

A Comparison of the Egalitarian Parenting Relationship between America after WWI and China after WWII

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Abstract

A healthy parent-child relationship can be defined as the relationship where parents provide for their child's physical, emotional, and developmental needs. Egalitarian parenting is taken to be the representative of American image and the west and is after by other countries in the world. As comparison with the West, China, the representative of the eastern in the world is always criticized for the authoritarian parent-child relationship. This paper analyzes the development and performance of egalitarianism in children-rearing in America after WWI and China after WWII from four periods: authoritarian generation VS founding generation; depression generation VS turbulent construction generation; baby-boom generation VS Reform and opening up generation; info-child generation(1965-)vs (1994-), and investigates the reasons from the aspects of ideology and socialization.

Keywords: Egalitarian Parenting Relationship, egalitarianism, four generations, America after WWI and China after WWII.

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, America and China are the two representatives of the western and the eastern in the world. As the western representative, America is always regarded as the kingdom of liberty, equality, and independence in the world while China is regarded as the opposite. The fundamental American proposition "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" attract lots of people to come. They are to the American people is what the mysterious driving force to the rotation of the earth which can last forever and activate forever. Likewise, the egalitarian parenting relationship between parents and children in America is always a good reference for us to learn from. Many children from all over the world look up to and look forward to the equality and freedom their American counterparts enjoy, and the parents also expect their children to possess the merits of self-reliance and creativity as the American children are noted for. On the contrary, the relationship between parents and children in China is always criticized by the world as authoritarianism. But is it the truth in China? Do American children enjoy the same equality in the family all the time in history? How can the ideologies of equality be passed down from generation to generation in America, or rather, how these typical ideologies are implanted in the

offspring? When these ideologies are implanted? This paper will make a contrastive analysis of the parent-child relationship in child-care between America and China and find the similar and different manifestations as well as investigate the reasons from a broad perspective of cultural, social, and historical factors.

There are now, indeed, many studies on the methodologies of the current American parent-child relationship in child-care in America such as basic principles of good parenting (Erikson 1950); the impact of childcare and parent-child interactions (Connell & Prinz 2002) and so on, but all of these are surface-focused and decontextualized, almost no attention to their origins, or rather, how these methods are from and developed; what is the rooted motivation behind it, or more specifically, the social background of the development of these methods? For the parent-child relationship in child-care in China, most of the researchers focus on a micro level such as the parent-child relationship at different ages or for left-behind children (Li & Nan & Xu 2020), scarcely on a macro level. There is also few studies on the comparison of the parent-child relationship in child-care between America and China. Therefore, this paper will be contributed to exploring these questions macroscopically and contrastively.

The Ideology of Egalitarianism

According to Destutt de Tracy (1796), ideologies have something to do with systems of ideas, and especially with social, political, or religious ideas shared by a social group or movement. Collectivism, as well as individualism, socialism and liberalism, egalitarianism and rankism, racism and anti-racism, are examples of widespread ideologies. In *"Ideology and Discourse"*, Teun A. van Dijk (2006) also believes that ideologies are the basis of social practices. Group members guide their interpretation of events and monitor their social practices under their ideologies. And the ideologies are formed from social, political, cultural, and historical aspects.

The ideology of Egalitarianism means the belief that everyone is equal and should have the same rights and opportunities. Individuals must be considered to be equal to each other in everything from the government ("everyone has the right to vote") to social relationships ("just call me by my first name"). As Thomas Jefferson well-known proclaiming, "All men are created equal" in the declaration of independence, Equality becomes something Americans strive to provide and maintain. It has become an integral and necessary part of the mosaic culture on which this nation was founded and the institution relied. The American people believe that everyone has the right to succeed in life and that the state provides equal opportunities through laws and secondary social relationships. A typical example is that most of the primary social relationships within a family tend to advance equality rather than hierarchy; children are often treated as equal to adults. In China, Egalitarianism comes from the fundamental principles of communism by Karl Marx (1818- 83), which mainly refer to social and political equality and human equal rights of the "masses" and a rebellion against subjugation and exploitation by capitalism. The ideology of Egalitarianism in a family has not yet been awakened. Closely related to egalitarianism is the American value of individualism. Individualism means that each individual is unique, special, and completely different from all other individuals (John Locke), which also indicates that everyone should be considered to be equal. In fact, these two ideologies: Egalitarianism and Individualism, usually come together and interplay and dominate American culture and society, and go down from generation to generation.

The History of America after WWI and China after WWII

When it comes to the different generations of America, American history usually was segmented into four periods after WWI, that is, authoritarian generation (1914-28); the depression generation (1929-45); the baby boom generation (1946-64); info-child generation (1965-), based on the experiences that create common values among the members of a specific group. These

divisions are adapted from Longfellow (1978) 's segmentation of generational differences in his psycho-sociological research. He based his divisions on child-rearing and parenting practices in early childhood and on the impact of the significant world and national events at transitional points in the life cycle (socialization), which are just the same basic elements considered in this research. The authoritarian generation is the time Americans have broken from European members for their independence. Depression Generation is the time from World War I to World War II characterized by duty and sacrifice, in which people generally accept authority and tend to follow society's rules. The baby boom generation grew up amidst great prosperity and challenged traditional institutions and values. Info-child generation felt at home with multitasking and multiple forms of electronic/digital technology, e.g. personal computers and Smartphones.

When it comes to the different generations of China, researchers usually focus on the history from the founding of the People's Republic of China (the same in this paper); Chinese history can also be segmented into similar four divisions: founding generation (1911-49), a time breaking from Qing dynasty and forming new nation after World War II; turbulent construction generation (1949-77), a time characterized by duty and sacrifice; Reform and opening up generation (1978-93), a time reforming traditional values and creating a new life; info-child generation (1994-), a time for universal access to the Internet. Therefore, it is clear that the features of the four-generation divisions of America after World War I and China from World War II are nearly the same on account of the great social changes and historic events. And this lays the foundation for the comparison of the parent-child relationship in the four-generation divisions of America after World War I and China after World War II.

A Comparison of Parent-child Relationship between America and China

Parent-child relationship refers to the close, intimate relationship between a parent and their offspring. When discussing, the term is often related to the social, emotional, ideological, and cultural aspects. Parent-child relationships are among the most complex and important relationships in life and parenting is a demanding job. The main characteristic of parent-child relationships is that they are unequal in authority. The parents have authority over the children, who are dependent on them and the children also have to obey their parents' rules. However, children need more authority to be well-adjusted and independent in their grow-up. This transition often leads to conflicts in a family. So egalitarian parenting is always the dream children fight for. And it is the same case in American and Chinese history. The following is a comparison of the parent-child relationship in the four-generation

divisions of America after World War I and China after World War II.

(1) The Authoritarian Generation of America VS Founding Generation of China

The westerners who strongly believed in original sin and that human nature was basically evil in Bible also took it for granted that “no child has been ever known who did not possess an evil disposition---however sweet it might appear”. It is clear enough that the authoritarian generation of Americans was strongly affected by this assumption. The advice and promotion given by the US government to new parents are clearly based on this assumption. The parents were to exercise their parental authority in the strongest way to limit the child’s self-exploration, as the psychological anthropologist Martha Wolfenstein observed when she studied the sequence of changes in parenting styles as reflected in the widely distributed US government publication infant care. There was yet no opposition to the control and authority of the ascending generation. The authoritarians accepted the domination of their parents and assumed that their descendants would accept their authority. The hierarchical differences between adults and children were to be preserved by the government publication infant care. Children had not yet become egalitarian in this time in America. However, the authoritarian generation’s view of the world was dominated by war. The members of this generation were born during WWI and reached their early adult transition during WWII. During this period, many American immigrants tried to break away from their own countries of origin, French, German, and other European members, and want to be independent and equal with them. Therefore, the parents began to have the awakening consciousness of independence and equality while the children haven’t the egalitarian thought.

The founding generation of China is trying to break away from the Qing dynasty of feudalism which was characterized by the autocratic monarchy and hierarchical differences. The members of this generation were born in the Qing dynasty and reached their adult transition during the founding of the People’s Republic of China. People in this period strictly obey the culture of filial piety. It is the nature that parents have authority over the children, and the children should absolutely obey their parents’ orders. Both parents and children have no idea of egalitarianism but authoritarianism.

It is evident that the social background of the authoritarian generation in America and the founding generation of China are similar for both are fighting against authoritarianism for independence and egalitarianism and the children in both countries are not treated equally to adults. The difference is that the

parents in America began to note egalitarianism while the parents in China still have not noted it yet.

(2) The Depression Generation of America VS Turbulent Construction Generation of China

The great depression began in 1929 and ran through the end of WWII. The parents in this generation quite doubted whether or not the adult would win out in the battle of dominance. First, the chaos and terror of WWII left these babies in many cases without fathers. It is not surprising, then, to see in this generation the development of the belief that if one was going to succeed, one was going to have to go it alone. The authority of the older generation was no longer simply assumed. For babies of this generation, the emphasis changed from self-denial to self-regulation and excessive scheduling of behavior. This was strongly manifested in the emphasis on very early control of the bowels in government advice to infant care. According to government advice, babies of the depression generation were expected to be in bowel training by six months of age. One aspect of this emphasis on bowel training should be noticed that the struggle for domination between adults and children in the family becomes the main theme. As a transitional generation, many of the forms of address of the preceding hierarchical generation remained in place. Nevertheless, underlying these surface forms of respect was an attitude that the younger generation really was more deserving of respect and authority than the older generation. The net result was that for this generation there are frequently mixed signals and less than clear agreement on the appropriate relationships between members of the same or an older and younger generation. This generation although it expressed an egalitarian ideology, was still basically hierarchical in relationships within the family.

The turbulent construction generation of China is from the founding of RPC to the beginning of reforming policy. Because the 3-year civil war and 10 years of the Great Cultural Revolution of China make China stagnant turbulently and create chaos across the country. The ideology of authoritarianism and hierarchy remains the same. Fighting against each other is the theme for this generation. Fighting raises the spirit of resistance and war leads people to fight against authoritarianism and hierarchy. The consciousness of equality began to awaken among people, including both parents and children.

So that people have egalitarian consciousness is a common point in the depression generation of America and the turbulent construction generation of China; the differences are that children in America began to awaken equal relationships with parents while children in China weren’t concerned about it.

(3) The Baby Boom Generation of America VS Reforming Generation of China

The baby boom generation was born into a world of affluence. Paradoxically, because of the rapid post-war economic expansion, they were born into an increasingly rich country, while still their share of that richness has never been guaranteed, because of the large number of them. The understanding of the past was blocked by the older generation who wanted to put the period of the great depression and WWII quickly behind them. At the same time, this generation was born under the shadow of the cold war and the potential of total world destruction. So this generation, being the first to have been raised in radical, egalitarian, ontological individualism, assumed that it was their right to decide whether or not they would do things. The American government's *infant care* continued to revise into Spock's *baby and child care*. The opening words in this book are "trust yourself; you know more than you think you do". The parent is no longer in control. It is the child who decides, while the parent waits patiently for this decision to be made. The emphasis in Spock's book is on the child's "own free will". The mandate to extend equality to all has now been extended to infancy. From Spock on, no American will be assumed to have the right to make judgments about what is right for another, not even the parents of a child. The right of complete self-determination is asserted by Spock to come into play from birth. The baby boom generation is the first completely egalitarian American generation. The self-exploration is recast and a loosely knit organization such as relationships, networks, and support groups appears in the boom babies' lifestyle. These social groups form and disperse along the lines of common interests, needs, and issues which are quite unlike the traditional relationships of family, and community. This generation has completed the transition from the hierarchical structures of the relationship of traditional European society to the egalitarian and lateral relationship of contemporary America. As a paradoxical result, one finds in this generation a much higher concern for relationships than in any preceding American generation and a high degree of skepticism about the endurance of any relationship.

The reforming generation of China speeds up the development of all aspects of the society by reforming the tradition to discard the dross and take the essence. The pace of social development and the intensity of change is just like it in the baby boom generation of the United States. The development and change of society also lead to change of people's ideas. Therefore, people are in a colossal muddle of ideological confusion between new thoughts from western countries and the traditional thought from old China. In the collision of Chinese and western thought, people are classified into three kinds: the radicals of western thought who practice the ideologies of

independence and egalitarianism, the old guard of Chinese thought who keep the ideologies of authoritarianism, hierarchy and obedience, and the moderate in the middle who learn from ideologies of independence and egalitarianism but authoritarianism, hierarchy, and obedience in action. Therefore, the parent-child relationship of this generation is also varied under the influence of the thought collision. Some parents and children have the thought of egalitarian relationships while others haven't. The awakening consciousness of equality in both parents and children in China is similar to the depression generation but different from the baby boom generation of America, the reforming generation of China has not completed the transition from the hierarchical structures of relationship to the egalitarian and lateral relationship.

(4) The Info-Child Generation of America (1965-)VS that of China (1994-)

Though the time of info-child generation in America and China is different, the social background and the ideology, as well as the manifestation pattern of parent-child relationship in child-care, is analogous.

The first info-child of America was born at the time of the Vietnam War; however, they seem to be less affected by the world events than any preceding generation of Americans. One typical feature of this generation is their lack of interest in entering the normal path of life's stages. They put off getting out of school, getting into the workforce, and establishing families. The book of infant care was rewritten by a committee of over one hundred medical, psychological and child-care experts rather than the one-person edition in the preceding generations. This emphasis on expertise reveals that there is too much information for the ordinary person as a parent to be expected to understand and digest in such a computer generation. The mother is told that there is nothing much she can do. The parents are expected to step aside and refer all questions and serious care to hired experts. The complete elimination of any indications of generational hierarchy, at last, comes true in this generation.

There are two factors brought about it; first, members of the info-child generation have clear cultural and technological dominance in the spheres which are so widely valued in society. As a result of their competence in these areas and of the dependence of modern society on their competence, they feel themselves the equals of members of any other generation in most contexts and highly valued by society. The second factor is that throughout the period beginning after WWII, there has been a major demographic change in the structure of the American family. The majority of the members of this generation have grown up in families, not of either the traditional extended family or the nuclear family type. Their parents are more typically divorced and remarried.

There is strong resistance to naming the second spouse of their own mothers and fathers with kin terms such as “father” and “mother”. It seems inappropriate for a child to call his own father or mother’s spouse “Mr.” or “Mrs.”, either. The solution which has been taken is to call all adults by given names, which dodges the issue of the exact relationships in the world in which such relationships are taken to be in constant flux, at the same time, puts equality in an evident and widely receivable form.

Chinese information technology formally started in 1994. The Golden Card, Golden Bridge, Golden Pass, and other major information projects opened the prelude of the national information age in China. Both the central and local governments have established the important position of informatization in the national economic and social development, and informatization has formed a strong development trend in various fields and regions. Under this social background, the young embrace change and information technology. Children in school have clear cultural and technological dominance in the spheres which are so widely valued in society. Based on their competence, they think they are equally good as others in any other generation. On the contrary, their parents are less active to the new technology and are comparatively less capable of the new skills so they are expected to step aside and refer all questions and serious care to experts or the internet. The hierarchy and dictatorship in this generation are slowly removing.

On the other side, affected by Family Planning, the advocacy of late marriage and late childbearing, fewer births and healthy births become more and more popular. People of this generation in China also show a lack of interest in entering the normal path of life’s stages just like that in America. They put off establishing families and childbearing which changes the family structure from the traditional extended family to the nuclear family type. Calling parents and older peers by name is also accepted in the nuclear family under the influence of American independent and egalitarian ideology. This kind of situation resembles the info-child generation of America and egalitarian parenting in China is also developing.

The info-child generation about America and China is semblable at a macro level and different in micro aspects. The same is true for the parent-child relationship in child care. From the info-child generation on, both America and China remain in the information age. Until now, there are few qualitative changes in American and China history, culture, etc. The ideology and socialization behind infant care mainly keep the same.

CONCLUSION

As argued above, all of these four generations of America and China struggle for egalitarian parenting, but this egalitarianism changed to some extent and was expressed in different ways in child-rearing.

For the American authoritarian generation, egalitarianism will be on the independence of America from outside European influence. This generation had not yet become egalitarian; the hierarchical differences between adults and children were still preserved. Similarly, the founding generation of China had no egalitarian thought. The time of the American depression generation and the Chinese turbulent construction generation both are still in the struggle for domination between adults and children in the family. For the baby boom generation, the egalitarianism will be on independence from tradition, the past, and the excessive influence of given human relationships such as those of the family or the community; equality to all has then been extended to infancy. Meanwhile, reform and opening up generation also discards the tradition and welcome the new ideology of egalitarianism and independence; the difference is that equality has not come to infancy and the family is still in the struggle for domination between adults and children. The info-child generation of both America and China believes that every individual is equally capable and puts equality in an evident and widely receivable form. However, the difference is the degree of equality is less in China than that in America. These intergenerational differences sufficiently marked the development of egalitarianism in American and Chinese child-rearing. Meanwhile, it also reveals the similarities and differences in the historical development of the parent-child relationship in child-care of China after WWII and the United States after WWI. What’s more, it indicates that the historical developments of China after WWII and the United States after WWI are always strikingly similar although the social iconography is different and we can learn from the good aspect of the developed countries and prevent the bad from happening when developing.

While most researches focus on the discontinuity between these generations and the concentration on the present generation, this paper prefers to take it as a continuous development with a contrastive analysis of the American and Chinese parent-child relationship in child-care in a broader version. It is hoped that this article can provide a new angle to view the parent-child relationship and make a contribution to child-care and children’s education in the world.

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