

# Introduction

Waldo Ralph Emerson (1803-1882) was a famous American writer and poet in the 19th century. He was also an educational thinker, who advocates reform and progress. As a representative of transcendentalism, he advocated the doctrine of individualism, emphasizing that the power of the spirit is far more than material, and that the potential of individual potential is infinite. Around him, gathered a group of people of insight, who were determined to transform the society, such as Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), etc. All of the above had once been teachers, and they were deeply saddened by the rigid education system and the old-fashioned education methods at the time, and firmly believed that the progress and improvement of society must be based on personal education and moral self-improvement. They actively participated in the mainstream of educational reforms that opened people's mind, innovated their ways of thinking, and created a new culture with reformed educational system in New England. At the same time, transcendentalism has become an important part of American educational thought.

Emerson's educational thought, on the one hand, was influenced by Plato's educational thought of ancient Greek, French romanticism represented by Rousseau, and German classicism represented by Kant; on the other hand, it was also rooted in the New England soil with a strong Puritan background. Emerson was also inspired by Franklin's practical educational thought and Jefferson's ideas of popular education. He put forward several educational propositions, such as "Education is to awaken every soul", "Man is endogenous, and education is his manifestation", "The secret of education is to respect students", as well as "Education is the transformation of experience into thought by actions", which not only helps to establish the value of freedom and equality in the whole society, but also indicates the direction of American educa-

tion reform aimed at cultivating innovative thinking ability. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Charles William Eliot (1834-1926) established an elective course at Harvard, and Robert Maynard Hutchins (1899-1977) promoted the “classical reading program” at Yale. It is a series of democratic educational thoughts summed up by the experimental school of John Dewey (1859-1952), which explains to some extent the long-lasting and in-depth influence of Emerson in the history of American educational thought.

It is also worth noting that Emerson’s contemporary education thinker, Horace Mann (1796-1859), father of American Common School movement, held different educational ideas. Mann advocated a uniform and highly centralized way to promote education reform in Massachusetts and the whole country, while Emerson advocated lively and creative self-education. This debate of American scholars against American schools urges people to further recognize the essence of education: freedom or system? individual or society? It shows that only by organic integration and by forming a united force of the two sides, can the promotion of knowledge popularization and the process of social democratization be realized.

In his book *Democracy in America* (1835), Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) depicted the characteristics of American education with his keen sense: this characteristic was born in the special combination of formal teaching, non-formal education and individual self-reflection that constituted the basic elements of the education of all people in the United States. He concluded that, unlike the aristocratic or elite education of continental Europe, the main objective of American education was to prepare for private life. Therefore, with the decentralization of family wealth and political power, education does maintain the fundamental foundation of a democratic republic among Americans through a continuous process of cultural creation. In other words, individuals and society, democracy and education are in fact closely intertwined and interdependent, which will result in the prosperity of modern American education.

The United States is not only a political and military power, but also a cultural and educational leader. The United States, in particular, is a forerunner around the world

in terms of democratizing and scientifying education. Considering that American education has been around for only three hundred years since colonial times, its achievements are all the more impressive. At present, it is also a historical period of rapid development of China's political and economic construction, and cultural education, of course, is of top priority. All political, economic, and military constructions are inseparable from education, such as improving the cultural quality of the people and strengthening the national defense and scientific and technological forces. Therefore, it has become a very urgent task to study and learn from the educational thoughts, practices and experiences of the United States for nearly three hundred years, especially since the 19th century.

The focus of this book is on the trajectory of the development and change of Emerson's educational thoughts in the context of the history of American educational thoughts, centered on the 19th century American philosopher, writer, and educational thinker Emerson, and the educational thought inherited from Emerson. The inheritance, the study of Emerson's contemporaries' educational thoughts, the historical significance of Emerson's educational thoughts, and the influence on later generations are aimed at revealing that the organic combination of tradition and innovation, liberalism and practicality is the trait of American educational thought.

As is known to all, an interesting phenomenon in the history of American education is that many influential educational thinkers are not professional educators. For example, Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) is a scientist and diplomat; Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) is mainly a political leader; and Emerson is mainly a writer and philosopher. Lawrence A. Cremin (1925-1990), an expert on the history of American education, once asserted that Americans generally valued practical theories over abstract ones: none of these three eminent men had any systematic treatise on education theory, and what has been passed down to this day is only a few bills, essays or speeches. In this way, just as *the Constitution of the United States* has a long-term effect on American society, it is all the more important to explore the mystery that the educational thought described in so concise and laconic diction can exert such a deep and lasting influence on American education from the late 19th century to the present.

The educational thoughts and theories put forward by the above-mentioned outstanding historical figures, Emerson included, have had different degrees of influence on the status quo of American education at that time in different historical periods, and played a major role in the development of American educational thoughts. It can be said that it represents the direction of the development of American educational thought before the middle of the 20th century. Therefore, their research not only makes people understand the historical and cultural background of American educational thought, but also outlines and traces the development and changes of American educational thought.

As early as the colonial period, when New England was still under the Puritan theocracy, the popularization of education in terms of enrollment, funding and control management became the decisive and most characteristic obligation of early American education. Those God's chosen people who dreamed about the "city upon a hill" are highly regarded and bear the sacred contract with God.<sup>1</sup> They must assume the historical mission of leading the world in the new century. Therefore, popularizing education among the people and making them believe in the Word of God has become the goal that the leaders of the Puritans are striving for. This idea of popularizing education has been strongly advocated by the educators and political leaders of the past, and finally became the mainstream thought of American society in the mid-to-late 19th century, which played a significant role in improving the comprehensive quality of the whole nation.

After the disintegration of the Puritan theocracy, in the middle and late 18th century, the utilitarian educational thoughts represented by Franklin were popular in the United States. This educational thought divides all human knowledge into "practical knowledge" and "decorative knowledge". It is believed that as the level of human intelligence continues to increase, life experiences are increasingly enriched. In the same way, knowledge will be endlessly accumulated and increased, and will eventually bring good results in the gradual improvement of people's lives.

<sup>1</sup>The term "city upon a hill" comes from *Matthew 5:14*. Here John Winthrop borrowed this term to refer to the religious territory and the dream of Massachusetts bay.

From the time of the founding of the Republic to the mid-to-late 19th century, Jefferson's general education and Horace Mann's public education thought further strengthened the social function of education. Education is not only a weapon for improving the personal life as the utilitarian priests claimed, but also a balance wheel for maintaining a harmonious and stable society in American democratic politics. Since the 1830s, the public education movement has emerged with great momentum. Its influence has lasted for more than a century, and it has exerted profound significance not only to American society and history, but also to the whole world.

Dewey is the representative of American education from the end of 19th century to the early 20th century. The progressive education movement he led embraced Rousseau, Locke, and Emerson's ideas of respecting children's individuality for their creativity, as well as Jefferson and Mann's general education and public education. As a result, American education has completely broken with the traditional European education model, and new "child-centered" schools have spread throughout the United States. Combining the democratic and practical nature of education, after nearly three centuries of hard work, American education has finally explored a new path, embarked on the path of scientific and modern education, and has become an example for all countries in the world to learn.

Since the 20th century, American educational thoughts, which were influenced by Emerson's educational thoughts to varying degrees, such as the general education thought represented by Hutchins, were based on the "essentialism" by William Chandler Bagley (1874-1946), the elementary education thought represented by Jamaica Bryant Conant (1893-1979), the new behaviorist teaching theory represented by B. F. Skinner (1904-1990), the structuralist teaching theory represented by Jerome Seymour Brunner (1915-), the mastery of learning theory represented by Benjamin Samuel Bloom (1913-1999), and the humanistic theory represented by Carl Ranson Rogers (1902-1987).

It is worth noting that the contribution of Emerson's educational thought to the development of the above-mentioned American educational thought has not received

sufficient attention for a long time. In his book *Emerson on Education* (1966), Lawrence A. Cremin declared that Emerson was “long-lastingly neglected” by American educational historians.<sup>1</sup> The reason is that on the one hand, Emerson himself is extremely broad and profound in knowledge, and it is not easy to generalize his ideas. In addition, his style of thinking jumps and the image is erratic (his friend Alcott has half-jokingly said that Emerson’s prose can be read “either forward or backward”).<sup>2</sup> It is difficult for researchers to accurately grasp his thoughts. Especially in relation to his transcendental philosophical thinking, compared with which, the discussion of educational thoughts only occupies a very small part in his writings. Emerson’s trivial discourse is submerged in his vast writings, difficult to search, and difficult to implement (this is one of the biggest difficulties in the writing of this book). On the other hand, the reason was that the giant of the education industry at the time, the “father of common school” in the United States, Horace Mann, also lived in Massachusetts. Mann was determined to make progress and had been a hero of public education in Massachusetts and throughout the United States for a decade or two. Emerson’s transcendental educational thought and Mann’s public educational thought, although not without similarities, the fundamental purpose is different. If Mann was the mainstream, Emerson can only be regarded as a minority, so he has long been overshadowed by Mann’s reputation. It was not until the 20th century that American researchers began to dig and sort this out (see the next chapter for details).

One of the main purposes of this book is to summarize the characteristics of American educational democracy combined with practicality in the process of sorting out the development and evolution of American educational thought. In particular, it focuses on the fundamental changes in American education in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Emerson’s concept of “broad education” and his educational thoughts have directly or indirectly played a huge role in the current and subsequent American education, although this specific work was carried out and completed by Dewey and his followers.

The study of American educational thought can be traced back to the colonial pe-

<sup>1</sup>Howard Mumford Jones, ed., *Emerson on Education*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1966, p.1.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph L. Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1949, p.203.

riod, and its major development period was in the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (which is also the focus of this book). Since Dewey listed the Department of Education separately at Columbia University, American education thought research, as a branch of education, has become more and more important and has evolved into an independent discipline, just like other disciplines, e.g. educational psychology.

Influential masterpieces in this area, such as Bernard Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society* (1960), *The American Spirit in Education: The Chronicle of Great Teachers*, (1921) edited by Edwin E. Slosson, *Foundations of American Education* (1992) edited by Dean Webb and others, Lawrence A. Cremin's *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957* (1961), *Education in American History* (1973), edited by Michael B. Katz, and Joel Spring's *The American School 1642-1990* (1990), etc., all approach to the history of American educational thought from a macro perspective. There are also a number of educational thoughts that have a greater impact on a particular historical period or on a particular topic, such as *A History of Education in American Culture* (1953) by Freeman Butts and Cremin, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States* (1955), co-authored by Richard Hofstadter & Walter P. Metzger; Vernon Louis Parrington's *Main Current in American Thought 1620-1920* (1927), which also contains a detailed account of the source of educational thought.

As for the general picture of the colonial education, influential resources contain *American Education (1607-1783)* written by Lawrence A. Cremin, *Readings in the History of Education* (1948) selected and compiled by E. P. Cubberley, *A History Introduction to American Education* (1970) written by Gerald Lee Gutek, *The History of American Education through Readings* (1964) edited by Carl H. Gross and others, *The Transit of Civilization from England to America in the Seventeenth Century* (1990) written by Edward Eggleston, *The Roots of American Culture and Other Essays* (1942) edited by Van Wyck Brooks, etc. *Readings in the History of Education* is well selected and it is one of the main reference books of this paper. The relevant

parts of Daniel J. Boorstin's *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (1958) are also valuable. The representative works in China, which this paper would refer to from time to time, is Teng Dachun's *American Education*. Representative academic papers include *The Recent Development of the History as a Field of Study in the United States* by Lawrence A. Cremin, *Family and Schooling in Colonial and nineteenth-century America* by Maris A. Vinovskis, and *The New England Grammar School (1635-1700)* by Walter H. Small, etc. Lawrence A. Cremin's research papers, as well as his three-volume *American Education*, are well recognized today, which also becomes this paper's most important reference.

Some of the books on the study of Puritan educational thought are very inspiring, such as *The Puritan Revolution and Educational Thought* (1969) written by Richard L. Greaves, *The History of Puritans* (1844) by Daniel Neal, and *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953) by Perry Miller, etc. *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) written by Max Weber is also of considerable reference value. Miller's representative paper *From Edwards to Emerson* can be regarded as the most authoritative discussion on this aspect, and this paper draws on some of the views. Domestic scholars' studies include Qian Mansu's *The Historical Evolution of American Liberalism* and Yao Yunbiao's *A Study of Religion in American Public Education*. In addition, Ji Ping's *Study on the Development of American Public Schools* would also be worthy of a special discussion.

As for the study on Franklin's educational thought, apart from *The Transformation of the School* and *The American Spirit in Education* written by Edwin E. Slosson, and Franklin's thoughts on education mainly edited by Lawrence A. Cremin. Besides, some relevant chapters in *Education of the Founding Fathers of the Republic* (1935) by James J. Walsh are extremely detailed, which is very valuable. Representative papers, such as William L. Hedges's *From Franklin to Emerson*, which is in stark contrast to Miller's point of view, and the comparison, are instructive. In China there are papers such as *The Influence of Modern Europe on American Education* written by He Guoqing, *Selected Historical Materials of Foreign Education Development* edited

by Xia Zhilian, *Selected Historical Materials of Foreign Education Development* written by Yao Yunbiao, and *Benjamin Franklin and the Public Society of Early Philadelphia* by Hao Kelu, and *Franklin's Autobiography and the Spirit of Pragmatism* by Liu Chunshui, etc.

There are some reference books on the study of Jefferson's educational thought, such as *Thomas Jefferson: The Apostle of Americanism* (1962) written by Gilbert Chinard, *Jefferson's Collected Works* edited and commented by Merrill D. Peterson, and *Thomas Jefferson: A Biography* written by Noble Cunningham, etc. Domestic studies include Liu Zuochang's *Biography of Thomas Jefferson* and *A Brief Discussion on Thomas Jefferson's Democratic Thoughts* and other papers. Although the latter paper was published in the 1990s, it is still of a great value in the period of China's transition to a democratic society today.

There are also some representative works on the study of Alcott's educational thought, such as *The Public School and the Private Vision* (2007) written by Maxine Greene, *A Critical Estimate of the Educational Theories and Practices of A. Bronson Alcott* (1937) by George E. Haefner, *Minding American Education: Reclaiming the Tradition of Active Learning* (2003) by Martin Bickman, and *Record of a School* (1835) by Elizabeth Peabody, etc. Academic papers include *Amos Bronson Alcott: A Transcendental Philosophy of Education* written by Thomas P. Pietras, *Beginnings of Modern Education: Bronson Alcott* by Marjorie Stiem, *Genesis and Genealogy: Bronson Alcott's Changing Views of the Child* by Bruce A. Ronda, etc. Professor Bickman is an expert on transcendentalism in American education. As soon as his *Minding American Education* was published, it aroused a strong reaction in the academic circle. The book makes reference to his views on educational thoughts of Emerson's contemporaries.

Books on the study of Fuller's educational thought, such as *The Transcendentalists* edited by Miller and *The Transcendentalists* written by Barbara L. Packer, which elaborated the origin and development of transcendentalism and Fuller's transcendentalism education; Besides, *Margaret Fuller as Cultural Reformer: The Conversa-*

*tions in Boston* written by Charles Capper and *Margaret Fuller in the Classroom: The Providence Period* by Laraine R. Ferguson also have carried on the study and the elaboration from different aspects to Fuller's educational thought.

The main reference books on the study of Thoreau's educational thought include *Reimagining Thoreau* (2008) written by Robert Milder, *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (1995) by Walter Harding, *Thoreau's Reading* (1988) by Robert Sattelmeyer, and *Uncommon Learning: Henry David Thoreau on Education* (1999) edited by Bickman—in the preface, Professor Bickman accurately extracted the essence of Thoreau's educational thought, which inspired this paper greatly. Other papers, such as Wang Yanli's *Creative Life Comes from Life Education* and Cai Yunyan's *Exploration of Thoreau's Educational Philosophy*, also have certain reference value.

There are some representative works on the study of Mann's educational thought, such as *The American School* written by Joel Spring, *Foundations of American Education* edited by Dean Webb, *Education and State Formation: The Rise of Education Systems in England, France, and the USA* (1990) written by Andy Green, and *Lectures on Education* (1855) by Mann himself. Domestic studies include *History of Western Education Thoughts* edited by Zhang Binxian, *Commentary 2 of Foreign Educators* edited by Zhao Xianglin, and *History of Modern Foreign Education* edited by Teng Dachun.

The study on Dewey's educational thought is abundant both at home and abroad. This paper mainly refers to *Dewey on Education* (1959) edited by Martin S. Dworkin, *American Education: The Course of Urbanization Period 1876-1980* written by Lawrence A. Cremin, *Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Western Education* (1966) by S. E. Frost and some other relevant chapters. Bickman's authoritative essay, *From Emerson to Dewey: The Fate of Freedom in American Education*, does the most for the book's thesis. In addition, there are relevant chapters in Boorstin's *Americans: the Course of Democracy*, Tocqueville's *American Democracy*, and domestic studies such as Du Zuyi's *Dewey's Theory on Education and Democracy in Hong Kong* and Lin Yuti's *History of American Educational Thoughts* are also suffi-

cient references.

As for the study on Hutchins's educational thought, there are books such as *Foundations of Education* (2004) edited by A. C. Ornstein, and *Contemporary Educational Theory* (1984) by Robert E. Mason, and *The Transformation of the School* written by Lawrence A. Cremin. Domestic works, like *Study on Hutchins' Educational Thoughts* by Xu Zonglin from Taiwan, are of great reference value. In addition, the relevant parts of *American Education Reform* edited by Qu Baokui, *General Education in American Universities* edited by Huang Kunjin of Taiwan, *Study on Contemporary Foreign Educational Thoughts* edited by Bi Shuzhi and Wang Yigao, and *History of Western Educational Thoughts* edited by Shan Zhonghui are also used for reference in this book. The representative works of this thesis include Hong Ming's *The Generalist View of Higher Education*, Zhao Huangjun's *Analysis of Hutchins' General Education Thought and Its Enlightenment*, Shi Xiaoguang's *Higher Education as 'Rational Man and Democratic Society'*, etc. Li Jianqiang's doctoral dissertation *Ideal University and Ideal University: Study on Hutchins Higher Educational Thought* has a relatively comprehensive discussion on Hutchins's higher educational thought.

The References to Emerson's life include *Emerson: A Mind on Fire* (1995) written by Robert D. Richardson Jr., *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1949) by Ralph L. Rusk, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1912) by Oliver Wendell Holmes, and *Emerson* (2003) by Lawrence Buell, etc. Works on the study of Emerson's educational thought include *Emerson on Education* edited by Jones, *Emerson on the Scholar* (1992) by Merton M. Sealts, *Public School and the Private Vision* written by Greene, and *Minding American Education* by Martin Bickman. John Madison Fletcher's doctoral dissertation *Emerson's Educational Philosophy* has given me a lot of inspiration. Representative papers include Martin Bickman's *Transcendental Educational Thought* and *From Emerson to Dewey: The Fate of Freedom in American Education*, and Stanley Cavell's *Thinking of Emerson*, etc.

Generally speaking, the above monographs outline the course of the development

and change of American educational thought from different aspects. In the early and middle of the last century, most studies focused on the development of public education from the colonial period to the middle of the 20th century. After the rise of pluralism in the 1960s, the study of educational thought, like other subjects, has been expanded from schools to study race, gender and sociocultural aspects, and considerable achievements have been made in the study of black, Indian and women's education. The most original and representative of them would be first recommend is Lawrence A. Cremin's three huge volumes of *American Education*, which respectively described the history of American education comprehensively from three different historical periods: the colonial period (1607-1783), the founding of the initial stage (1783-1876), as well as the urbanization period (1876-1980). And the analysis of the evolution of educational thought in the book is particularly detailed and thought-provoking. The book is also one of the main reference works in the writing process.

Since the new century, the study of the history of American education and the history of educational thought is still deepening. On the one hand, some influential movements such as public schools and progressive education movements are re-evaluated and re-examined from different perspectives. On the other hand, it also re-understands the phenomena and characters that were previously ignored by most scholars. For example, Martin Bickman's monograph reinterprets and re-evaluates the influence of Emerson's educational thought on American education (mainly through Dewey).

Domestic works on the history of American educational thought, such as Teng Dachun's *American Education*, which has referred to the book of the same name written by Lawrence A. Cremin, and have special chapters on the famous American educational thinkers. This work finished by Mr. Teng can be regarded as the pioneering work of American educational study in China. In addition, *Foreign Education History Course*, edited by Wu Shiyong, gives a detailed introduction to the reformist education of Brameld, an American modern education thinker, and also gives a detailed introduction to Bagley's essentialist education, Hutchins's eternal education

and Brunner's structuralist education thoughts. In *History of Western Educational Thoughts* edited by Shan Zhonghui, there is also a special chapter detailing the changes of American educational thoughts.

In addition, in recent years, there are many doctoral theses related to the study of American educational thought such as Zhang Guolian's *Public Education Campaign in the United States in the 19th Century* (1998), Wang Dinghua's *American Liberal Education Development* (1998), Xiang Beili's *Liberal View of Dewey and His Education Thought* (2001), Chen Hua's *American Pluralism and Education Study* (2003), Li Jianqiang's *The University of Ideal and the Ideal of University: Study on Hutchins' Higher Education Thoughts* (2003), Yao Yunbiao's *Between Church and State: Education in Schools* (2004), Zhou Cai's *From Cubberley to Cremin* (2004), Liu Xiangrong's *Conant Education thought Study* (2006), Fu Hong's *From National Citizens to Citizens of the World: A Shift in the Goal of Citizenship Education in the United States* (2011), and Dan Liusong's *American Public School Sports Study* (2014), etc. From the perspective of the history of education or the history of thought, the above papers presents interpretations that are not entirely equivalent to those of native American scholars, and some of them have also carried out a comparative study on the educational situation in China, which is both academic and instructive to the educational cause in China.

Regrettably, domestic scholars' original monographs or influential papers on Emerson's educational thoughts are still worth expecting. This book would be a tentative exploration in this field.