

A Study of the Influence of Cultural Factors on the Formation of Philanthropic Awareness of the American Public

Cuicui Lyu¹

¹ Shandong Technology and Business University, Yantai, Shandong, China

ABSTRACT

Charity is an important cause to promote the development of human society, and modern charity awareness is a deep-seated factor affecting the development of charity, which is an important guarantee for its sustainable development. The more mature philanthropy in the United States is inseparable from the higher level of charity awareness among the public, while cultural factors are important factors affecting the formation of charity awareness among the American public. By analyzing the influence of traditional cultural factors and religious culture on the American people's philanthropic consciousness, one can overcome the shortcomings in the development of our country's philanthropy in order to promote the prosperity and development of our country's philanthropy.

Keywords: *Charity consciousness, Traditional culture, Religious culture.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of modern society, charity plays an increasingly important role in human society. The development of charity not only directly reflects the degree of civilization of a country and society, but also effectively realizes the "third distribution", eases social conflicts, and strengthens the cohesion of the country and national affinity. Philanthropic consciousness is the deepest factor influencing the development of philanthropy. Philanthropic consciousness is the understanding, knowledge and judgment of charity formed by people in practice, thus provoking the values of philanthropic behaviour.

The United States is a charitable country, and the development of its philanthropy not only relies on the charity of the rich and powerful, but is also piled up by the charity of the common people. The American people are so actively involved in charity, which means that they have a good sense of charity, and the formation of their charitable consciousness is inseparable from the American cultural tradition and education. The charitable culture of the United States has taken root since the colonial period, under the influence of Christian culture and its

traditional culture formed during the construction of the country, a good charitable atmosphere has been formed in the American society, which has a subtle effect on the formation of the people's charitable consciousness. The family education, school education and even social education, which actively cultivate charitable consciousness, run through all levels, and pay much attention to the combination of charitable concepts and charitable practices, forming a set of unique and effective system of cultivating charitable consciousness. All these factors have strongly promoted the development of philanthropy in the United States.

Compared with the well-developed philanthropy in the United States, China's philanthropy, which is still in its infancy, faces many difficulties, one of which is the urgent need to raise the level of people's awareness of philanthropy. Under the influence of the traditional idea of "big government, small society", in which the government solves all kinds of problems in the society, the philanthropy in China lacks the motivation to develop and make progress. People hope that the government will use tax revenue to help people in trouble or support the disadvantaged groups through the social security system, which

leads to a lower sense of personal social responsibility, and the desire for charitable donations has also been diluted. Therefore, by analyzing the cultural factors affecting the formation of American people's charitable consciousness, learning from them and combining them with our own national conditions and excellent traditional culture, one can continuously improve the level of our people's charitable consciousness and promote the development of our country's charitable undertakings.

2. THE ROLE OF CHARITABLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY

As a global charitable country, the development of American philanthropy system has reached a very mature point. These achievements are not only thankful to the rich philanthropists, but also rely more on the active participation of the general public in the United States. The philanthropic behavior of the American people is inseparable from their good philanthropic consciousness.

First of all, charitable consciousness has inspired the American people's good and loving heart and sense of social responsibility, laying a moral foundation for the development of its philanthropic undertakings. The voluntary and non-compulsory nature of charitable behavior determines that the people's charitable consciousness plays a moral supporting role for the development of charity. Secondly, charity consciousness makes the American people widely participate in charity, which adds a long-lasting power to the sustainable development of charity. As a kind of subjective consciousness, charity consciousness makes all American people who have the ability to help others work together, and then individual acts of charity are gathered into such a grand American charity. Therefore, philanthropic consciousness is the long-lasting driving force for the sustainable development of American philanthropy and the deepest factor that promotes the development of its virtuous cycle. Third, charity consciousness indirectly promotes the development and improvement of the operation mechanism of American charity. On the one hand, driven by the public, the U.S. government has established and perfected a complete system of regulations and policies to regulate and guide the development of philanthropy, and at the same time encouraged the public to actively participate in

charitable donations through the corresponding tax system, which has formed a good system of mutual promotion; on the other hand, the public and public opinion have given full play to the function of social supervision, promoting charitable organizations to improve their own industry self-discipline and professional service system. Fourthly, charity consciousness and the United States charity culture interact with each other to promote the deep-level development of the United States charity. Philanthropic culture is the soul of philanthropy and is the cohesion and crystallization of philanthropy at a deep level of development, while philanthropic culture influences and guides the practice and development of philanthropy. And charity consciousness and charity culture are interacting and shaping each other. The unique charitable culture of the United States influences the people's philanthropic consciousness, making it with national characteristics, in line with the national conditions; the American people's philanthropic consciousness also enriches the country's philanthropic culture, so that it can keep pace with the times, and constantly innovate; and the two together, so that the United States of America's philanthropy is thriving and has a rich connotation. Philanthropy not only serves its own people, but also benefits the people of the world.

3. THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL FACTORS ON THE PHILANTHROPIC AWARENESS OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

3.1 Traditional Culture

The United States is a multiracial country composed of immigrants from all over the world, with a corresponding diversity of cultures, but the dominant culture is the religious values practiced by the Puritan immigrants from England. American culture has its roots in Europe, particularly in its mother country, Great Britain. However, in the historical process of exploring the New World and building this new nation, the American people developed their own distinctive culture. It is this culture, developed in the course of the nation's development, that has shaped American society and Americans today and influenced the American public's sense of philanthropy.

3.1.1 *Individualism*

Individualism is the core of American culture and the traditional value of the United States, which has profoundly influenced the attitude as well as the way of life and thinking of the American people, and its spirit has penetrated into the hearts of the American people. Individualism emphasizes the value and dignity of the individual, believing that the human being should be the center of all values and that the interests of society are the sum of individual interests. Individualism advocates equality and freedom. Individualism believes that the freedom and autonomy of the individual are extremely important, that the will of the individual should be determined by himself, and that his thoughts and behavior should be independently governed by him and should not be subject to outside interference. This is the right to freedom and the realization of individual values. In addition, individualism upholds the rights and interests of the individual and respects the development and realization of the individual.

Individualism, while emphasizing respect for the rights and values of the individual, also calls for the individual to assume responsibilities and duties towards society and others. This is because personal values cannot be realized without a connection to society and others. Expressed in the sense of charity, people believe that they should take the initiative to care for others and improve society, which is not only the requirement of personal responsibility, but also part of the realization of personal values. In today's American society, after experiencing the influence of extreme individualism, people begin to re-emphasize the traditional noble values, they have a deeper appreciation of the relationship between the individual and the society, and the individual and others, and they regard the establishment of harmonious interpersonal relationships and the creation of a better social living environment as a part of their own pursuit of values. At the same time, the idea of individualism includes the concept of "individual is superior to the government". In terms of philanthropy, Americans suspect that there are problems of inefficiency and corruption in public charities organized by the government. Therefore, people are more willing to participate in private philanthropy, which is one of the reasons for the development of private charitable foundations in the United States. In addition, in the charitable donations and other indirect ways to help others at the same time, the U.S. people are also

personally involved in charitable services, such as participating in community volunteering, volunteering and so on. These behaviors all reflect the individualism in the consciousness of the American people.

3.1.2 *Volunteerism*

Volunteerism is a product of European civilization. Christian charity is one of its sources. The Christian idea of charity requires people to "love others as oneself", which is considered to be a response to God's love and a way to realize self-redemption. This kind of love for others transcends family and blood relations and requires every believer to love and help others unconditionally. Although this idea is somewhat religiously coercive and utilitarian, believers are guided by it to make the spirit of fraternity their moral requirement and consciously practice helping and caring for others. This spirit of conscious, mutual help has also become the source of the spirit of volunteerism. In addition, since the Renaissance and the Reformation, under the influence of traditional Christian doctrine and humanistic thinking, the awareness and organization of charitable and mutual aid among the people of Europe and the United States have also continued to develop, and these experiences drawn from practice have also become an important source of the spirit of volunteerism.

Volunteerism advocates an ethical sense of respect for life, mutual assistance and love, as well as a free and conscious personal attitude, and encourages people to pursue the value of life. In the United States, the spirit of volunteerism as a historical and cultural tradition, has always influenced the people's sense of charity, precisely because it can arouse people's inner sense of virtue, and make people regard charity as a human instinct to be respected. Volunteerism cultivates people's happiness in helping others. Volunteerism, with its concept of benefiting others and serving the society, tells people that helping others unselfishly and voluntarily without any reward and contributing to the healthy development of the society is the main way to a happy life. In conclusion, volunteerism, as a charitable culture, plays an important role in promoting the development of American society. It comes from the American people's practice of transforming nature and society, and at the same time it also transforms people's consciousness in practice.

3.1.3 *Pragmatism*

Pragmatism is derived from the Greek word *Pragma*, meaning behavior and action. Pragmatism advocates being based on reality, advocates people's positive action, emphasizes effectiveness, and encourages people to forge ahead. Because pragmatism is a philosophy that calls for positive action, it has a profound impact on society and people's consciousness. Pragmatism makes the American people willing to practice what they want, and they are admirably active in charitable behavior. In addition to participating in the activities of charitable organizations, they also take the initiative to carry out community service activities after work, and these activities are all planned by the community members themselves, and many of them are also carried out in response to some of the problems that exist in the community. They study these problems, form their own ideas and then actively put them into practice.

In addition, pragmatism believes that people should have a full understanding of the social environment in which they live. The real world is full of randomness and it is inevitable that people encounter difficulties in life. Because of the sense of risk, Americans do not forget to help others while they strive for their own success. They realize that a person can not live completely independently, and always need the help of others. Therefore, to help others is to help oneself, and helping each other is the best way to resist risk. This kind of mutual help is in line with the spirit of modern philanthropy, and is also a manifestation of the pragmatism "principle of effectiveness".

3.2 *Religious Culture*

Religion is the mother of charity. Since the first immigrants set foot on the North American continent, Christian civilization has taken root in this new continent. Nowadays, Christian culture has penetrated into every aspect of American society, and the vast majority of American people believe in God, and Christian faith has not only become their spiritual support, but also an indispensable part of their lives, and American culture can be said to be a Christian culture. American culture can be said to be a Christian culture. American philanthropy, which began in the colonial period, was deeply influenced by Christian culture. It is also this religious culture that nurtures the concept of charitable consciousness of the American people.

3.2.1 *The Idea of Fraternity*

"Fraternity" advocates the spirit of love, believing that the key to the path to heaven lies in having a heart of fraternity; it advocates the ethical universalist tradition of "all are equal before God", and therefore this kind of love is universal and unconditional. The widespread promotion of the spirit of fraternity has transformed the idea of religious charity into a wide range of activities to help others, and such activities have become a natural thing. For a long time, the Christian tradition of charity has deeply influenced the thinking and lifestyle of Westerners, engaging in charitable donations and volunteering has become the public's general moral consciousness. "Fraternity" has had the following impact on the American public's sense of charity:

First, "fraternity" advocates the cultivation of love and compassion. The Christian idea of fraternity encourages people to discipline their own behavior with a noble moral code. Fraternity is a kind of faith, a kind of selfless love, which advocates the spirit of diligence and trustworthiness, self-discipline, and leniency, etc., implicitly influencing the people's philanthropic consciousness, and becoming a powerful and lasting internal impetus and spiritual source to enhance the level of people's philanthropic consciousness, which in turn guides and restrains people's external behaviors. Secondly, "fraternity" establishes people's charitable consciousness of respect, forgiveness and equality. Respect is the basic element of love, if there is no respect, love will become simple charity or condescending pity. Respect is not fear or awe; it is recognizing a person's uniqueness through his or her original nature and understanding that person's willingness to grow and develop in accordance with his or her own laws. Christian fraternity makes it possible for the people to show in their acts of charity not only emotional love, but love with real power that respects the value of the personality of the person being helped. In this way, it is possible to awaken them to value the possibility of developing their own personalities, to give them spiritual encouragement, and to enable them to really get out of their difficulties by their own strength. "Fraternity" advocates treating everyone equally. In today's American society, although the policy of racial discrimination has long since disappeared, but racially discriminatory behavior still occurs from time to time. Christianity's idea of fraternity demands that people's love transcends ethnicity,

race, gender, class, geography, and country, and actively shapes people's sense of equality. On the other hand, in American society, the problem of the gap between the rich and the poor cannot be ignored, and the idea of fraternity also influences the wealth concepts of the rich and the middle class, so that they actively make charitable donations and thus promote social justice.

3.2.2 *The Ideology of "Sinful Wealth"*

The idea of "Sinful Wealth" is an important part of Christian charitable thought, which is about the concept of wealth, and directly affects the attitude of the American people towards charitable donations. The idea of "Sinful Wealth" deeply reflects the Christian view of wealth, that is: the world's wealth comes from God's gift, relying on labor to obtain, the proletariat is only the custodian of God's wealth, and to help the poor to help the world is the obligation of the rich.

The Western Christian faith belongs to the external transcendence of pure spirituality, transcendence and otherness. St. Augustine said: There is no sin in possessing property. There is nothing wrong with just loving wealth and expecting to possess it. It is only sinful to violate truth or justice in order to acquire wealth." He believes that wealth is a gift from God to people, that God gives people all that can be given to them in this world, that it is in accordance with God's will for people to acquire wealth through their labor, and that this act of acquiring wealth through labor is an act of justice in accordance with God. Aquinas emphasized the sanctity of private property, unlike Augustine, but he believed that anyone who had more than he needed for his own living, i.e., excess, should help the poor. He said: "All earthly goods given by God to men belong to us in terms of ownership, but the right to use them belongs not only to us but also to those who have more than one needs. Thus if there is excess one should go to the relief of those who are most in need." It can be seen that the early Christian view of wealth held that it was sinful for the rich to accumulate wealth and lead an extravagant life, that this sin of the rich could be mitigated or pardoned by donating to the poor, and that the righteousness of accumulating wealth lay in giving generously to the poor. The only way for the rich to enter heaven is to donate their wealth to the poor. Worldly things such as money are held in trust by God for each earthly individual and thus do not belong to the individual forever, but are ultimately returned to God as such.

This idea can be extended to mean that wealth comes from society and eventually returns to society. In the traditional Western view, when a person leaves this world, it is a great shame to leave behind a large amount of wealth that has not been properly disposed of and returned to God or donated to the poor. The later Protestant further realized that wealth is entrusted to him by God, and that every penny, as long as it is earned through honest labor, moderation and obedience to law and morality, the more money you earn, the more it proves that God favors you, and the more you achieve worldly success, the more it proves that God favors you. But wealth cannot be used for extravagant pleasures, and at this time personal wealth has become one with the glory of God. This tradition dictated that merchants were highly respected in the West, both in England and in France.

From this one can see that Protestantism has provided capitalism with a moral basis for the acquisition of wealth, and that through personal struggle and the fulfillment of vocation, due diligence, moderation and hard work, one is approaching God. Under the influence of Christianity, there is the idea of "sinful wealth" in the Western ethical outlook, especially the idea that the rich have great responsibilities if they have great wealth. The American "steel king" Carnegie wrote in his "Gospel of Wealth": "It is a shame to die in the midst of great wealth." This famous saying has deeply influenced several generations of Americans, Bill Gates has also said that having great wealth "is not only a great right, but also a great obligation". He not only said so but also did so. He donated his entire fortune to charitable foundations for cultural and educational endeavors in the United States. Under the influence of this Christian faith, the Western bourgeoisie has done its utmost to accumulate wealth, which they consider to be doing their duty and approaching God, and this concept of wealth is the cultural background and value orientation of the philanthropy of the whole society.

4. CONCLUSION

The United States is a world-wide charity power, and its developed charity proves that a good sense of public charity is an important factor in promoting the healthy and smooth development of a society's charity, which reflects the public's understanding of charity and the enthusiasm to participate in charity. The formation of a person's

philanthropic consciousness requires a certain process, which is influenced by a variety of factors such as traditional culture and religious beliefs. As a developing country, China's modern philanthropy has just started, and its economic foundation, citizens' philanthropic awareness, policy and legal environment, as well as philanthropic mode of operation are not yet sound. Therefore, in the process of the development of China's philanthropy, one should continue to inherit the fine traditions of China's philanthropic culture, on the basis of critically absorbing the advanced factors of Western philanthropic concepts, to form a new type of philanthropic values that is a confluence of the East and the West, and is based on universal love and generosity. Only when the ethics of philanthropy becomes the inner faith of people, coalesces into a lasting national psychology and group consciousness, and widely penetrates into people's social life and actions, will China's philanthropy be able to achieve lasting and benign development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is finally supported by 2022 Wealth Management Research Project funded by Shandong Technology and Business University "A Study of the Impact of Cultural Differences on Philanthropic Behaviour".

REFERENCES

- [1] Isen A M, Levin P F. Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1972, 21(3).
- [2] Lyu Cui-Cui, Song Ying-Jie. Spatial Dobbin Model Analysis of Residential Consumption from the Perspective of Cultural Differences, in *Statistics and Decision Making*, 2017(18):107-110.
- [3] Louis A. Penner. Volunteerism and Social Problems: Making Things Better or Worse? in *Journal of Social Issues*, 2004, 60(3).
- [4] Natalia Letki. Investigating the Roots of Civic Morality: Trust, Social Capital, and Institutional Performance, in *Political Behavior*, 2006, 28(4).
- [5] Robert H. Bremner. *American Philanthropy*, University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- [6] Robert S. Ogilvie. *Voluntarism, Community Life and the American Ethic*, Indiana University Press, 2004.
- [7] Shao Longbao, Chen Dongli. Chinese and Western Views of Wealth and Charity Ethics, in *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, 2013, 42(02):64-71.
- [8] Ty M. Cruce, John V. Moore. First-Year Students' Plans to Volunteer: An Examination of the Predictors of Community Service Participation, in *Journal of College Student Development*, 2007, 48(6).