

HOW PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS INFLUENCE THE UNITED STATES: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON PRAGMATISM

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Abstract: From the perspective of pragmatic diplomatic philosophy, Peace Corps can benefit the United States, which is an important reason for the domestic support it receives within the United States. Through the volunteers' acculturation experience, cultural exchanges between the United States and host countries are promoted and the awareness of the American society about the Third World countries is raised, which is the true value of the Peace Corps from the perspective of American interests. As members of American society, Peace Corps volunteers gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the Third World in their host countries, which is not only an important part of improving the awareness of the American society the Third World, but is also an important bridge to spread this awareness in the United States. When volunteers return to the United States after finishing their service, they bring their understanding of the Third World to different industries and fields in American domestic society. Among them, American education and diplomacy are mostly affected. These are of great significance in improving the international vision and awareness of American education and the reliability of American foreign policy.

Keywords: Peace Corps. Acculturation. Pragmatism. Diplomatic philosophy. Cultural exchanges.

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INTRODUCTION

When scholars discuss the influence of the Peace Corps, most people naturally think of and observe the benefits of the Peace Corps from the perspective of foreign aid. Such observations often lead to disappointing evaluations, as scholars have found that Peace Corps has little impact on the local people's living standards in the host countries and on national economic development (RICE, 1985, p. 286; LOWTHER, 1978, p. 54; SEARLES, 1997, p. 209). The reason is that the influence of the Peace Corps on the host country is often hidden and lagging. A similar approach to the impact of the Peace Corps on the United States leads to similar conclusions for the same reason. However, there is only one official goal of the Peace Corps, which relates to foreign aid, while the other two constitute cultural exchange between the United States and host countries. Pragmatism is an important part of American philosophy and it is also a philosophical guide to American diplomacy (MARKS, 2003, p. 283). From the perspective of pragmatism with the focus on national interests, the reason Peace Corps has been supported by the US federal government and Congress for such a long time may not be due to the excellent foreign aid effects but rather because it is an organization that is beneficial to the United States. The effect of Peace Corps' foreign aid is not satisfactory, but considering the influence on the United States as the function and purpose of cultural exchange, the true value of the Peace Corps to the United States is found. The volunteers' acculturation experiences in the host countries are the fundamental source of the cultural exchange effect provided by the Peace Corps. Most volunteers return to the United States after completing their two years of service. As a result, their experience of acculturation will benefit both the host countries and, more significantly, the United States: the nation itself.

From the pragmatic and based perspective on the Peace Corps officials and volunteers' monographs and memoirs, official documents and survey reports, this article analyses the influence of host country acculturation experiences on Peace Corps volunteers and the Peace Corps volunteers' influence on American domestic society and US diplomacy to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of what the Peace Corps means to the United States.

1 THE IMPACT OF ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCE IN THE HOST COUNTRIES ON PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

The acculturation experience in the host countries obviously affects Peace Corps volunteers, which is an important part of how Peace Corps affect American society as well. It is also an important reason why volunteers can spread the influence of their cultural adaptation experience to all aspects of American society. The third statutory purpose of the Peace Corps clearly expresses its expectation for volunteers to bring their experience in the host countries back to the United States. This expectation is mainly achieved by allowing the American people to better understand the host countries, their people and their culture. At the same time, volunteers are the bridge for other Americans to understand the host countries and cultures.

The volunteers receive assistance from the locals in exchange for aiding the citizens of the host nations. While educating, they get knowledge from the locals. Volunteers frequently benefit from the warm welcome and consideration of the community while they are serving. They gain a greater understanding about the locals and their culture by helping local communities. The volunteers are introduced to the local language, culture and cuisine by the locals, who also teach them the language. The frequency of volunteers' interactions with locals, as well as the language instruction provided by the Peace Corps, have an impact on their language proficiency. As early as 1961, when Shriver visited India to promote the Peace Corps, founding prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, pointed out that Indian villagers needed certain technical skills to build dams or schools, but the American people also needed to have a deeper understanding of the Third World. He concluded that "[...] the Indian people have confidence in the culture of India and there are many things that can be taught to newcomers, in terms of spirit, I believe that Americans will learn a lot in this country, which may be an important experience for them." (WOFFORD, 1980, p. 272). Later, Tanzanian President Nyerere also told Peace Corps' officials that he would be "[...] particularly happy to educate Americans [...]." (RICE, 1985, p. 291).

After returning to the US from the host countries, the volunteers not only benefited from serving the local language and culture but were also more internationally and culturally aware due to their volunteer experience. They are generally more concerned about the problems faced by the people at home, as well as abroad, and more willing to take action to solve the relevant problems.

First, returned volunteers gain a clearer understanding of American society and culture. After living in the host countries for a long period of time, many volunteers, who are more able to understand and sympathize with the people's lifestyles in the Third World, have a more global perspective, and are more aware of the harms of labels and stereotypes. It is more likely that they understand the essence of equality between people instead of labeling people as "[...] blacks, communists, nerds or Jews." (ASHABRANNER, 1971, p. 369). Returned volunteers seem to react more strongly to what they think of as the shortcomings of the United States, such as "commercialism," "racism," "localism," "herd" and "immaturity" in the United States (HOOPES, 1966, p. 222). In 1969, the Harris Poll showed that 85% of the returned volunteers in 1964 believed that racial inequality was the most obvious weakness in the United States (RICE, 1985, p. 291). Cross (1998, p. 5) found, through interviews with 154 returned volunteers, that volunteer experience not only improves their cultural awareness and changes their world outlook, but it also changes their personality.

Second, returned volunteers may have short-term readjustment problems after returning to the United States after adapting to the lifestyle of the host country, but they generally face up to any problems. They may temporarily face the difficulty of making choices for the future, be temporarily out of touch with American domestic society, or are not able to adapt to the fast-paced life of the United States. Some returned volunteers may feel lost in the hustle and bustle and overwhelming news within the United States, and some may even find American food "disgusting." Compared with host societies, American society is "divided," "tense," "angry" and "violent" (ASHABRANNER, 1971, p. 369). However, benefiting from their more challenging adaptation experience in the host countries, they are generally able to adjust quickly and become more concerned about the problems faced by people in the United States and abroad.

Compared to their university peers or acquaintances, who have not travelled overseas, most returned volunteers are more mature. They have a better understanding of what is going on in the world, in the nation and in their own local communities. A volunteer, who worked in a Latin American Community Development Project, said that before joining the Peace Corps, he was frustrated because many things were too complicated, and he never cared about some things. But after finishing the volunteer service and returning to Minneapolis, he felt that he was more responsible. This volunteer is now

pursuing a master's degree at the University of Minnesota. Even though he was angry, he realised he had to face reality and not just stand by and observe. He began to care about the city he was in and wanted to understand "who lives in where in the city, what are the different groups and interests, what are the problems, and who will manage the city." He wanted to learn about Minneapolis with the same social overview he had when working in the Latin American village (HOOPEs, 1966, p. 222).

Most returned volunteers described their service experience in the host countries as a transformative experience and believed it helped shape their views of the world and their future. Many volunteers reported that they "[...] learned more than they taught" in the host country (ASHABRANNER, 1994, p. 100). In 2011, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps, more than 11,000 returned volunteers participated in a questionnaire survey conducted by Bridgeland with the support of Peter D. Hart Research Associates and other institutions.

According to this survey report, 92% of the returned volunteers believe that the Peace Corps has changed their lives; 89% of the returned volunteers believe that the Peace Corps has changed their views on the United States; 86% of the returned volunteers said that their Peace Corps volunteer experience made them more open to people of different races, ethnicities and religions; 80% of the returned volunteers questioned US foreign policy because of joining the Peace Corps; 67% of the returned volunteers believe that their values have been changed as a result; 59% of the returned volunteers said that the Peace Corps volunteer service experience made them more willing to join the volunteer service of the community after returning home; 52% of the returned volunteers said they became more optimistic about their future because of joining the Peace Corps (BRIDGELAND, 2011, p. 12). In addition, the returnees said that the volunteer service experience of the Peace Corps had an impact on their future. This is mainly because it will affect their views on American foreign policy (74%), their career choices (60%), their political views (53%), how they use their spare time (41%), their choice of residence (35%) and their religious or spiritual beliefs (26%) (BRIDGELAND, 2011, p. 52).

2 THE PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS' INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN DOMESTIC SOCIETY

Peace Corps volunteers can have a certain impact on American education during their in-service period and the preservice training period in the early development of the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps volunteers' impact on American society mainly occurs after they return to their country, but some of the impacts occur during their service. In the early development of Peace Corps, some of the impact may even occur before they go to the host countries.

In the 1960s, the Peace Corps volunteer preservice training was mainly completed in the United States. During this period, many universities provided strong support for Peace Corps volunteer training. At the same time, the Peace Corps' volunteer training has brought new changes to these universities. In the early years of the Peace Corps' development, many universities in the United States undertook the main part of the volunteer training. To complete successfully the volunteer training tasks of the Peace Corps, these colleges or universities often had to update existing teaching methods and expand existing research fields.

Language instruction and regional/national studies were the two areas where this kind of influence was most apparent. Numerous colleges and institutions have a shaky foundation in the teaching of foreign languages of the host countries. Volunteers required training, and some of them lacked the necessary language training conditions. However, improved training environments for these languages have steadily developed, and new language training techniques have been established in order to perform successfully volunteer language training assignments. Many cultures of the host countries have been explored for the first time in these universities in order to better complete the cultural training for volunteers. As a result, regional/national studies in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the host nations have been carried out and enhanced through time by these institutions and universities.

In 1958, the United States promulgated the National Defence Education Act, which promoted foreign language training in the United States. However, the Peace Corps volunteers' preservice training had a more extensive impact on foreign language education in the United States. More American foreign language talent is trained than in the National Defence Education Act, and many trained foreign language types are even more minor. For example, these

colleges have trained Thai, Malay, Sinhala, Nepali, Cree and Hausa for Peace Corps volunteers. The language education of the National Defence Education Act did not train talent in these languages for the United States at that time.

Since the establishment of Peace Corps, batches of visiting teachers and international students from various host countries have been brought into these universities to participate in the volunteer training. Soon after the training started, these universities gradually established international research centres to conduct research in the Third World countries. Using the Northern Illinois University as an example, the university originally did not have any international programs. But because of joining the Peace Corps volunteer training program, the Malayan government sent six training teachers to the university. Many teachers from the university also visited Malaya, which made Northern Illinois University one of the first American universities to teach Malay. The university soon established the Southeast Asian Studies Project (SHRIVER, 1964, p. 87).

In the early development of the Peace Corps, because volunteers had little contact with the United States, it was generally difficult for them to have a significant domestic impact during their service in the host countries. However, in 1989, to better achieve the third goal of the Peace Corps, Paul Coverdell, the 11th director of the Peace Corps, established the World Wise Schools project, which enabled volunteers to interact with many Americans at home while serving in the host countries (SHRIVER, 1964, p. 88). In the early days of the project, volunteers serving in the host countries were paired with school classes in the United States to facilitate their communication through letters, photos, work and phone calls, and to allow volunteers to visit domestic schools after returning to the United States. With the continuous development of communication technology, Peace Corps volunteers can gradually interact directly with students in the United States, in the classroom through the internet. Many volunteers also used this project to produce teaching videos, lesson plans and even books for American students in specific countries during their overseas service.

The World Wise Schools assisted approximately three million American students to communicate directly with the Peace Corps volunteers, according to information provided by the Peace Corps in 2006. Through the project, 4,000 volunteers gave American students firsthand accounts of their volunteer work in the host nations. About 380,000 pupils from all 50 states of the United States benefited from this (PEACE CORPS, 2006, p. 87). Currently,

many volunteers use several internet channels in addition to the World Wise Schools Project to share their lives and work in the host nation as well as local customs with residents from all over the world, including the American people, through blogs and video clips. When Peace Corps volunteers return to the United States, after completing their volunteer service, they enter various walks of life and have a more profound impact on different areas of American society.

Since the Peace Corps does not limit the applicants' professional background when recruiting and selecting volunteers, the volunteers' destinations, after returning to the United States, are also diversified. Among the 2,427 Peace Corps volunteers' first batch returning to the United States, 51% chose to go to different majors in colleges and universities to continue their studies; 14% chose to become teachers in schools of different levels; 12% became government employees; and 5% chose to work in nonprofit organizations (HOOPEs, 1966, p. 213-215). In 1967, Peace Corps counted the 7,393 volunteers' whereabouts, who returned home, and found that 37% of the volunteers chose to continue their studies; 19% of the volunteers chose to become teachers, 17% of volunteers chose to work in the federal government (12.7%) or state/local governments (4.1%); and 7% of the volunteers chose to work for nonprofit organizations (PEACE CORPS, 1967, p. 45).

Returned volunteers, who choose to continue their studies, have always accounted for the returned volunteers' largest number, and they choose different majors when they continue their studies. Taking statistics in 1967 as an example, volunteers' fields of study included social subjects (30%), education (14%), and technical fields, including engineering, science, mathematics and architecture (14%). Humanities included news and language (13%), law (4%), regional studies (4%), agriculture or forestry (4%), business and management (3%), and health, entertainment and sports (3%) (PEACE CORPS, 1967, p. 58). After graduation, these volunteers move to different areas of American society, which also affects the returned volunteers' employment.

As American domestic society develops, the returned volunteers' employment destination continues to change, with volunteers being employed in multiple fields. According to statistics on more than 11,000 returned Peace Corps volunteers' whereabouts, who completed their services from 1963 to 2011, volunteers returning from the 1960s mainly engaged in education (50%), business (23%), nonprofit organizations (20%), governments at all

levels (20%), medical and health care (13%), and international development, the Peace Corps or the United Nations (10%). In the 2020s, the most popular employment field for returned volunteers still included education, but the ratio decreased (33%) (BRIDGELAND, 2011, p. 13). Compared with volunteers in the 1960s, volunteers in the 2000s were less interested in business and all levels of government. They were more interested in health, international development, the Peace Corps and the United Nations.

Judging from the returned volunteers' career development data, their acculturation experience in the host countries has the most obvious impact on American education. Teachers have always been the most popular profession for returned volunteers. Many volunteers want to become teachers after returning to the United States because of their volunteer service experience in the Peace Corps. According to the survey data of the Peace Corps in 1963, before joining, only 13% of volunteers wanted to become teachers after returning home. After serving, 25% of volunteers said they wanted to become teachers after returning to their country (ADAMS, 1964, p. 192). Studies have shown that volunteers returning from the Peace Corps show a higher sense of self-efficiency and cultural awareness as teachers, thus having an important positive impact on teaching (CROSS, 1998, p. 15).

Although schools in the United States want to recruit more teachers with experience as volunteers in the Peace Corps, they believe that returned volunteers are "the best source of teachers." However, after returning to America, many volunteers chose to teach in poorer schools with more challenging teaching conditions (ASHABRANNER, 1971, p. 365). For example, as many as ten returned volunteers taught at Cardozo High School in Washington, DC, which is one of the worst slums in the area with high levels of violence. Each of the ten returned volunteers was responsible for teaching two classes at the school and for developing new courses for disadvantaged groups. They believed that teaching there gave them a sense of dedication and accomplishment, as did volunteering in the Philippines (SHRIVER, 1964, p. 89).

In addition to the education industry, returned Peace Corps volunteers' large number enters various walks of life and has an impact on American society in various ways.

Volunteers' increasing number chooses to continue to work in nonprofit organizations after returning to their home country. This allows

many returned volunteers in the United States to continue to utilize the work methods and skills they have learned in the host countries. These volunteers share their experiences with the people they meet in their posts with enhanced international and cultural awareness brought by their Peace Corps experience. That is important for solving problems and influencing the people and society around them. According to relevant surveys, nearly two-thirds of the returned volunteers said they could apply the skills they learned in Peace Corps to their work. More than half of the returned volunteers shared their Peace Corps volunteer work experience in the United States through speeches, and 52% of the returned volunteers delivered speeches at school (BRIDGELAND, 2011, p. 14).

In the fiscal year 2003, the returned volunteers of Peace Corps went to schools or communities to share formally their service experience more than 7,000 times (PEACE CORPS, 2006). Many volunteers finally chose to join Peace Corps because they were influenced by returned volunteers who came to the school to share their experiences. For example, a volunteer, who had served in Ethiopia, was attracted by a slide show by a returned volunteer in the school when he was in junior high school. So he decided to join Peace Corps (CONRAD, 2011, p. 4).

Many Peace Corps volunteers authored and published memoirs about their service in the host countries after returning to the United States. Books about the social cultures of the host countries were written and published by certain volunteers. Volunteers made it possible for more Americans to comprehend the social cultures of their host countries on a deeper level, which can pique their interest in such societies and the Peace Corps volunteers' experiences. According to incomplete statistics from the US Library of Congress, as of 2011, there have been more than 800 books about Peace Corps host countries published by former volunteers (THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, 2011, p. 15).

Families are the most common targets for returned volunteers to share their service experiences in host countries. This way of sharing not only enables their families to have a deeper understanding of the social culture of a host country but also attracts them to join the Peace Corps, which produces sustained results. According to statistics, the returned volunteers' vast majority (98%) is willing to recommend that their children join the Peace Corps. And many people said that they joined the Peace Corps because they were influenced by their families (BRIDGELAND, 2011, p. 22). For

example, in Carrie Radelet's family, then deputy director of the Peace Corps, her aunt joined the Peace Corps in the early 1960s and became the 10,000th returned volunteer in the history of the Peace Corps. Then, her grandparents became Peace Corps volunteers in the early 1970s because they were always attracted by her stories about Peace Corps volunteer service. She also joined Peace Corps in 1981 and became one of the volunteers serving in Samoa (RADELET, 2011, p. 4).

3 THE PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS' INFLUENCE ON US DIPLOMACY

During their service in the host countries, Peace Corps volunteers won the hearts of the United States through friendly exchanges with local people, thus gaining soft power. They are important practitioners of American cultural diplomacy. Moreover, after they return to the United States, they continue to provide high-quality talent and intellectual support for American conventional and cultural diplomacy.

For a country, cooperative soft power, that is, the ability to influence others' choices through cultural attraction, rather than threats and bribery, is as important as economic and military hard power in international relations (NYE, 1990, p. 153). Cultural diplomacy or public diplomacy is an important way to improve soft power (NYE, 2004, p. 5; NYE, 2008, p. 94). Public diplomacy, as a supplement to official diplomacy, can influence public opinion in other countries through various means of information dissemination to increase the influence and image of a country among the foreign public. Cultural diplomacy can promote national security through subtle, wide-ranging and sustainable methods. Cultural diplomacy provides a large amount of content for public diplomacy and is the most critical part of public diplomacy (SCHNEIDER, 2006, p. 191; US DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2005, p. 46). For a long time, Peace Corps volunteers have left a good American impression on the local people in host countries and have gained intangible soft power for the United States. As a result, the Peace Corps is often regarded as a model of successful cultural diplomacy in the United States (FINN, 2003, p.15; ARNDT, 2006, p. 39; GLADE, 2009, p. 240; LIU, 2009, p. 159).

Only those exchanges on a certain scale, and with symmetrical information and attitudes that occur among the people, constitute effective cultural exchange. Cultures in different civilizations are lasting and stable,

and it is difficult for people to transform them forcibly (HUNTINGTON, 1993, p. 37). Uncomfortable propaganda and obvious diplomatic purposes keep a country away from cultural diplomacy (CULL, 2009, p. 10). Effective cultural diplomacy needs to make full use of the natural forms of non-governmental communication. For a country, “[...] the ‘national image’ and the ‘public support’ formed by extensive and in-depth daily non-governmental communication are more real and reliable.” (ZHUANG, 2017, p. 67). The scale of people-to-people exchanges (the number of people affected, the diversity of the fields they belong to and the length of the impact) and the symmetry of communication (the symmetry of information exchange, the symmetry of personnel flow and the symmetry of communication attitude) can be used to judge the effect of cultural diplomacy (YE, 2019, p. 69).

Generally speaking, interactions between Peace Corps volunteers and locals have a long-lasting impact on people from various disciplines. They are symmetrical in terms of communication attitudes and information flow but unbalanced in terms of personnel flow. In other words, Peace Corps volunteers can have the best effects on American cultural diplomacy. First, the scale of exchange between Peace Corps volunteers and the local people of the host countries is considerable. Every year, Peace Corps has thousands of volunteers serving in various host countries. For more than half a century, as many as 230,000 people from all 50 states of the United States have joined the Peace Corps (PEACE CORPS, 2019, p.32). The people of the host countries, who they affect, are countless. The backgrounds and majors of Peace Corps volunteers are diversified, along with the projects in the host country, so they affect people in different fields. Students, teachers, doctors, farmers and other people in the host countries are all likely to be the volunteers’ exchange targets. Peace Corps volunteers have a three-month preservice training in the host countries. And the service period is as long as two years. They have plenty of time to communicate with the local people.

Second, the Peace Corps volunteers’ status in the host country helps them maintain a symmetrical attitude when communicating with local people. The Peace Corps volunteers’ work in the host countries does not easily have a considerable impact on the overall development of the host countries. But they enter the host countries to serve the local area in the name of aiding. In addition, they generally have specific jobs and do not ask for remuneration from the locals or the host countries. Conversely, local people are more willing to communicate with volunteers. Compared with American diplomats, they

believe that these volunteers are truly willing to help, so they also show a friendly attitude toward them and provide assistance and support for their work. Sometimes, even when anti-American sentiment exists in a host country and Americans are expelled, Peace Corps volunteers are still respected by the local people and treated differently. For example, in 1965, the United States sent troops to interfere brutally in the internal affairs of the Dominican Republic and support the pro-American regime that was overthrown, which aroused strong anger among the Dominican people. While they chanted “Yanks, get out,” they added “Peace Corps volunteers, can stay.” (SCHWARZ, 1991, p. 73).

Additionally, the information flow between the volunteers and the locals tends to be two-way and balanced as a result of the cultural adaptation tactics used by the volunteers in the host nations. In their daily lives, volunteers use integration tactics that encourage assimilation. Because volunteers often adopt a separation-biased integration strategy in their work, local people are better able to communicate with and demonstrate their social culture to volunteers. This enables local people to feel that volunteers respect their culture and allows them to avoid feeling threatened by a dominant position. The strategy of religious segregation can help locals and volunteers feel more at ease.

Returned volunteers of the Peace Corps also generally believe that their service in the host countries has greatly improved the image of the United States around the world. According to the 2011 survey report, 93% of the returned volunteers believe that their work has improved the image of the United States in the world; 21% believe that the personal relationships between Peace Corps volunteers and the people of the host countries help promote mutual understanding, appreciation and respect; and 12% believe that Peace Corps has improved the national security of the United States by promoting an atmosphere of understanding between different cultures (BRIDGELAND, 2011, p. 24).

It is worth noting that the influence of volunteers on American diplomacy is not limited to cultural diplomacy. When volunteers return to the United States, they become important in terms of intellectual support for American diplomacy, which they have an impact on from all sides. The United States has always attached importance to using returned volunteers to serve in the US government. Kennedy once said to a group of Peace Corps volunteers who are about to start missions in host countries: “I hope that when you come back, we can persuade you to serve in other departments of the US government,

especially the foreign affairs department” (HOOPEs, 1966, p. 126). When the first batch of Peace Corps volunteers, who served overseas, returned to the United States in 1963, Kennedy also issued Presidential Executive Order No. 11103, stipulating that returned volunteers have priority in appointment as American civil servants. Volunteers returning from the Peace Corps still enjoy the priority in civil service appointments of the federal government (PEACE CORPS, 2019, p. 38).

Many of the returned volunteers work in the federal government or in foreign-related departments or agencies. In fact, as many as 12% of the volunteers’ first batch, who returned to the United States from the Peace Corps, went to work in the federal government. Most of them go to foreign-related departments or agencies, such as the Peace Corps, the Agency for International Development, the US Information Agency and the US State Department (HOOPEs, 1966, p. 214). In 1967, the Peace Corps counted more than 7,000 returned volunteers’ whereabouts. It was found that 335 people worked for the Peace Corps (administrative staff), 134 people worked for the International Development Agency, 25 people worked for the US State Department, 19 people worked for the US Information Agency and ten people worked for the US Congress (PEACE CORPS, 1967, p. 75). In 1985, 10% of the staff recruited by the US State Department came from Peace Corps returnees. The number of returned volunteers in the US Department of State and the Agency for International Development exceeded 1,000 (LIU, 2009, p. 159). In 2009, the inaugural Peace Corps returnees of the federal government included two US Assistant Secretaries of State and 14 US ambassadors abroad (MEISLER, 2011, p. 204).

Returned volunteers can bring more reliable intellectual support to American diplomacy. After returning to the United States, many returned volunteers entered the US government, think tanks and media. They influence US foreign policy through the driving mechanism of US diplomacy (WU; MEMON, 2022, p. 1; WU *et al.*, 2020, p. 1). Lederer and Burdick (1959, p. 26) pointed out that diplomats in the United States, who do not know the local language of a host country and only have an academic understanding of local customs, beliefs, religions and humor, can only communicate with the very few local people who can communicate in English. In communication, the information they obtain is often one-sided or incorrect. Peace Corps volunteers not only understand the languages of the host countries but also have a deeper understanding of the society and culture of the host countries.

Returned volunteers, entering the foreign-related departments of the US federal government, can have obvious intellectual advantages in the language and social-cultural cognition of developing countries. If they are sent to work in the host countries, where they have served, they will be able to communicate fully with the local people, thereby providing a more reliable basis for US foreign policy. Many returned volunteers believe that the service experience in host countries affects the former volunteers' political or congressional careers, who served in foreign-related departments or the US Department of State, thereby affecting US foreign policy and national security (BRIDGELAND, 2011, p. 26).

Hence, the Peace Corps volunteers' influence on American foreign policy is comprehensive. Dong (2012, p. 29) once divided the US diplomatic decision-making participants into the core tiers, including the president, presidential advisers, government departments and Congress; the various interest groups' middle level, political parties and think tanks; and the outermost level, including voters, mass media and public opinion. Obviously, when Peace Corps volunteers return to the United States, they simultaneously have a comprehensive impact on the core, middle and outermost layers of American foreign policy decisions. Some returned volunteers serve in government departments after returning to the United States, and core decision-makers, including the President, formulate foreign policies, based on information about the host countries, brought back to the United States by volunteers. Returned volunteers come from various origins, work in a variety of professions, support a variety of political parties, and eventually join a variety of interest organizations. In order to increase Americans' understanding of the host countries, many volunteers also join various think tanks where they disseminate information on the social cultures of the host nations in a variety of ways.

CONCLUSION

The Peace Corps is a project that is in line with the US pragmatist diplomatic philosophy. It can bring benefits to US domestic development and serves US diplomacy well. The United States, which was once a British colony in history, is less likely to understand the vast number of third-world countries through colonial expansion than those European countries that were once maritime hegemony during the colonial expansion period. Enhancing the

understanding of the Third World and improving the soft power of the United States have always been an important direction for the country. Kennedy's original intention in establishing the Peace Corps was to help the United States escape the disadvantage of an insufficient understanding of third-world countries (MEISLER, 2011, p. 8). Obviously, Peace Corps volunteers have been doing this very well. During their service, volunteers can learn foreign languages, local social and cultural knowledge, international perspectives, cultural awareness and a new understanding of American society and culture, all of which will spread to the entire American society through their role as the bridge. After returning to the United States, volunteers enter different areas of American society and have an impact on different industries and fields. Among them, education is the most obvious area of benefit. Peace Corps volunteers are practitioners of American cultural diplomacy. When they are in the host countries, they can reap significant soft power for the United States. And after returning to the United States, they comprehensively influence foreign policy decisions in all aspects.

YE, L.; LIAO, Z.; YU, Y. Como os voluntários do Corpo da Paz influenciam os Estados Unidos: uma análise baseada no pragmatismo. *Trans/Form/Ação*, Marília, v. 46, p. 185-204, 2023. Edição Especial.

Resumo: Do ponto de vista da filosofia diplomática pragmática, o Corpo da Paz pode beneficiar os Estados Unidos. É uma importante razão pela qual conseguiu receber apoio doméstico, nos Estados Unidos. Por meio da experiência de aculturação de voluntários, promove intercâmbios culturais entre os Estados Unidos e os países anfitriões, e aumenta a conscientização da sociedade americana sobre os países do Terceiro Mundo, que é o verdadeiro valor do Corpo da Paz, na perspectiva dos interesses americanos. Como membros da sociedade americana, os voluntários do Corpo de Paz obtêm, no país anfitrião, uma compreensão abrangente e profunda do Terceiro Mundo, o que não é apenas uma parte importante para melhorar a conscientização da sociedade americana sobre o Terceiro Mundo, mas também uma importante ponte para difundir essa consciência, nos Estados Unidos. Quando os voluntários retornarem aos Estados Unidos, depois de terminarem seu serviço, eles levarão sua compreensão do Terceiro Mundo para diferentes indústrias e campos da sociedade doméstica americana. Entre eles, a educação e a diplomacia americanas são as mais afetadas. Estes são de grande importância para melhorar a visão internacional e a conscientização da educação americana e a confiabilidade da política externa americana.

Palavras-chave: Corpo da Paz. Aculturação. Pragmatismo. Filosofia diplomática. Intercâmbios culturais

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