

# A Comparative Study of the Individual Philanthropic Cultures between China and America

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**Abstract.** There are deep-rooted philanthropic cultures in both America and China. However, a large gap in the individual philanthropic achievements still exists between the two countries. This thesis aims to analyze the cultural elements that influence the individuals to contribute to philanthropy through making a comparative study of the motives and the individual philanthropic modes between China and America and finds out that the individual philanthropic cultures between China and America not only differ in motives but also differ in individual philanthropic modes. Therefore, in order to fill the gap in individual philanthropic achievements between China and America, it's of vital importance to improve the Chinese people's philanthropic awareness, cultivate volunteer spirit and sense of social responsibility, as well as hold a right attitude toward wealth.

## Introduction

Philanthropic culture is regarded as one of the typical American culture. According to "Giving USA Annual Report for the Year 2015"[1], for all the 373.25 billion dollars generosity for the Year 2015, 71% came from individuals, 16% came from foundations, 9% came from bequest and 5% came from corporation. The largest part came from individual (71%) and there was a 3.8% increase compared with that of 2014. Individual philanthropy has played and will continue to play a vital part in American Philanthropy.

Meanwhile, according to "China Charity report 2015"[2] released on November 29th, 2016 by China Charity Alliance, China charity donations kept rising in 2015, and the annual total donation reached 110.857 billion. Personal donation totaled 16.93 billion yuan in 2015, representing an increase of 5 billion 372 million yuan compared with that of 2014. That means 15.27% of the total charity sum came from individuals. There is no denying that philanthropic culture is also deep rooted in China. However, compared with the individual philanthropy in U.S.A, we still have a long way to go to catch up. What are the main causes of the large difference in individual philanthropy between U.S.A and China? The following part is trying to penetrate into such cultural perspectives as religious culture, classic literatures, volunteer spirit, and individual philanthropic modes, etc.

## Motives

Religious cultures serve as the utmost philanthropic motives for both the Americans and the Chinese. Most Americans believe in Christianity, and the Christian doctrine holds that a wealthy man is sinful. In "Matthew", a rich young man asks Jesus what actions bring eternal life. First Jesus advises the man to obey the commandments. And then Jesus adds: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." [3] Americans firmly believe that people are only in charge of money-management when they are alive. Die in great wealth is believed to be a disgrace. Meanwhile in China, early during the reign of Emperor Ai of Han, Buddhism was introduced into and was later widely accepted in China. Such doctrines as "What goes around comes around." form the basic philanthropic ideas encourages the Chinese people to take care of other people when they are able to.

The ancient Chinese classic literature contain rich philanthropic ideas. In “Tao Te Ching”, the founder of Daoism—Laozi said: “The ways of the heaven are impartial. It sides only with the good man.”[4] Mencius also advocates mutual help and protection between friends and neighbors. In “Mencius: King Hui of Liang”, he teaches us to: “Expend the respect of the aged in one's family to that of other families; And expend the love of the young ones in one's family to that of other families.”[5] Although China is rich in charitable thought and ancient charity culture, the modern charitable culture is still in its infancy and is being formed. While modern charitable culture originated in the era of Western industrialization, and was improved and developed early in the 1970s with the rise of the humanism movement.

Volunteer spirit is the foundation of American public welfare thought. The individual, of his free will, with no promise of compensation, takes part in the development of human and society and perfects the community work. The reason why most of the Americans donate is that they volunteer to shoulder the responsibility of the society instead of leaving it to the government. American education is one good example. The main famous universities in the United States are private, run by donations, for example: Harvard, Princeton, Yale... etc. With volunteer spirit, the American individuals also take an active part in donations without the national boundaries. Many of the private philanthropic foundations aim to help people all over the world. While in China, Chinese Confucianism forms a rich tradition of patriarchy. It is taken for granted that the government should shoulder the responsibility of the social welfare. The individual Chinese are hard-working and can endure hardship in order to take care of the family members and create a good environment for their offsprings instead of shoulder the responsibility of the whole society.

### **Individual Philanthropic Modes**

Individuals donate to charitable organizations. The charitable organizations receive individual donations and finance various public welfare undertakings. In other words, the individuals support the charitable organizations to play very important roles in such areas as education, health care, protection of women's rights, services for the elderly, poverty eradication, immigration and employment, environmental protection, crime prevention and community transformation, etc.

Private philanthropic foundation refers to the individual to raise funds for vulnerable groups. Oil tycoon Rockefeller set up the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913, with the aim of improving the life of all mankind, and are committed to the development of global health care. Bill Melinda Gates Foundation aims at promoting equality in global health and education. In China, the purpose of Soong Ching Ling Foundation is embodied in the word "peace, unity and future", and is to maintain world peace, promote the reunification of the motherland and pay close attention to national future. The Chengloong Charitable Foundation was founded in Beijing, and by the end of 2014, its total expenditure amounted to 108 million 70 thousand yuan. Of which more than 70 million for the rescue of children's lives, more than 20 million for the disaster relief at home and abroad. The other were for teacher safety training, charity and other cultural propaganda[6].

Voluntary workers are the people who volunteer their time and effort to provide services to improve social services and promote social progress without any material reward. Americans not only donate money, but also donate time. In the United States, it can be said that both men and women, young and old, have the experience of volunteering. Some schools have a clear requirement for students to do volunteer: in addition to grades, credits and other requirements, it is also required for the students to serve a certain amount of free time in the community. Chinese also are doing well in voluntary works. According to the "2015 Social Service Development Statistics Bulletin"[7] issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, there were 9,346,000 people in the year 2015 providing 277.7 million hours of volunteer service in the field of social services.

Online donation is popular all over the world due to its convenience. It is especially widely accepted in China among the young people. The total amount of Individual small donation (a single amount of less than 10,000 yuan) increased from 5.86 billion yuan in 2014 to 7.5 billion yuan. The

online donation platform is one of the main channels for individual donations in 2015. Individual donations through the four platforms: Sina Weibo, Tencent, Antgroup, Taobao in 2015 accumulated 966 million yuan, which is a rise of up to 127.29% compared with the number in 2014. [8] It can be understood that the size of the small donations of ordinary people is expanding, the charitable atmosphere of Chinese society has become increasingly strong, and the situation for ordinary individuals to participate in the philanthropy is maturing. This trend has a direct relationship with the development of network donation platform. Open, transparent, convenient and so on, so that the network donation has become the preferred way for ordinary people, especially young people.

## **Conclusion**

After a comparative study on individual philanthropic cultures between China and America, it is not difficult to find that the philanthropic culture of America can bring some important enlightenment and thinking to the development of philanthropic culture in China at present. It's of vital importance to improve the Chinese people's philanthropic awareness, cultivate volunteer spirit and sense of social responsibility, as well as hold a right attitude toward wealth.

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