

Study on the Tortuous Development of Women's Higher Education in the United States

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Abstract: The development of women's higher education in the United States has gone through nearly two centuries since the 19th century. Social history, religion, politics, economy, and other factors are all influencing the development of higher education for women in the United States. Exploring the development and essence of higher education for women in the United States is of great significance for achieving social equity and safeguarding women's rights.

Keywords: Women's Higher Education in the United States; Development; Women's Rights.

1. Introduction

American women were excluded from higher education until the 1830s. In the predominantly Christian United States, it was believed that girls' education would make women lose their femininity and that a woman's proper place was in family life. In the 1930s, 100 years after American women entered the field of higher education, the social debate on women's acceptance of higher education has always been growing, and American women have also experienced pressure, suspicion and fear from all sides when they receive higher education. Taking American women as an example, this paper analyzes the development of American women's higher education and the causes affecting its development, and probes into the influence of feminist movement on women's higher education in the United States.

2. The Social and Historical Causes of Gender Segregation in American Higher Education

Higher education in the United States began with the establishment of Harvard University in 1636, but it was not until 1837 that only four women were admitted to Oberlin College, and American women began to enter traditional universities to receive higher education. In 1853, Mary Sharpe College was founded, the first institution of higher education for women in the United States that could compete with four-year men's colleges. With the feminist movement sparking one massive ideological liberation movement after another in social politics, culture, education, and other fields, more and more women's colleges emerged from the late 19th century and began advocating for the cultivation of women as teachers. By 1872, there were 101 normal school in the United States that trained female teachers. Although women's colleges and various teacher training schools promote their curriculum, there are still many shortcomings in the teaching of these two types of schools from a comprehensive perspective of higher education. By the 1930s, except for some elite or military higher education institutions, higher education institutions that were previously only open to men were gradually opened to women. It is worth noting that while female and male students receive higher education together, they also face various criticisms and hardships. Overall, there are several reasons why American society opposes women's

access to higher education.

Firstly, the influence of religion on American society cannot be ignored. The American people generally believe in Christianity. According to God's will, women should take care of their children and husbands at home, and only men can participate in political, economic, and social affairs. During the colonial period, Americans generally believed that girls should be born chaste, humble, patient, and obedient. "Men believe that they have simple minds and rich emotions. They exist for men and rely on them to live, first obeying their fathers and then obeying their husbands. Under the rule of theocracy, patriarchy, and patriarchy, women have to submit to these so-called" feminine traits "dogmas. Even in a country known as the "Free Country "in the United States, women's freedom is also subject to patriarchy.

In addition, the issue of women's marriage has also been considered within the scope of opposition to women's education. In the 18th century, women who were versatile, well-educated, and could speak multiple languages were not the ideal marriage partners for men. A sociologist once pointed out that for many women, giving birth has become a burden, or at least an unwelcome part of family life, and this incompatible family view is precisely caused by women's higher education.

In the mid-19th century, people used science, especially biology, to explain gender differences. Just like most Americans during the colonial period, they believed that women were fragile and should not receive too much education, as it could easily lead to various diseases and ultimately affect their fertility. Therefore, adopting a segregated education system between men and women is not only a divine will, but also a manifestation of biology. At that time, medicine also believed that the brain capacity of women was smaller than that of men, resulting in lower intelligence. Women were considered to lack rational ability and the ability to learn advanced knowledge. On the other hand, Western philosophy has emphasized "rational men" and "emotional women" since ancient Greece, where "reason" is superior to "emotion", and therefore men are always superior to women. Aristotle even compared women to slaves who were completely free, and thus concluded that women do not need to receive education. If they need to learn, it is also to better assist men.

3. The Development of Women's Higher Education in the United States

The development of women's higher education in the United States can be divided into three stages: the embryonic period from the American Revolutionary War to the pre Civil War, the expansion period from the mid to late 19th century to the 1930s and 1940s, and the period of reflection after the 1940s.

4. The Embryonic Period

As early as the colonial period in the United States, American women longed for humanistic education, but at that time, society did not have the concept of individual choices for women, nor did it provide them with opportunities for formal education. The early schools that specialized in providing post-secondary education to American women were mainly vocational colleges and private women's colleges, such as the early Trojan Women's College, which was equivalent to the average and college level. It was not until 1836 when Lyon founded the Mont Holyoke College and in 1850, fully adopting the standards of male schools, that the truly higher education category of women's colleges emerged in American history. In addition, Oberlin College officially accepted four female students in 1837, making Oberlin the first higher education institution in the United States to officially accept female students and award them degrees. For a long period of time from the enrollment of female students at Oberlin College in 1837 to the rise of coeducational systems in American universities in the 1870s, American universities were in the experimental stage of coeducational systems. However, due to the opposition of American society towards women's access to higher education, the development of coeducational education for women in the United States has been very slow.

5. Expansion Period

Many behaviors that were considered contrary to the general public in the United States before the mid-19th century became a necessity for society in the mid to late 19th century, and this also applies to the field of education. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, students of different ethnicities, races, religious beliefs, and social classes had access to various educational opportunities. When the United States was founded, it promised to establish an open America, which required support from higher education. Support for higher education for women in the United States initially came from communities, gradually developed to the state level, and ultimately gained support from the federal government. The Civil War was a watershed in the history of higher education for women in the United States, and since then, American women have begun to receive education at a level comparable to that of men. The flourishing development of women's colleges and coeducational education have become symbols of the robust growth of higher education for women in the United States.

In 1864, President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act, which played a decisive role in women's access to higher education. Before the enactment of the bill, although some schools attempted the policy of co educational programs, the scale was very small. The colleges established through this bill emphasize serving everyone and offering both male and

female students, thus sparking a nationwide trend of co educational programs. At the same time, female graduate education has gradually developed.

From the mid to late 19th century to the 1930s and 1940s, the main ways for women to receive higher education were to enter co educational universities, enter independent women's colleges, and enter women's colleges for joint learning with men's universities. The degree of study mainly includes four-year undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students, as well as a small number of college associate degrees. Women's higher education in the United States has begun to develop from a rudimentary to comprehensive, from a single form to a diversified approach.

6. Reflect on the Previous Period

After World War II, the development of women's higher education in the United States has become an unstoppable trend, integrating into the mainstream of American higher education. Under the call of the second wave of feminist movement, American women began to reflect and continue to move forward.

Over the past few decades, significant progress has been made in women's higher education in the United States, accompanied by a gradual shift from single gender education to blended education. Some well-known male universities have begun to accept female students, and many women's colleges have also begun to transform into co educational institutions. Therefore, in the 1960s, the thriving American women's colleges began to experience significant reductions in both quantity and scale. In addition, although co educational programs at the undergraduate level have been widely adopted in the United States, they have not brought the same authoritative status to American women as male university scholars. The development of female graduate education and academic career is facing difficulties, which has also become an important issue in higher education. Once again, the concept of adult women returning to university for further education was also introduced during this period and gradually matured.

7. The Influence of Feminist Movement on the Development of Women's Higher Education in the United States

The feminist movement is closely related to the development of higher education for women in the United States. The feminist movement has awakened women's self-awareness, enhanced their self-worth, stimulated their self realization, and provided theoretical support for women to receive higher education. It can be said that without the feminist movement, the enactment of a series of laws such as the Civil Rights Act and the Women's Education Equality Act, there would be no education for women in the United States today. Over the past two centuries, the world has experienced two major waves of feminist movements. The first wave of feminist movement occurred in the second half of the 19th century to the early 20th century, while the second wave of feminist movement occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. These two waves have played a significant role in promoting higher education for women in the United States. The feminist schools of thought that emerged in each wave have become the guiding ideology for the development of higher education

for women in the United States.

For the first wave of feminist movement, its primary goal was to fight for women's right to vote, and the second goal was to fight for women's right to education. However, there was always controversy over whether women should have the right to education and what kind of education they should receive. Women from various countries have put forward demands to realize their right to education, resulting in a large number of women's schools emerging. When the first wave of feminist movement came to an end, women were in the right to vote! Significant progress has been made in the areas of education rights and employment rights. Specifically, this is reflected in the increasing number of women obtaining the right to vote, the widespread promotion of women's education, and the increase in women's employment.

Liberal feminism was a direct product of the first feminist movement and played an important role in promoting the development of higher education for women in the United States. Firstly, liberal feminism believes that education is one of the best ways to change the fate of women, as it can inspire women and break gender segregation. The first wave of feminist movement guided by liberal feminism actively promoted the development of coeducational education in the field of higher education in the United States. Many feminists believe that coeducational education is the only way to achieve the ideal of equal education. With Oberlin College in the United States publicly admitting female students to traditional gender segregated higher education institutions for the first time, many leaders of feminist movements have become convinced that coeducational education will be achieved throughout the United States.

The second wave of feminism emerged after the quiet rise of anti feminism during the global economic crisis in the 1930s. It has had a profound impact on the theory and practice of higher education for women in the United States. With the

increasingly significant impact of the women's liberation movement, people are gradually realizing the crucial role of education in ensuring women's social status. Many educational institutions have become more aware of the necessity of providing fair education for women, and some have also begun to apply certain feminist theories to their educational practices.

The radical feminist movement, which emerged in the second wave of feminism, regards the concept of patriarchy as the core concept and sees it as the root of human gender oppression. From the perspective of social systems, it reveals the long-standing source of gender discrimination that has been overlooked by people. Therefore, radicals believe that women should pay more attention to women themselves and emphasize the importance of feminist research.

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