow's compassion and responsibility for the society and people's livelihood.

To Kill a Mockingbird, a best-selling novel which brought great popularity to the author Harper Lee, has been translated into more than 40 languages and sold more than 30 million copies worldwide. The novel tells the story of a white lawyer, Atticus Finch, who, despite the growing racial discrimination and personal safety, insists on defending Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. The novel unfolds through the perspective of a child, the daughter of Atticus, and the narrator Scout and her brother Jem have experienced a series of mysterious, troublesome events. Although Atticus eventually found evidence of Tom's innocence, Tom was convicted of crime due to people's racial bias and was killed when trying to escape. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not only a novel about racial inequality and social injustice, it also explores the importance of social education and family education. Atticus Finch's image became a symbol of justice and moral courage, and might promote students to follow the example to fight against social injustice and take social responsibility.

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, once teased Harriet Beecher Stowe as "a little woman who wrote a book and made a great war" for her anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Through the story of Tom, a black slave, the novel shows the cruelty and injustice of slavery in the America, reveals the destruction of humanity by slavery, and condemns the hypocrisy and greed of the slave owners. In his masterpiece *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain also expressed his democratic ideal that blacks should be set free. Black writers such as Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison also expressed their democratic ideals of racial equality, and presented the sufferings of black people and their yearning for "freedom, equality, justice and rule of law". Teachers can guide students to compare and analyze the status of different ethnic groups in China and America, help students realize that the 56 ethnic groups in China not only

enjoy equality in legal sense, but also the minorities might enjoy more preferential policies since they might need more help to realize common prosperity.

3.3. Enhancement of international vision

In the process of globalization, international vision is one of the most important qualities for the present and future development. In 2016, Chinese Ministry of Education released *Core Competencies for Chinese Students*, which focuses on cultivating people with all-round development, which is divided into three parts: cultural foundation, independent development and social participation. It is characterized by six qualities like "humanistic foundation", "scientific spirit", "learning to learn", "healthy life", "taking responsibility" and "practical innovation". Among the key points, it also emphasizes "having global consciousness and open mind, understanding the process of human civilization and the development of the world, respecting the diversity and differences of the world's multicultural cultures, actively participating in cross-cultural exchanges, paying attention to the global challenges facing mankind, and understanding the connotation and value of the community of shared destiny for mankind."

In the course of "American Literature", teachers should guide students to read literary works, at the same time, help them dig deep into the advanced ideas contained in the works, make them realize the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and the cultural collision, conflict and integration brought by these differences. As a matter of fact, there are a lot of ideological and political elements in "American Literature". When talking about Thoreau's *Walden*, teachers will consciously guide the students to compare the ideas contained in the works with those in Zhuge Liang's "Advice to My Sons". Thoreau put Transcendentalism into practice while seeking for peaceful mind by living in a distant shabby hut in a very simple way. Zhuge Liang, the well-known great military strategist in the Chinese Three-kingdom period, taught his sons to improve their moral character through tranquility and frugality. Teachers will help students to find the connection between Chinese and American traditional values, so as to enhance their understanding and tolerance of other cultures. The Beat Generation in America is a group of writers influenced by the Chinese "Zen" thought. Ursula K. Le Guin's novels were influenced by Taoist philosophy, and the main theme of her creation is the exploration of the essence of life, which is in line with the philosophical purpose of Taoist concern for life. While teaching "American Literature", teachers should guide students to compare, appreciate and reflect between the East and the West cultures, so that students will enhance their international perspective.

Although the unique cultural ideas, values, thinking habits and methods of dealing with problems are different, in the course of human development, many common things have been formed through historical evolution and cultural accumulation. To think about literature from the global perspective, students realize that only reading the classics can deeply dig out the ideas, humanistic spirit and moral norms contained in the world's excellent traditional culture. However, these are the important ideas that need to be transmitted in the course of curriculum ideology.

In addition, to build cultural self-confidence, we need to be inclusive. We should make college students realize that the important reason why Chinese traditional culture has tenacious vitality is its own spirit of openness, tolerance and internalization. This inclusive and internalized force reflects the essential spirit of Chinese culture, and the strong self-innovation spirit of Chinese culture. Chinese traditional culture has become more powerful and mature in the course of the continuous collision with foreign cultures, forming a natural cohesive force and superb cultural adaptability, and then becoming a cultural model of continuous development and preservation in human history. Contemporary college students should have global consciousness and international vision, absorb the spirit of the times in order to adapt to the development of society.

3.4. Promotion of personal character

As the hope and backbone of our country, contemporary college students are expected to have healthy body, master abundant scientific knowledge, and to have good moral cultivation as well.

Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* guides students to develop thirteen virtues such as temperance, frugality, industry, resolution, justice, which quite go along with Chinese socialist values. Emerson's "Self-Reliance" encourages readers to have an optimistic and confident attitude towards life. Thoreau's *Walden* and Dickinson's poetry world of self-discovery tells us that for human beings, the richness of the spiritual world is more important than that of the material world. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* tells us that the sheer flow of material desire and the insubstantial desire can only lead us to a state of eternal destruction.

In the interpretation of such literary works, teachers can fully integrate the elements of ideological and political education through designing high-quality problems and adopting diversified teaching forms, and guide students to engage in a speculative discussion, thus subtly helping students to form a correct world outlook, outlook on life and values, and improving their own character and quality, and then become useful talents to have both ability and political integrity.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the teaching of "American Literature" should not be limited to the enhancement of students' literary knowledge and language ability. The teaching process should combine works with real life, integrate ideological and political elements into the interpretation of specific literary works, pay attention to the teaching of the connotation and spirit of literary works, further deepen the students' understanding and mastery of the connotation of words, and then guide students to examine the texts from a macroscopic perspective, and promote moral cultivation in accordance with the socialist core values. Only in this way can the value of these classical works be maximized and the teaching value is maximized.

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