JOHN DEWEY AND MODERN CHINESE EDUCATION: PROSPECTS FOR A NEW PHILOSOPHY

DISSERTATION

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By

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The transformation of Chinese civilization has been a great issue since the late Ching (1839-1911), and the role played by modern education in this process has continued to be the center of disputes. In search of a new road, the May Fourth intellectuals, most of whom became active after the second decade of the twentieth century, eagerly sought guidance from the West and finally developed several proposals for change in education. This dissertation, by using the messages brought by John Dewey’s two-year visit (1919-1921) to China as points of reference, is an attempt to understand and evaluate the efforts of that generation.

Upon his arrival, Dewey immediately noticed the struggle to make over China into a modern state. His lectures linked education with democracy and pointed out the importance of the scientific method, experimental attitude, intellectual freedom, and evolutionary ways of change. With particular concerns over their own days, the May Fourth intellectuals took and digested Dewey’s ideas quite differently. Dewey’s most notable Chinese disciple, Hu Shih, led a cultural-intellectual reform by advocating creative intelligence and critical spirit. Another of Dewey’s influential disciples, Tao Hsing-chih, applied his mentor’s theory to popular education and finally invented new
principles such as “life is education” and “society is school.” The British philosopher Bertrand Russell, who attracted a large audience during his visit to China, gave some advice similar to Dewey’s, but strongly emphasized the necessity of preserving Chinese virtues. The renowned Confucian, Liang Shu-ming, strove to reveal the enduring ideals of Confucius and combined them with China’s need for modernization. The communist leader, Mao Tse-tung, insisted upon using ideological transformation and class struggle to build a socialist kingdom. The nationalist leader, Sun Yat-sen, proposed a construction plan that included not only cultural revival but also economic, political, and social democracy.

This study adopts a dialectic approach to present all the ideas concerned and to analyze the virtues or defects of the major positions. The directions for the development of modern Chinese education are indicated, and the significance of Dewey’s philosophy of education in building a new China is also discussed.
Dedicated to all Chinese
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INTRODUCTION

The Setting

When the Opium War burst out in 1839 and subsequently opened a chain of Western exploitation, China, the once greatest power in the Pacific and East Asia, suddenly found that she had been pushed into an aggressive world characterized by imperialist greed. The country was too underdeveloped to defend herself effectively. Almost every conflict with the Great Powers resulted in humiliating treaties that terribly deprived China of her wealth and damaged her stability. For a century, the Chinese people suffered from seemingly endless social unrest, political turmoil, and military defeat. The pressing need to survive in the new world order began to change the old concept toward education. Modern Chinese education was thereof born in 1862 in the hope to save the country. Nevertheless, how to utilize education to achieve this goal constantly became the center of disputes during the following years. Intellectuals disagreed especially about whether to learn from the West, what to learn from the West, and how to learn from the West.

John Dewey’s two-year visit (1919-1921) and the educational reform he inspired marked a new stage in the history of modern Chinese education. Arriving in China just
three days before the outbreak of the May Fourth Incident (a student demonstration protesting the unequal treatment of China by the world powers during the Paris Peace Conference), Dewey happened to witness and to get involved in the radical awakening of this old country. On the one hand, China had just entered a critical moment of cultural transformation after having overthrown the last dynasty and establishing the first republic in 1912. The people Dewey met had largely lost their confidence in tradition and were eagerly seeking guidance from the West. On the other hand, the vast importation of foreign ideas intensified the existing arguments about education. Dewey’s theory was perceived quite diversely among different groups of intellectuals. The controversy aroused by the American philosopher thus reflected the larger ongoing efforts to identify the sources of China’s problems and find possible ways to cure them. In time, it further led the Chinese people to where they are today. In this study, I use Dewey’s visit as a window to understand the nature of those enduring conflicts and to gain insight into the development of modern Chinese education.

**Literature Review**

As a liberal in the political spectrum, a pragmatist in philosophical thinking, a progressive in educational theory, and a Westerner coming into Eastern culture in a turbulent time, John Dewey appeared to be a complex figure in the literature about his visit to China. Generally speaking, studies of this topic can be roughly divided into four categories by the research approaches adopted. The first approach focuses on Dewey’s activities in China, often trying to assess his achievement from certain historical points of
view. The historian Chow Tse-tsung (周策縱) gave a detailed analysis of the evolution of the May Fourth Movement in which Dewey had actively participated. He indicated that Dewey’s former students were the key to his popularity in Chinese intellectual circles.\(^1\) However, he mentioned little of the relationship between Dewey’s theory and Chinese educational development. A more complete survey on the dissemination of Dewey’s theory in China was written by Ou Tsuin-chen (吳俊升), who helped translate Dewey’s lectures in China back into English. Noticing that the most profound impact Dewey exerted was on education, Ou provided some primary information about how progressive ideas were accepted and then rejected in China. According to Ou, the decline of Dewey’s authority since 1925 resulted mainly from the unfavorable socio-political milieu of China (including Taiwan after 1949).\(^2\)

Compared with Ou, Barry Keenan cared more about the internal weakness of pragmatism. Tracing the efforts of Dewey and his Chinese disciples — Hu Shih (胡適), Chiang Meng-lin (蔣夢麟), Kuo Ping Wen (郭秉文), and Tao Hsing-chih (陶行知) — to apply his political and educational philosophy to the realities of China, Keenan attributed their failure to Dewey’s inability to offer any strategy that could possibly affect political

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power. Nancy F. Sizer also pointed out the inherent limit of Dewey’s philosophy, but she placed more blame on Dewey’s followers for not forming a systematic ideology which could serve as a political force.

Different from Keenan’s and Sizer’s focus, certain researchers devoted their attention to the political consequences caused by Deweyan liberal experiments. For example, Benjamin I. Schwartz held that Dewey’s philosophy actually delayed the process of having Chinese intellectuals become Marxists. In contrast, Amaury de Riencourt maintained that Dewey’s influence was destructive to the cultural and social heritage of China and therefore was responsible for pushing Chinese intellectuals to Marxism. Cheng Hsueh-chia (鄭學稼) doubted that it would be suitable for China to promote and practice Dewey’s theory under the oppression of imperialist powers. Yet, George Dykhuiizen believed that Dewey left a deep mark on Chinese education because his doctrine was treated as some kind of prescription for educational problems.

The second approach adopted by researchers delves into the philosophical aspects of the East-West encounter. For example, Cecile B. Dockser emphasized the link between

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Dewey's experience in China and the development of his social and political philosophy. She analyzed the different interpretations of Dewey's ideas by his two disciples (Hu Shih and Tao Hsing-chih), yet touched little on the significance of his contribution to modern Chinese education. In contrast, Thomas Berry, a historian in Asian studies, concentrated more on China herself. Recognizing Dewey's commitment to teaching people how to live and think in the modern age, Berry examined the competing forces (liberalism, Confucianism, idealism, and Marxism) at work in the May Fourth period and offered some reflections on the incompatibility of pragmatism with Chinese society. Henry F. Billings made a further distinction between Dewey's ideas of education and those of liberalism. In his view, the former were more well accepted because they were in harmony with certain basic Chinese values, while the latter was not provided the necessary bridge to cross the gap between the two distinct political traditions. It is clear that both Berry and Billings were sensitive enough to the historical development and philosophical trends of modern China, but they seemed to fail to relate Dewey's educational thought to the larger disputes among the Chinese intellectuals. Some other

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articles written by Timothy J. Bergen, John E. Smith, and Julia Ching did focus more on this aspect. Yet without exploring the real disputes in depth, they could only provide very limited interpretations.\(^\text{12}\)

The third approach adopted by researchers is primarily concerned with the promotion and application of Dewey’s educational philosophy in China. Juan Yen-ming (阮雁鳴), for example, explored the significance of Dewey’s visit in light of China’s difficult situation in the modern age. Holding that Dewey’s educational ideas were largely compatible with the ideals of Chinese culture and nationalism, he suggested that some characteristics of Dewey’s thought — such as futurism, realism, and activism — could be valuable for improving Chinese education.\(^\text{13}\)

More specific studies were conducted by several doctoral students from China. Starting from the common intellectual and philosophical ground shared by Dewey and the May Fourth intellectuals, Yu Xiao-ming provided a detailed examination of the 1922 educational reform that was inspired by Dewey. He pointed out that the transitory popularity of Dewey’s philosophy in China could be due to the superficial understanding of its meanings by school teachers, the unstable social environment, the quick rise of nationalism in China’s educational circles, and its incapability to offer concrete


\(^{13}\) See Juan Yen-ming, 1966, *杜威學說與中國教育* [The educational theory of John Dewey and the education of China].
instructions in national salvation.\footnote{See Yu, 1991, \textit{The encounter between John Dewey and the modern Chinese intellectuals: The case of the 1922 education reform} (doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia).} In contrast, Wang Rui looked at Dewey’s influence mainly through the practices of his three followers (Chiang Meng-lin, Hu Shih, and Tao Hsing-chih). He argued that the efforts to implement Dewey’s theory in education actually continued until the early 1930s, when the socio-political restraints finally brought them to failure.\footnote{See Wang, 1993, \textit{John Dewey’s influence on Chinese education} (doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University).} Reviewing the ten educational changes which happened after Dewey’s visit, Kuang Qizhang contended that the American philosopher contributed a lot to the modernization and democratization of Chinese education. Like some other researchers, he also believed that the Chinese liberals — such as Tsai Yuan-pei (蔡元培), Chiang Meng-lin, Hu Shih, Kuo Ping Wen, Tao Hsing-chih, and Chen Ho-chin (陳鶴琴) — played an important role in promoting Dewey’s ideas.\footnote{See Kuang, 1994, \textit{Pragmatism in China: The Deweyan influence} (doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University).}

Recently, the fourth approach — comparative study — was prevalent among researchers from Taiwan and mainland China. Only twenty-six years ago, Sizer observed that Dewey’s educational ideas were practiced extensively in Communist China, even though he had been politically vilified since the 1950s.\footnote{However, as an outsider, Sizer did not see the implication behind this phenomenon — Dewey’s philosophy of education met the needs of the Chinese in many respects, so they just had no way to}
totally discard it.\textsuperscript{18} It was the Chinese researchers who best captured this point. Looking for a better understanding, they scrutinized the theoretical similarities and differences between Dewey and certain important Chinese figures. Not surprisingly, Dewey was often paralleled with Confucius,\textsuperscript{19} Sun Yat-sen (孫中山),\textsuperscript{20} and Mao Tse-tung (毛澤東)\textsuperscript{21} — the three thinkers who had profoundly shaped the course of Chinese education. The rise of these comparative works not only reflects the special status of Dewey in China, but also shows that his educational theory has regained the attention of the Chinese. Nevertheless, when eagerly making a comparison between two sets of ideas, this kind of research tended to neglect the complicated feelings and various struggles involved with these ideas since the May Fourth period.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{17} See Sizer, 1974, \textit{Dewey, China and the philosophy of development}, paper presented at the meeting of the AERA, Chicago, IL.


To conclude, this review of the literature on John Dewey and modern Chinese education shows us that the American philosopher’s contribution to China is highly controversial. Although some researchers have recognized that either the support or the opposition to Dewey’s philosophy had much to do with the crises facing the country, they have hardly investigated the relationship between education and the many ideas at work during and after Dewey’s two-year sojourn. Specifically, two important aspects have largely been overlooked. The first is related to the respective positions and arguments of the May Fourth intellectual groups, who responded to Dewey’s reform ideas with particular concerns over their own days. Questions that need to be discussed may include: Who were the major leaders of each group? What kind of understanding did they have about the problems of China? What was at issue from their viewpoints? How did they take and digest Dewey’s theory? What were their proposals for change in education? What were the points of their disputes? Did their insights fundamentally conflict with one another? What were the strengths and weaknesses of those competing ideas? Since the previous literature lacked systematic and comparative presentation of the ideas concerned, we are still very vague on the whole picture of these historical and philosophical encounters.

The second aspect that the previous research has not seriously dealt with is the significance of Dewey’s theory for China. Over the past twenty years, while the philosopher has been regaining the admiration of his American countrymen, Chinese society (including the mainland and Taiwan) has also witnessed a renewed interest in his ideas due to the changing social and political situations. This more friendly climate
makes it an appropriate time to reevaluate him. Questions that need to be discussed may include: What are the salient features of Dewey’s experimentalism in contrast to traditional Chinese thought? What were Dewey’s overall impressions of China? How valid were his observations on the country’s problems? Did he have anything to say about the disputes he was involved in? Were his ideas and suggestions useful in solving China’s predicaments? Will his philosophy of education contribute to building a hopeful China in the new millennium? If so, what should the Chinese take from Dewey’s thinking? Before we can make any rational judgment on Dewey’s contributions to Chinese education, a proper understanding of what he actually expressed in China should be obtained.

**Purpose and Significance**

In view of the limited accomplishments of any previous research on this topic, the specific purposes of my project are to:

1. Review the history and philosophy of modern Chinese education, identify the problems it has faced throughout time, and thus acquire the necessary starting points in definitions and concepts;

2. Examine the schools of thought of the May Fourth intellectuals from various positions, reassess Dewey’s philosophy in terms of their responses, and then determine what exceptional insights Dewey had into the needs of China and what remained of critical issues that he failed to address but had been raised by his supporters or opponents;

With the belief that both Dewey and the May Fourth intellectuals have something important to teach the Chinese and to illuminate the future of modern Chinese education, the results of this research should to some extent be useful in solving those problems that have confronted Chinese education for more than a century and in improving the present educational quality on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. When the true value of Dewey's ideas is finally revealed, educators and policymakers may find it easier to decide what and how to learn from the great philosopher.

Method

Considering that the important issues of modern Chinese education are characterized by intense disputes, I plan to use a dialectic approach in this project to achieve my research purpose. First, a continuing dialogue among the competing groups will be constructed. By examining the problems of China and the efforts to cure them, I will present the main arguments on each issue and analyze the virtues and defects of each position. Second, Dewey and his ideas will be used as points of reference to identify the conflicts that were going on in China. Although the American philosopher will be put in the center with the May Fourth intellectuals around him, my focus is not only on the encounters between the West and the East, but also on the complicated interactions among different Chinese intellectual groups. It is hoped that an improved view will
emerge after the logical reasoning comes to an end. Finally, knowledge of Chinese history will be employed in this research as a major complement to the dialectical approach. Since the latter does not necessarily lead to a good synthesis, weaving relevant historical events into the text may help prevent an unrealistic judgment.

In order to make a more complete survey of Dewey’s relationship with modern Chinese education, the primary sources and essential literature used in this project have been obtained from the research libraries of the United States, mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. These include Dewey’s lectures in China, his articles about China, the biographies and works of the May Fourth intellectuals, studies of modern Chinese education, etc.

**Chinese Characters and Romanization**

In Chinese, family names precede given names, and this has been the order followed in each chapter. Since this study covers a long stretch of time, the transcription of Chinese terms basically observes the older Wade-Giles system (adopted by most Chinese and Western scholars prior to 1979 and still in use in Taiwan today). To avoid the inconvenience of reading such words, my practice here is to omit the special punctuation marks of the Wade-Giles system and supply the real Chinese characters in parentheses on the first occurrence. For example, the name Liang Ch’i-ch’ao will appear as Liang Chi-chao (梁啟超) in the text. Yet earlier common usage is continued throughout for easy identification. For example, the character 子 is transcribed as Tze rather than Tzu. To
make a distinction, names of authors from the People’s Republic of China are given in the Hanyu Pinyin system. Mainland geographical names after 1979 are also given in the Hanyu Pinyin system in the references.

**Contents of the Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of six chapters.

In chapter one, I will briefly review the history and philosophy of modern Chinese education. The major themes of the two periods (early modern and republican) will be discussed. During the process of telling stories, I will play the role of a social reformer. That is, my focus will be to trace the accumulated problems of Chinese education and to locate the tremendous challenges it must deal with in the modern age.

In chapter two, I will introduce Dewey and his main ideas in terms of the intellectual ferment in China during the May Fourth Movement. Dewey’s outlooks on this country and his approaches to the solving of her problems will also be examined to provide grounds for understanding the basic features of Chinese situations.

In chapters three, four, and five, I will discuss the leading figures of the May Fourth Movement and their respective ideas about education. Dewey’s philosophy and China’s new education will be examined in terms of the responses from the six important intellectual groups. It is noteworthy that the British philosopher Bertrand Russell, who
lected in China about the same time as Dewey did, had a somewhat different view from Dewey on the task that the Chinese should undertake. Since he attracted a large audience, I will also include him and his followers in the dialogue.

In chapter six, I will reassess the value of Dewey’s ideas in terms of the Chinese context. In addition, the lessons learned from China’s past experience will also be reconsidered. After critically reexamining the literature about Dewey in China, I will present my own view on what the Chinese can learn from the American philosopher in the new millennium.

Since the summer of 1998, when I began to work on my dissertation, I have invited John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, and some of the May Fourth intellectuals together to speak for themselves and chat with me on the future of China. I hope my readers understand that I am not only looking back on China’s past but also constructing a philosophy of education for her future — the latter task is my real focus. A historian must be able to explain the past, but he or she is denied the privilege of dreaming. Only in a philosophical realm can a scholar be allowed to dream something which has not yet been realized. Living in an imperfect world, we human beings need a lot of dreams. Like those figures engaged in this dialogue, I also have dreams. I dream of a strong China, I dream of a wealthy China, and I dream of a highly civilized China. I dream that we Chinese will someday achieve all these goals to help the world live in harmony as our ancestors have dreamed and tried for so many centuries. This work is for those who share the same dreams and want to know how a philosophy of education can help realize such dreams:
Philosophy is implicitly pedagogical...meant to correct the myopia of the past and the immediate...to transform the way we think, act and interact. Philosophers have always taken themselves to be the ultimate educators of mankind... They thought that interpreting the world aright would free us from illusion and direct us to those activities that best suit us... A vital and robust philosophy of education inevitably incorporates virtually the whole of philosophy; and the study of the history of philosophy mandates reflection on its implications for education.\textsuperscript{22}

CHAPTER 1

MODERN EDUCATION IN CHINA:
THOUGHTS AND EFFORTS

The Struggle of Reconstruction

*Education and National Security (1842-1894)*

Historically, the Opium War of 1839 to 1842 was considered a starting point of China’s modernity because it invited a century’s imperialist exploitation which forced the old country to transform from an agricultural to an industrial society. The war was also a significant watershed in the development of Chinese education, for it marked the beginning of China’s long struggle for substantial changes in the educational realm in order to cope with a predatory world. The threat of foreign conquest thus contributed to the birth of early modern Chinese education, whose major task was to help strengthen national security.

Since the rapid educational changes of modern China took place in a time of national crisis, such issues as what should be taught could be easily found in the country’s
new schools. Here it is worth knowing how earlier Chinese researchers saw the whole situation. Kuo Ping Wen (郭秉文, 1879-1967), from Jiangsu province, was one of John Dewey’s Chinese disciples and later the chancellor of National Nanking Teachers College. His Columbia doctoral dissertation of 1914 was probably the first English work that systematically examined the various problems facing modern Chinese education. In retrospect, Kuo epitomized the pragmatic attitude of the May Fourth intellectuals, who would generally consider that the following issues were becoming of national importance (from top to bottom) in their day:

- **Missionary education:** How to enable the government to exercise its legitimate control and supervision over the schools supported by religious bodies and by so doing, to supplement the national educational work, which was often handicapped by the lack of funds.

- **Moral education:** How to develop moral character in the rising generation in the absence of the old classical learning and its ethical ideal.

- **School discipline:** How to govern schools to reduce the frequent student riots and strikes.

- **Funding:** How to devise adequate sources of financing to meet the heavy expense of the new schools.

- **Universal education:** How to overcome the difficulties resulting from language and remedy the initial mistake of neglecting elementary schools.
Teacher training: How to supply the different types of new schools with a sufficient number of competent teachers.

Relating education to life: How to improve the selection of material for curriculum and the methods of teaching so that knowledge taught in schools would help meet the daily needs of the individual and solve the perplexing problems of the country.

Education and national progress: How to enhance national progress through educational reform so that the ship of state would be steered into the haven of safety.

Education and government service: How to change the dominating idea that education was primarily a preparation not for practical life but for employment in the government.

Centralization vs. decentralization: How to secure a blending of centralization and decentralization in educational administration to satisfy both national and local needs.

Curriculum: How to avoid the danger of over-emphasizing the importance of Western subjects at the expense of all that is really vital in the Chinese national life.

Method of education: How to do away with the excessive stress on memorizing and encourage active use of scientific methods by students.¹

The above list gives us a sense of what the critical issues were during the 1910s in the Chinese system of public education. In the following brief survey, I will provide

more information about the development of early modern Chinese education, especially the major educational thoughts and efforts prior to the May Fourth Movement.

**New Awareness and Strong Resistance**

After the humiliating Opium War, the glory days of China were on the verge of coming to an end. One of the few intellectuals to awaken to the national crisis and argue for the importance of understanding the outside world was a noted thinker named Wei Yuan (魏源, 1794-1857). Stressing the urgent need to master the enemy’s military techniques, he proposed to change the narrow contents of the civil service examination and to actively learn technology and democracy from the West. Officials like Wei represented the more pragmatic and flexible attitude toward reforms among Chinese intellectuals, yet it was now a hard line that dominated the opinions in the court. Fearing that China’s own cultural values would be jeopardized by the pursuit of Western studies, conservatives like the grand councilor Wo-jen (倭仁, d. 1871) rejected any proposal for change and thus kept China’s military force from modernizing during the next twenty years.\(^2\)

Not until 1860 did successive military defeats and harsher treaties lead the self-confident empire to painfully admit that its civilization could not compete with Western gunboats. To repel the powerful invaders, weapons and schools had to be Westernized no matter how resentful the Chinese felt about the West. As one of the modernizing

\(^2\) See Wakeman, 1975, *The fall of imperial China*, p. 139.
officials, Feng Kuei-fen (馮桂芬, 1809-1874), indicated, "what we then have to learn from the barbarians is only the one thing, solid ships and effective guns." Consequently, the educational change brought by the Self-Strengthening Movement (1860-1894) mainly focused on subjects regarding military and diplomatic defense. Along with the newly created government departments, arsenals, and steamship factories, a number of academies (館/學堂) were gradually established to train linguists, technicians, and military officers. Moreover, young students were sent to the United States and European countries in the hope that they would bring back the secret knowledge that China lacked.

It was clear that China's early borrowings from the West were very cautious and selective. The attempt of the Self-Strengtheners — men like Tseng Kuo-fan (曾國藩, 1811-1872), Li Hung-chang (李鴻章, 1823-1901), and Chang Chih-tung (張之洞, 1837-1909) — to enhance China’s power and wealth and meanwhile preserve the essence of its tradition was manifested in their common tendency to require both Confucian classics and Western studies to be taught in the new academies. However, such an unorthodox curriculum plus the increasingly popular hostility toward the West inevitably put those reform efforts under considerable attack. The opposition again came from the cultural conservatives, whose confidence in Confucian wisdom was still strong and whose

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3 Feng, 1860, On the manufacture of foreign weapons, in Teng & Fairbank, 1954, China's response to the West, p. 53.

4 For the establishment, organization, operation, accomplishments, and problems of these academies, see Biggerstaff, 1961, The earliest modern government schools in China, chs. 2-4.

5 On the development of the Chinese movement to study abroad, see Wang, 1966, Chinese
dominant position was being threatened. Their worry that barbarians’ learning would corrupt the character and intellect of China’s future leaders not only ended the bold project of sending students to the United States, but also defeated almost every proposal to integrate Western studies into the traditional examination. As a result, education reforms were unpopular within the literati establishment throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, and the civil service examination system remained largely unchanged. In addition to the new academies generated by the reform movement, major changes were brought by foreign missionaries, who took a more active interest than the Ching government in founding Western-style schools.

● The Double Character of Mission Schools

In fact, the officials of the Self-Strengthening Movement were not the first to promote Western learning. Through the Unequal Treaties beginning from 1842, the Western Powers had gained privileges for their clergy to freely preach Christianity in China and establish churches and schools where they wanted. With the zeal to convert infidels, the early mission schools were usually interested in lower-level education and primarily focused on the instruction in the Bible. They usually charged no fees and provided their poor Chinese students with free food, lodging, clothes, and books. In response to the increasing demand of the treaty ports for trained linguists and experts, the missionaries later began to establish colleges and to add modern secular subjects into

intellectuals and the West: 1872-1949, chs. 2-7.

6 The Unequal Treaties were intended to undermine China’s sovereignty, including
their religious curriculum.⁷ Up to the 1890s, there had been over 40,000 Chinese students (out of a population of 400,000,000) enrolled in about 2,000 mission schools, half of which were sponsored and managed by American religious groups.⁸

Similar to the situation of other colonized countries in the world, mission schools in China also played a significant role in facilitating imperialist domination, though they did help develop Chinese universities and expand educational opportunity to underprivileged groups.⁹ As the lectures of American minister Calvin W. Mateer (狄考文, 1836-1908) at the 1877 and 1890 missionary conferences revealed, the combination of Christianity and Western-style education could serve the West as a potent tool to eliminate the competition of Confucianism as well as to shape the mentality of China’s future leaders.¹⁰ In practice, however, the imperialists had difficulty in achieving the above goals. This was because the elite class generally remained hostile to such intellectual intrusion, and most commoners still dared not entrust their children to “foreign devils” (yang kuei-tze

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⁸ See Wang Bingzhao, 1994, 中國近代教育史 [History of modern Chinese education], pp. 94-96.

⁹ For the growth of Christian Colleges and their contributions to China, see Fenn, 1976, Christian higher education in changing China, 1880-1950, chs. 2-5.

Mission schools as a whole not only constantly aroused suspicion during this period, but were often destroyed by the irritated masses thanks to the many conflicts between the Chinese and Westerners.

*Education and National Salvation (1895-1911)*

After China’s 1895 defeat by Japan and the subsequent imperialist scramble for concessions, China’s national dignity and cultural pride almost vanished. Worse than that, her existence in the world began to be seriously threatened by foreign invaders. The deteriorating situations had made the choice of rejectionism so hopeless that they stimulated a new wave of reform movements among members of the scholar-official elite. Events thereafter evolved at an increasingly rapid rate. Although the emperor-sponsored reform of 1898 was soon brought to an end, some educational changes like the founding of modern schools by local elite had taken place. After being trampled by the combined force of eight powers in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, the Ching authorities immediately

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11 The following survey of the educational changes during this period is based on Reynolds, 1993, *China, 1898-1912: The xinzheng revolution and Japan*, ch. 7.

12 This defeat brought the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895), which forced China to surrender her last vassal state Korea, her territories including Taiwan and the Penghu Islands, and finally 230 million tael indemnity to Japan. The last was almost three times the amount of China’s annual revenue (80 million taels) in the 1890s. See Michael & Taylor, 1964, *The Far East in the modern world*, pp. 156-157.

During the following ten years (1896-1906) the Great Powers, including Germany, Russia, Britain, France, and Japan, began to fight with one another in order to secure their previous spoils and acquire the new privilege of building railways and working mines.

13 This antiforeign war resulted in the Boxer Protocol of 1901 with eleven powers, including Germany, Japan, Russia, Britain, the United States, France, Austria, Italy, Spain, Belgium, and
initiated a series of institutional reforms which went even further than any of the previous efforts. New education especially had to be formed on a large scale, for it now played an unprecedentedly crucial role in national salvation!

- *The Foresight*

In retrospect, the ideas of several of China's most influential intellectuals had paved the way for the radical reforms launched by the late Ching court. Believing that the country's weakness had its roots in the inadequate ways of training and nurturing the talent, they had urged since the 1880s for extensive modernization of the education system. The first one to articulate such a need was the Self-Strengthening official Chang Chih-tung (張之洞, 1837-1909), who popularized a slogan reconciling the old with the new: “Chinese learning for the fundamental principles and Western studies for practical use” (中學為體, 西學為用). To help the country recover her political and economic energy, Chang proposed a set of new measures which included modifying the classical curriculum, transforming traditional colleges (i.e., *shu-yuan* 書院), abolishing the civil service examination, emulating the Japanese school system, and sponsoring overseas study.\(^{14}\) In contrast, the leaders of the 1898 reform, such as Kang Yu-wei (康有為, 1858-1927) and Liang Chi-chao (梁啓超, 1873-1929), paid more attention to the issue of mass education, arguing that popular literacy was a prerequisite for national progress.

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\(^{14}\) See Ayers, 1971, *Chang Chih-tung and educational reform in China*, pp. 149-173.
The famous thinker and translator Yen Fu (嚴復, 1853-1921), who introduced to his countrymen the shocking “survival of the fittest” message of Social Darwinism, was the most hostile to the traditional curriculum and the most enthusiastic advocate of Western science and empirical research.

**The Formation of New Education**

During the short period from 1901 to 1911, China experienced a swift creation and implementation of new educational policies. The imperial government ultimately took up the reform suggestions and issued a variety of decrees. Local colleges and schools were soon reorganized into a three-tier system of elementary, secondary, and tertiary schools, based on the German model modified by the Japanese. Moreover, a number of industrial and military academies were established, Western learning was promoted, a Ministry of Education was created, and students were encouraged to study abroad. Above all, the civil service examination was abolished in 1905 in order to enhance the enrollment in the new schools. A few years after the enduring tie between classical Confucian education and public office was broken, the Ching Dynasty was overthrown and, in 1912, China’s first republic was born.

**Republican Reorientation**

The Republic was originally designed to be governed and shared by all the people. Yet the revolutionaries who created it quickly knew that the difficult task of realizing these ideals had just begun, for the largely illiterate masses were still suffering from
China's disorders. Enlightened by political and social philosophies from the West, those new intellectuals took a very different attitude from the previous reformers toward the directions of education. Three major issues especially attracted their attention. The first one concerned China's continuing poverty and vast unemployment. Criticizing that new education since the late Ching had deviated from the daily needs of the people, educators like Huang Yen-pei (黃炎培, 1877-1965) contended that vocational skills should be emphasized in formal schooling. The second issue concerned the threats from the outside world. Leaders such as Fan Yuan-lien (范源濂, 1876-1927) advocated the implementation of military training in all schools. The last issue centered on the meaning and goals of universal education. Comparing the difference between monarchical and popular interests, government officials like Tsai Yuan-pei (蔡元培, 1867-1940) insisted that equal educational opportunity would benefit most people and ultimately the country.¹⁵ The founding father of the Republic, Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙, 1866-1925), was the most thoughtful in assigning particular roles to education. Hoping to lift China to the level of the modern world, Sun contended that education was not only a basic human right but also a pivotal force of promoting national integration, independence, economic advancement, social reform, and finally, the progress of civilization.¹⁶


¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 245-254.
In response to the new demand for change, China’s modern schooling was revised in 1912. On the basis of the late Ching accomplishments, its scope was extended and its length was shortened to accommodate new kinds of specialized education. As the new government decided not to preside at the age-old ceremonies venerating Confucius in order to separate religious belief from the state, a dramatic change also occurred on the part of the curriculum — more time was given to modern subjects, and the Confucian classics were dropped. Furthermore, a decree of compulsory education was ordered, but throughout the republican era (1912-1949) public schools grew slowly in the extremely turbulent environment created by domestic political turmoil and imperialist oppression.17

Confucianism as a Target

The main source of China’s domestic political turmoil was her warlords, who divided up the country from 1917 throughout 1949. Besides illegally diverting the already small allotment left for education to their own armies,18 many of these military governors were also notorious for their reactionary practice of ideological control. The latter could be traced back to 1913, when the ambitious president Yuan Shih-kai (袁世凱, 1859-1916) intended to restore dynastic rule with himself as emperor by exalting

17 For example, the Kuomintang government’s special effort to expand primary education in 1935 resulted in a reported enrollment increase from 13 to 21.5 million over the next two years. Yet these gains were destroyed by the eight-year war (1937-1945) against Japan. See Thomas & Postlethwaite, 1983, Schooling in East Asia: Forces of change, p. 95.

18 About 80 percent of the entire revenue of the nation was devoted to military affairs. See Chow, 1960, The May Fourth Movement, p. 260.
Confucianism to the status of a national religion.\textsuperscript{19} It followed that he not only revived the abolished ceremonies but also decreed that the Confucian classics be taught again in schools. After Yuan’s death in 1916, the same dirty tricks continued to be played by those regional warlords who wanted to legitimate their domination over the areas under their control. Because such autocratic measures were so contradictory to the democratic goals of the Republic, they quickly provoked intellectual attack on old traditions, with Confucianism as a major target. Inevitably, this raised the tough issue about how to deal with Confucianism and its omnipresent influence (no matter how good or bad) in education. It later led to a few of the heated debates during and after the May Fourth Movement (1919-1925).\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{American Theories}

The May Fourth Movement was a nationalistic reaction directly stimulated by foreign domination in China. It derived its momentum since the May 4th of 1919, from a student demonstration in Peking that protested against the decision of the Paris Peace Conference to transfer Germany’s concessions in Shantung province to Japan.\textsuperscript{21} It was

\textsuperscript{19} Yuan was elected to the presidency because he enjoyed the loyalty of China’s best army as well as foreign support; some of the later warlords were generals under him. For Yuan’s intention in worshipping Confucius, see Ouyang Che-sheng (歐陽哲生), 1999, 在傳統與現代性之間 [Between tradition and modernity], in Yu Ying-shih et al., 五四新論：既非文藝復興，亦非啓蒙運動 [New criticism of the May Fourth Movement: Neither a renaissance nor an enlightenment], pp. 151-160.

\textsuperscript{20} The quick rise of Chinese nationalism in 1925 ended the May Fourth Movement.

\textsuperscript{21} The Japanese had proposed the Twenty-One Demands to China in 1915 with the
due to such anxiety for an effective route to strengthen the nation that various Western educational trends were quickly introduced in China. Japan’s initial success in adapting Western education had provided the late Ching reformers with a modern model of structuring the school system. Yet American ways quickly attracted attention when the influence of students returning from the United States gradually increased. During the May Fourth Movement, several progressive American educators such as John Dewey (1859-1952), Paul Monroe (1869-1947), William A. McCall (b. 1891), Helen Parkhurst (b. 1887), and William H. Kilpatrick (1871-1965) were invited to offer new guides to the Chinese people. An educational reform was launched in 1922, which reorganized the Chinese school system according to the American pattern and shifted the goal of Chinese education in light of Dewey’s thought. Before long, the most modern school practices were copied and tried in many schools, yet educators finally found that there was difficulty in crossing the huge gap between Chinese reality and foreign doctrines, created by distinct cultural, economic, social, and political conditions.\footnote{See Lu Ting-pin, 1981, 民初美國訪華教育學者對中國新教育影響之研究 [The impact of

\textit{The Christian Colleges}

In addition to educational theories, American influence also manifested itself in the increasing numbers of mission schools. Up to 1918, there had been about 350,000
Chinese students enrolled in about 13,000 mission schools, half of which were sponsored and managed by American and British religious groups. Having great interest in China’s higher education, the Protestant organizations (most of which came from the U.S.) had founded 16 universities by 1921, while the Chinese themselves had only built 8. Since 1905, such mission colleges and universities had been at odds with their Chinese faculty and students on the issues of curriculum and administration, and the fights intensified after 1919. The question of whether the republican government had a right to supervise religious groups was only the tip of the iceberg. The real issue was that the foreign missionaries were more interested in Christianizing and subjugating China’s youth than in educating them for a brighter future for the country. As John Dewey criticized in a 1922 article, American missionary colleges in China had failed to provide “what China most needs from the West, namely, scientific method and aggressive freedom and independence of inquiry, criticism and action” and only turned out “men who when they went into industry took subordinate positions in foreign managed industries.” To resist such cultural imperialism, educational autonomy was thereafter pursued by Chinese national sentiment.

American visiting educators on Chinese new education during the early republic], pp. 183-189.


24 See Ibid., pp. 239-241.


26 For the antagonism toward Christian schools and the devolution in missionary education,
Where to go?

On the whole, the May Fourth Movement had long-term revolutionary consequences in the later directions of China's political and cultural development. This is because it not only strongly advocated Western science and democracy as panaceas for the country's ills, but also promoted a skeptical attitude toward all traditional ideas, customs, and institutions.\textsuperscript{27} Regardless of its consequences, what it intended to destroy and introduce did create extreme tensions both in society and in schools. Its themes continue to reverberate even more than half a century later. Before turning to the competing interests and inclinations in which this ferment took effect, we need to conclude this chapter by examining the educational problems that confronted the Chinese nation since the establishment of the first modern government school in 1862.

The Problems of Transformation

Knowledge Old and New

As indicated earlier, an initial difficulty within the development of modern Chinese education was that Western knowledge was profoundly alien to the indigenous one. If

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see Gregg, 1946, \textit{China and educational autonomy: The changing role of the Protestant educational missionary in China, 1807-1937}, chs. 7-10; for the rise of modern nationalism and its influence on the Chinese educational system, see Peake, 1932, \textit{Nationalism and education in modern China}, pp. 120-157.
both were indispensable, as most of the late Ching reformers had insisted, there emerged the immediate issue of how to harmonize the two and get the most desirable results. Such an example could be found in the efforts made by the famous Self-Strengthening official Chang Chih-tung. A committed Confucian civil servant and moderate reformer, Chang had tried to make a compromise during the late Ching.\textsuperscript{28} He argued that Western learning had to be acquired since it could help China broaden the domain of knowledge and produce competent technicians; on the other hand, he believed that only the Classics would fill the role of rectifying human hearts and enhancing moral cultivation:

\begin{quote}
Chinese learning is inner learning, Western learning is outer learning. Chinese learning is for regulating the body and mind. Western learning is for managing the affairs of the world. It is not necessary to seek for everything in the idea of the classics. But it is not necessary to contravene the meaning of the classics. If one's heart is the heart of the sages and one's actions are the actions of the sages, with filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, and sincerity accepted as virtue, and respect for the ruler and concern for the people accepted as (principles of) government, then no harm will befall the disciples of Confucius even though they use machines and speed over railroads.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

With its strong emphasis on the need for loyalty to the emperor and the imperial form of government, Chang's proposal enjoyed great popularity among officials and intellectuals. Unfortunately, it was soon proved to be more an ideal than a reality, because the urgent demands for trained specialists often decreased the time spent on the classical curriculum.\textsuperscript{30} After the Republic was established, such arguments in defense of


\textsuperscript{28} See Ayers, 1971, \textit{Chang Chih-tung and educational reform in China}, ch. 6.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 160.
Confucianism were quickly swept aside. It seemed that traditional learning had to be vacated, and Western-style education occupied the center stage. Nevertheless, under the surface modernization, there was still tension between the old and the new.

*Mind Old and New*

In the dissertation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Kuo Ping Wen noticed that in the past there was little requiring knowledge of experimental method or inductive reasoning in education, which accounted for the comparatively backward condition of China. On the problems associated with teacher training and method of education, he indicated that the country was entering the modern world but her people were still being educated in an antiquated manner:

> The teacher in a modern school is expected to develop in the pupils the power of reasoning instead of only mere memory. And the old-style teacher does not easily lend himself to the new order. He is by training conservative, inclined to cling to the methods to which he is accustomed. He is himself so wedded to the old that he confesses to a sort of intellectual awkwardness when he tries to use the new learning and new methods. In his fear of making mistakes, he confines himself closely to text-books. Consciously or unconsciously he still over-emphasizes the value of memory. He himself is not trained to think and of course is not inclined to adopt methods which quicken thought in his student.  

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31 Kuo’s view and the following similar account given by Charles K. Edmunds can be better understood as the lack of an effective epistemology and methodology in traditional Chinese philosophy. See Chapters 3 & 6 of this study.

Having been deeply immersed in literary imagination and philosophical speculation throughout many centuries, the Chinese mind, for the most part, had great difficulty in adapting to scientific modes of thinking. Nonetheless, awareness like Kuo’s was not yet common among most Chinese educators, though the issue of intellectual development was by no means less serious than others.

It was not until 1919 that an American missionary, Charles K. Edmunds, first spelt out such kind of problem. As the president of Canton Christian College, Edmunds did not find any fundamental difference in intellectual caliber between Chinese and American students. But after 15 years in China, he observed that the difference in method and attitude was the reason why the country had lagged behind her Western counterparts. Thus, in a chapter describing his experience of teaching science in the old country, he attributed the current backwardness to several factors, as follows:

- **Absence of the inductive method**: Inductive method was the distinguishing characteristic of modern science. However, it was almost completely lacking among the Chinese, for their ancient philosophers had preferred 
  a priori deduction and given greater weight to analogy. “Western teachers of Chinese students are constantly impressed with their readiness to argue by illustration and to accept a single illustration as proof,” Edmunds wrote, “not that they consider that a single exception to a rule invalidates its generality, but that from a single case a general law can be deduced.” The result of this deficiency was that unverifiable speculations, rather than valid generalizations, were prevalent.
✧ **Spirit of inaccuracy:** The advance of science in Western lands depended on the absolute invariability of standards of quantity. In contrast, the Chinese were entirely free from the quality of accuracy in most matters involving numerical relations. For instance, “the distance between two points A and B, according to Chinese representation, depends not merely on the geometrical factor, but on others that determine the relative facility of travel between these points... It is farther between A and B at night or when raining than it is by day or when clear.” Vagueness and indefiniteness consequently operated to retard the appreciation of accurate statement and accurate thinking.

✧ **Other causes:** According to Edmunds, these included the lack of mathematical knowledge or the failure to apply it, the difficulty of the written language, the mistake of the old system to quench the spirit of inquiry, the influence of ancient superstitions and reverences, and the official indifference to popular education.³³

**The Demand of the New Age**

It was the sudden new demand for change, rather than the continuing evolution of tradition, that transformed almost every aspect of Chinese education. By 1919, the modern school system had been promoted as a necessary constituent for China’s modern reconstruction, though the new system itself was full of uncertainties. On the basis of

the problems raised and identified in this chapter, I would like to summarize all the critical issues that would have a significant bearing upon the later progress of Chinese education, as follows:

◆ **The aim of education:** This refers to what direction Chinese education should take after the traditional political order broke down.

◆ **The type of knowledge:** This refers to how to replace the traditional learning with the new Western subjects.

◆ **The way of thinking:** This refers to how to foster scientific attitudes that were essential to modern life.

◆ **The method of teaching:** This refers to how to change the formalistic way in which modern knowledge was taught.

◆ **The shift of belief systems:** This refers to how to deal with the old ethical ideals and rebuild a common ground for a new order.

◆ **The object of education:** This refers to which group of people should be served.

◆ **The suitability of foreign doctrines:** This refers to whether imported theories are suited to Chinese reality.

◆ **The autonomy of education:** This refers to how to make education independent of foreign control.

◆ **The mode of administration:** This refers to how to manage schools and regulate the system.

◆ **The source of financing:** This refers to where to find the necessary resources.
The above issues then will serve as a starting point for our discussion of the educational ideas during the May Fourth period. Particularly, the first seven will be the major focus because of their presence in most of the disputes over the directions of Chinese education, as well as their relevance to Dewey’s philosophy of education.
CHAPTER 2

JOHN DEWEY IN CHINA:
IDEAS, OBSERVATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Life and Mind of John Dewey, 1890-1919

The Making of a Philosopher

John Dewey (1859-1952) developed his unique educational ideas as he experienced the great transformation of American life that proceeded at the turn of the twentieth century. The turning point in Dewey’s early intellectual life occurred in the first half of the 1890s, following the declining influence of religion and the rising power of science in the United States. From then on, Dewey abandoned his church membership. All his life he took an opposing attitude toward the truth and authority defined by traditional religious ideas or superstitious beliefs. No longer a philosophical idealist, he insisted that “the only approach to life, education, ethics, and politics that offered a hope of
"progress" was a thoroughgoing naturalism. And it followed that the appeals to science and the emphasis on the virtues of scientific investigation prevailed in his educational statements.

Anxieties about the social crisis of modern America were also embodied in Dewey's writings on almost every subject — philosophy, politics, education, religion, art, etc. When Dewey left the University of Michigan and began another phase of his teaching career at the University of Chicago in 1894, the forces of industrialization had dramatically increased the gulf and conflict between the classes. Like other progressive reformers, Dewey was troubled by the strong individualism of the upper classes and deeply opposed to the tyranny of the industrial leaders, whose only concern in education was to secure a cheap and docile work force. From this period on, democracy as an aim of schooling to take part in correcting inequities began to take root in his educational theory, by which he hoped to achieve a society permeated "by a mutual regard of all citizens for all other citizens, and by an ambition to make society both a greater unity and one that reflected the full diversity of its members' talents and aptitudes."2

The period from 1894 to 1914 was the high point of Dewey's philosophical career. In those years, he founded a laboratory school, wrote extensively on education, and became a revered hero to progressive educators. The intellectual forces that influenced Dewey's new approach to education came from several sources. First, although he rejected the abstract metaphysics of Hegelian idealism he had learned from his earlier

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training, Hegelian dialectical reasoning dominated all his efforts to overcome educational dualisms. Second, his earlier and later association with scholars from the newly established empirical disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, left an obvious mark on his discussion about child development and the learning process. Perhaps the third source — the evolutionary concepts of Darwinian biology — obsessed Dewey the most and longest, not so much in the sense of adaptation but in the sense of progress. To a considerable extent, preparing individuals for continued growth, intelligent action, and better control over their ever-changing environment summed up his entire rationale for education.²

*From Philosophy to Education*

Trying to provide an effective way of thinking about how to arrive at some answers or knowledge, Dewey invented a distinctive approach to philosophy. Three extraordinary features of his pragmatism (sometimes called “experimentalism,” “instrumentalism,” or “empirical naturalism”) also extend to his educational ideas. First, drawing upon Darwin for a theory of nature, Dewey contends that all organisms come into being and make progress when continuously interacting with their troublesome environment. This vision leads to his conviction that intellectual growth arises from the process of problem-solving. In the context of his long career, Dewey had attempted to

² Ibid., p. 25.

articulate a structure of analyzing philosophical issues. Likewise, in the realm of pedagogy, he wanted to make the educational process clearer and more purposeful to teachers.

Unsatisfied with the Herbartian class lesson plan (i.e., a five-stage schema including preparation, presentation, comparison, generalization, and application) which suggests "imparting concepts and information for their own sake," Dewey created his own method of teaching which emphasizes "the complete act of thought." The five steps of Dewey's schema can be summarized as follows: (1) encountering a felt difficulty; (2) identifying its location and definition; (3) formulating a possible solution; (4) testing the solution; (5) accepting or rejecting the solution. To put it briefly, Deweyan education begins with the need to solve a problem and lets increasingly sophisticated information and skills be acquired in the process of thinking, with the aim of helping students gain a capacity to act wisely and effectively.

A new conception of experience is the second feature that Dewey brings from his philosophy into the discussion of education. Traditional philosophers have "regarded experience as the exclusive possession of the private subject and hence sought to ground knowledge in something extraneous to experience that represented the external world." Yet Dewey not only recognizes that we live in a world of experience, but also contends that the experience we possess results from our active interactions with our biosocial


5 Ibid.
environments. Accordingly, on the issue of educational means, Dewey is more inclined to dismiss traditional methods of learning, such as deductive thinking or contemplation, and supports the view that substantive knowledge is gained through experience and practical action.\footnote{Diggins, 1994, The promise of pragmatism, p. 230.}

The third feature of Dewey’s thought that relates to his concerns of education is his attempt to reconcile and integrate false dualisms. Striving for unity and wholeness, his mature philosophy always tries to find a middle ground for traditionally opposed positions such as mind and body. He approaches almost every problem by identifying the tension between the competing forces at work and then showing how they interact with and are necessary for each other. Similarly, the best perspective of understanding educational dilemmas for Dewey is to go beneath the surface and dig out the underlying conflicts. This persistent effort manifests itself in many of his book titles: The School and Society (1900), The Child and the Curriculum (1902), Interest and Effort in Education (1913), Experience and Nature (1925), Experience and Education (1938), etc. It is estimated that in Democracy and Education (1916) alone Dewey tackled more than thirty dualisms in his typical fashion.\footnote{See Smith, 1980, Sources of progressive thought in American education, pp. 157-175.} \footnote{See Feng, 1989, A re-examination of John Dewey and education, pp. 7-8.}
Education for Democracy

Besides his ideas regarding pedagogical renewal, Dewey also puts great emphasis on many of the educational requirements of democracy. In fact, as his most complete statement on educational philosophy Democracy and Education (1916) reveals, Dewey is much more concerned with the social bearings of school education than with the details of instruction. For him, democracy is more than “a form of government.” It is primarily “a mode of associated living” and demands devotion to education. To enable the child to become a full member of society, Dewey made a notable effort to deal with three dimensions of schooling.

First, recognizing the bonds connecting the subject matter of school study with the habits and ideals of the social group, Dewey believes that the selection of material should use a criterion of social worth. He contends that “a curriculum which acknowledges the social responsibilities of education must present situations where problems are relevant to the problems of living together, and where observation and information are calculated to

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9 These requirements include “the amplification to be heard,” “the credibility to be listened to,” “the patience to listen to others, to weigh evidence, to seek accommodation, or to adopt the perspective of the weak or the vulnerable,” and “the sensitivity to understand how people can be manipulated by symbols or the ability to determine the causes of one’s own desires and emotions — or to reflect on these in light of those causes” (Feinberg, 1993, Dewey and democracy at the dawn of the twenty-first century, Educational Theory, 43(2), p. 215).

develop social insight and interest.\textsuperscript{11} For example, the function of historical and geographical subject matter is to enrich and liberate “the associated life of men,” while science should be an indispensable factor in social progress.\textsuperscript{12}

The second dimension is related to the democratic essence of social life. Viewing social efficiency as the individual capacity to share in a give-and-take experience, Dewey struggles against three forms of dualism in education:

- **The sharp division between labor and leisure:** To let “all share in useful service and all enjoy a worthy leisure,” Dewey maintains that a truly democratic society should transform its education to construct a course of study which is useful and liberal at the same time.\textsuperscript{13}

- **The sharp division between naturalism and humanism:** To secure “recognition of the place occupied by the subject matter of the natural sciences in human affairs,” Dewey argues that our important social concerns and well-being directly depend upon the methods and results of natural science.\textsuperscript{14}

- **The sharp division between vocational and cultural education:** To avoid the narrowly practical and pecuniary impression, Dewey tries to redefine the meaning of vocation in terms of “service to others” and “personal powers in behalf of the accomplishment of results.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 192.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp. 211 & 225.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 256 & 258.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 290.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 319.
Third, the above considerations mean that, for Dewey, all education is moral education. Since the end of schooling is to develop habits that encourage working well together, and knowledge of the good needs to be acquired through years of practical habituation and strenuous discipline, Dewey contends that the school cannot be an isolated island cut off from the wider community:

The school must itself be a community life in all which that implies. Social perceptions and interests can be developed only in a genuinely social medium — one where there is give and take in the building up of a common experience... In place of a school set apart from life as a place for learning lessons, we have a miniature social group in which study and growth are incidents of present shared experience. Playgrounds, shops, workrooms, laboratories not only direct the natural active tendencies of youth, but they involve intercourse, communication, and cooperation — all extending the perception of connections.16

To put it briefly, “schooling, in a Deweyan context, is simply an activity which is continuous with these larger surroundings... The school is one of the many communities which make up the national community.”17

A Visit to China

When gaining recognition as the leading American philosopher and educator at home and abroad, Dewey was invited during his vacation in Japan by some of his former Chinese students at Columbia University to lecture in China.18 His arrival in early May

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16 Ibid., p. 358.


18 For a detailed account of Dewey’s two-year visit (1919-1921), see Keenan, 1977, The Dewey experiment in China, ch. I.
1919 coincided with the beginning of what came to be known as the May Fourth Movement, a nationwide movement that protested Japanese imperialism and the corruption of domestic politics. Amid revolutionary social and cultural changes, the Chinese were eager to hear the progressive message brought by Dewey and “closely associated his thought with the very definition of modernity.”

His educational theory especially attracted broad attention — such works as *Democracy and Education* were quickly translated and even a large-scale school reform was launched according to his teachings. Yet to understand the significance of Dewey’s contributions to the old country, it is necessary for us to examine first the dynamic intellectual milieu in which his ideas were involved.

**The Intellectual Ferment in China, 1915-1923**

Owing to the shattering of the old world, the ideological reconstruction of Chinese life had become a great problem since the late Ching. The crises facing the new Republic further threw many intellectuals into the difficult task of re-defining the values and goals of their nation. The major landmark was the founding in 1915 of the journal *New Youth* (新青年) by Chen Tu-hsiu (陳獨秀, 1879-1942), who eloquently denounced the traditions and called for the rejuvenation of China. Dewey’s most notable Chinese disciple, Hu Shih (胡適, 1891-1962), quickly joined him and advocated a literary reform

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19 Ibid., p. 34.
by using the vernacular language in writing. Later, this intellectual ferment was invigorated by the outbreak of the May Fourth Incident. A flood of publications soon emerged, attacking about every aspect of the past and introducing a host of Western ideas such as democracy, science, liberalism, pragmatism, humanitarianism, anarchism, socialism, etc. As these diverse social philosophies and political models competed with one another and clashed with the indigenous ones, the disagreements about the future direction of China became increasingly intense.

*Overthrow of ‘Confucius and Sons’*

The first controversy in intellectual circles subjected the Confucian tradition to thoroughgoing criticism. It was formally launched in early 1916 by an article entitled “A Discussion of Confucius” appearing in *New Youth*, with the intention to reveal the secret of the Confucian worship then conducted by President Yuan Shih-kai (袁世凱, 1859-1916). The author, Yi Pai-sha (易白沙, 1886-1921), identified four defects inherent in Confucianism that made it historically a tool of tyranny. First, Confucius advocated unlimited authority for the monarch. Second, the sage discouraged his disciples from asking questions. Third, the lack of absolute principles invited distortion of his doctrine. Fourth, his enthusiasm about official life rendered his followers dependent on the rulers’ financial support.21

20 This term (孔家店) was first used by Hu Shih in 1921 to refer to Confucianism and its followers. It became popular later in the movement against Confucianism.
The influence of Western ideas and the corruption of domestic politics had also led the radical intellectual leader, Chen Tu-hsiu, to condemn the old culture. In his powerful articles published from 1916 to 1918, Chen enumerated several reasons to demonstrate that Confucianism could not suit the conditions of a modern republic. First, the Confucians preached the morality of meek compliance, which made the Chinese too weak and passive. Second, Confucian ethics imposed on the individual filial piety to the family and loyal duty to the monarch, without endowing him with individual rights. Third, Confucianism upheld a caste system and the unequal status of individuals in the state. Fourth, Confucianism denied the independence of grown-up children and equality between the sexes. Fifth, to make Confucianism a national religion under the constitution would violate freedom of religious belief. Last, to enforce Confucianism as an official principle of education would impede the free development of thought and civilization.22

More deficiencies of the rotten orthodoxy and its application to Chinese life were subsequently exposed by Wu Yu (吳虞, 1871-1949) and Lu Hsun (魯迅, 1881-1936). The former fiercely attacked the traditional family system, arguing that its advocacy of paternalism and filial piety had become the basis of despotism. The latter bitterly diagnosed the spiritual ills of the Chinese as intolerance, inertia, hypocrisy, servility toward a superior and arrogance toward a subordinate, opportunism, and hesitation, all of

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21 Ouyang Che-sheng (歐陽哲生), 1999, 在傳統與現代性之間 [Between tradition and modernity], in Yu Ying-shih et al., 五四新論：既非文藝復興，亦非啓蒙運動 [New criticism of the May Fourth Movement: Neither a renaissance nor an enlightenment], pp. 155-156.
which he attributed to the effect of traditional ethics and institutions.\textsuperscript{23} Although many of such accusations were not groundless, few had been willing to recognize the valuable parts of the traditional culture. By 1920, the anti-Confucian camp had gained an overwhelming victory, and the conservatives could only stand futilely on the defensive.

\textit{Problems vs. Isms}

The second debate among the new intellectual leaders centered around the methods of national salvation. It was initiated by Hu Shih's article, "More Study of Problems, Less Talk of -isms," published in July 1919. Noticing the impatient search among the radicals for immediate solutions to the plight of China, Hu argued that "no doctrine or 'ism' was more than an instrument for the solution of this or that practical problem." The real solution must be based on the study of specific problems and could be achieved only piecemeal, he cautioned. "There was no single prescription which could cure every kind of disease."\textsuperscript{24}

Hu's article was immediately challenged by Li Ta-chao (李大釗, 1888-1927), the leading convert to Marxism. Contending that problems could not be separated from -isms, Li pointed out that -isms provided the people with "an idealism" and "a common direction" through which social problems could be understood and solved. While acknowledging the importance of a considerable amount of preparatory work, he insisted


\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., pp. 303-311.
that, in a country as disorganized and stagnant as China, it is first necessary to have “a fundamental solution” before there can be any “hope of solving concrete problems one by one.”

In response to Li, Hu insisted that isms might be “studied and selectively adopted as instruments and hypotheses” but should not be “accepted as creeds or iron laws.” Later in an article summarizing his view on the new thought tide, he emphasized again the importance of gradual approaches to social reform:

What is the sole aim of the New Thought? It is to re-create civilization. Civilization was not created in toto, but by inches and drops. Evolution was not accomplished overnight, but in inches and drops.

The split between the two camps was not truly resolved as this controversy went on. At the end, Li was more firmly committed to the Marxist program of rapid fundamental change:

The solution of the economic problem is the fundamental solution. As soon as the economic problem is solved, then all political and legal problems and the problems of the family system, women’s liberation, and the workers’ liberation can be solved.

24 Ibid., p. 218.


*Eastern Civilization vs. Western Civilization*

The third controversy was about the choice between Westernization or preservation of a national essence. To some extent, it could be seen as a direct response to the crisis brought by World War I. Before the war, many Chinese intellectuals had favored an extensive reform of the old tradition and desired good relations with foreign states. Yet the spectacle of Europe’s self-destruction and Chinese disappointment about the result of the Versailles Peace Settlement began to prompt some to be severely critical of Western utilitarian culture.

The famous thinker and translator, Yen Fu (嚴復, 1853-1921), was among the first to express great disillusionment. A onetime admirer of the West, Yen’s ideas changed dramatically after 1918. He then turned back to the Chinese tradition and reaffirmed its spiritual value in the modern age:

> The culture of Western countries since this European war has been corrupted completely... I feel that the three centuries of progress of their races have only accomplished four things, that is, to be selfish, to kill others, to have no integrity, and to lose the sense of shame. When we recall the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius, they are really as broad as heaven and earth and their influence is extended to the people all over the globe. This is not what I alone say, even Europeans who have good minds also gradually have got such notions.  

The once foremost advocate of Westernization, Liang Chi-chao (梁啓超, 1873-1929), also shared this revulsion against the West in his last phase. After a trip to post-war Europe, he reported that the West had reached an extreme state of spiritual famine:

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Material progress in the West in the last one hundred years has greatly surpassed the achievements of the three thousand years prior to this period. Yet we human beings have not secured happiness; on the contrary, science gives us catastrophes. We are like travelers losing their way in a desert. They see a big black shadow ahead, and desperately run to it, thinking that it may lead them somewhere. But after running a long way, they no longer see the shadow and fall into the slough of despond. What is that shadow? It is this “Mr. Science.” The Europeans have dreamed a vast dream of the omnipotence of science; now they decry its bankruptcy. This is a major turning-point in current world thought.\(^{30}\)

Believing that the relief must be found in China, Liang suggested that the Chinese should love and respect their own heritage and contribute to the reconstruction of world civilization.

The most systematized and powerful defense of Chinese tradition came from a committed Confucian, Liang Shu-ming (梁漱溟, 1893-1988). From 1920 to 1921, he delivered a number of lectures at National Peking University and elsewhere on the topic “Eastern and Western Civilizations and Their Philosophies,” in which he presented Chinese civilization as the central civilization of the world and predicted that Westerners were about to adopt the Eastern way of life. His view reinforced what Liang Chi-chao had observed in Europe and thereafter strengthened the conservative position. However, it also provoked much criticism from the new intellectuals. The anarchist Wu Chih-hui (吳稚暘, 1864-1953) berated Liang Shu-ming as a “useless creature of the 17th century.” Liberals like Hu Shih reminded the public that China lagged behind the West not only in science and technology, but also in everything else — politics, literature, music, arts,

morality, and even physical stature. The debate continued in the subsequent decades, deeply disturbing the Chinese mind with such slogans as “wholesale Westernization” and “the reconstruction of civilization on a Chinese base.” Moreover, it triggered off the next controversial issue — questions about the efficacy of science.

Science vs. Metaphysics

The last vehement debate during the May Fourth period was derived from the increasing awareness of the defects of scientism. The fire was first set in 1923 by a German-trained philosopher, Chang Chun-mai (張君勉, 1887-1969), in a speech entitled “The Philosophy of Life” given at Tsinghua University (清華大學) in Peking before a group of science students. Pointing out to his audience the deficiencies of their education, he repudiated the prevailing belief that science held the key to all intellectual problems and that the scientific method is the only way to arrive at truth:

No matter how developed science is, it can never solve the problems of the philosophy of life, which depends entirely on man himself and nothing more... the great thinkers of the past and present have all had significant contributions to this question of the philosophy of life. For instance, the school of Yang Chu accentuated the “I,” Mo-tze emphasized love, and Confucius and Mencius followed the doctrine of the Golden Mean. From Mencius and Confucius down to the Li school of Sung, Yuan, and Ming, the thinkers all gave priority to the cultivation of the inner life and hence brought about a spiritual civilization. Europe, on the other hand, for three hundred years concentrated on the control of nature by human power with the result that it produced a materialistic civilization.32

Chang was firm in his belief that the dimensions of reality obtained through religion, philosophy, and esthetics was a higher and more necessary type of knowledge than those disclosed by inductive scientific thought. Warning that “Mr. Science” promoted by the New Culture movement could not solve all problems of China, he preached the necessity of a moral ideal which could be found in Confucianism.

On his side, Chang Chun-mai had strong supporters from the conservative camp. Influential leaders like Liang Chi-chao and Liang Shu-ming spoke for him from an ethical and humanist standpoint. Chang Tung-sun (張東蓀, 1886-1962), a Japanese-trained philosopher, entered this arena by according to metaphysics the important work of providing meanings and values:

The role of philosophy is hereafter to criticize the sciences... It has an independent place, an end and a method proper to it... whereas science should describe, not interpret the universe. It answers the “how,” not the “why.”

Needless to say, the cultural conservatives provoked a sharp reaction from the camp championing science and Western values. They were immediately labeled “Ghost Metaphysics” by the outstanding geologist, Ting Wen-chiang (丁文江, 1887-1935), who was extremely suspicious of all metaphysical and ethical thought not rooted in the natural sciences:

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The object of science is to eliminate personal subjective prejudices and to search for the truth which is general and universal... Science is all-sufficient, not so much in its subject matter as in the manner of procedure.\textsuperscript{34}

Ting's defense of "God Science" was further confirmed by Chen Tu-hsiu, who argued for historical materialism: "We believe that only objective material causes can change society, can explain history, and can determine one's philosophy of life."\textsuperscript{35} Sharing with the reform-minded the fear that the reassertion of the traditional attitudes would inhibit the development of science in China, Hu Shih supported the naturalistic conception of life and the universe proclaimed by Wu Chih-hui, for it "ruled out God, banished the soul, and punctured the metaphysical idea that man is the most spiritual of all things."\textsuperscript{36} With the difference in the main sources of knowledge on both sides — one from Henri Bergson's\textsuperscript{37} and the other from John Dewey's theories, the final result of the debate was inconclusive. Yet it seemed that afterwards, science emerged stronger and the scientific method more popular than before.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Chen, 1923, Argument for historical materialism, in Teng & Fairbank, 1954, China's response to the West, p. 250.

\textsuperscript{36} Chan, 1953, Religious trends in modern China, p. 234.

\textsuperscript{37} Bergson's philosophy of Vitalism was very close to the Chinese view of life and thus attracted much attention in China then.
Dewey’s Articles about China

As “the country nearest his heart after his own,”38 China initially stirred John Dewey with her struggle for national salvation under discouraging circumstances. Upon his arrival, the philosopher immediately became interested in and actively responded to the events around him. His observations were recorded in dozens of articles he wrote publicly for the Dial, New Republic, Asia, and Baltimore Sun as well as in many letters privately to his children.39 Although they were originally aimed to bring American readers to the consciousness of their nation’s imperialist foreign policies,40 these articles can also be used to understand Dewey’s opinion of the essential nature of China’s problems. Based upon Dewey’s conviction that “man’s basic problems are those of his culture,”41 the following discussion will focus on those issues which the philosopher considered most pertinent to Chinese culture and the then efforts to search for solutions.

Chinese Popular Psychology

In dealing with China’s problems, the common Western approach has confined itself to the more “obvious” and more “structural” factors, such as the adjustment of the power


40 For more detailed analysis of this aspect of Dewey’s articles, see Westbrook, 1991, John Dewey and American democracy, pp. 252-260.
and authority of the central government to that of local and regional governments. However, from Dewey’s viewpoint, trying to reorganize China by beginning with such matters is like “solving an engineering problem by skillful juggling.” Maintaining time and again that Chinese life can be understood only in terms of its own beliefs, customs, traditions, and historic institutions, the philosopher devoted his attention to the deeper question of changing attitude and thought.

**Political Habits**

One of the characters that Dewey believes can significantly contribute to China’s rebirth into full membership in the modern world is found in her democratic habits of life and thought, which are “historically manifest in the absence of classes, the prevalence of social and civil equality, the control of individuals and groups by moral rather than physical force — that is, by instruction, advice and public opinion rather than definitive legal methods.” But he points out that the strong points of a people lie close to the weak ones. The peculiar quality of this democracy also becomes a mighty obstacle to national unity when the country is confronted by a greedy world:

For while China is morally and intellectually a democracy of a paternalistic type, she lacks the specific organs by which alone a democracy can effectively sustain itself either internally or internationally. China is in a dilemma whose seriousness can hardly be exaggerated. Her habitual decentralization, her centrifugal localism, operate against her becoming a nationalistic entity with the institutions of public revenue, unitary public order, defense, legislation and diplomacy that are imperatively needed. Yet her deepest

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42 Dewey, 1919, Transforming the mind of China, in *John Dewey: The middle works*, vol. 11, p. 213.
traditions, her most established ways of feeling and thinking, her essential
democracy, cluster about the local units, the village and its neighbors.\textsuperscript{43}

In view of these cultural factors, the philosopher believes that the political problem facing
China is not how modern systems can be put into force, but how such traditional habits
can find an organized expression of themselves.

By the same token, the extraordinary indifference to politics, coupled with the
profound unconcern about racial distinctions, has also retarded the development of public
spirit in the Chinese mind. But, Dewey holds, this does not mean that patriotism is
missing. When national sentiment is aroused like the Boxer outbreak, it tends to take
"an anti-foreign color," for the Chinese lack "the positive organs of national life through
which to resist foreign encroachments."\textsuperscript{44} The recent student movement is another
example. As the immediate task of preventing the signing of the Versailles Treaty was
completed, the enthusiasm lapsed. Clearly, definite institutions of national thought and
action required for constructive purposes are still in an early stage of formation:

The masses trust to a \textit{laissez-faire}, happy-go-lucky policy of meeting each
stringency as it arises, rather than of committing the country to some
comprehensive scheme which, because of the organization involved in it,
makes the fact of foreign influence obvious.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp. 212-213.

\textsuperscript{44} Dewey, 1919, Chinese national sentiment, in \textit{John Dewey: The middle works}, vol. 11, p.
223.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 225.
• Social Habits

The conservatism of the Chinese people troubled social reformers and discouraged many proposed changes. Most foreign residents were infected with this attitude and somewhat came to believe that the safe thing in China was to leave things alone. Progress was made so slowly that even ex-President Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙, 1866-1925) needed to invent a new theory to persuade his countrymen to act. Doubtless, the Chinese are conservative, Dewey affirmed. Yet he finds that this trait is "much more intellectual and deliberate, and less mere routine clinging to custom," for the Chinese mind is generally intelligent and adaptive. On closer examination, the philosopher partly attributes this to the impact of an extraordinary and long-continued density of populations:

Live and let live is the response to crowded conditions. If things are fairly well off, then let well enough alone. If they are evil, endure them rather than run the risk of making them worse by interference. In western countries, the doctrine of laissez faire has flourished because a policy of hands off was thought to encourage individual energy and enterprise. In China it flourishes because any unusual energy or enterprise on the part of anybody may work untoward results. Not to rock the boat is wisdom the world over. In a crowded country, not organized along the lines of utilization of natural resources, any innovation is likely to disturb the balance of the social boat.47

Of course, the unique Chinese civilization also helps explain this conservatism. Two great philosophies — those of Lao-Tze and Confucius — have exerted profound


influence on Chinese attitude toward political and social issues. In Dewey’s view, the teaching of Lao-Tze — the doctrine of non-doing — carries more weight with ordinary people than Confucianism does. It is “a kind of rule of moral doing, a doctrine of active patience, endurance, persistence while nature has time to do her work.” He finds that the Chinese are very saturated with this laissez-faire attitude — they are contented, tolerant, pacific, humorous, and even fatalistic toward life, recognizing the importance of time and having a “contempt for hurried and artificial devices of man’s contriving.” They are conservative because for thousands of years they have been obstinately conserving and nursing the resources of nature.48

Nevertheless, virtues and defects go together, Dewey indicates. “Non-doing runs easily into passive submission, conservation into stubborn attachment to habits so fixed as to be ‘natural,’ into dread and dislike of change.” Here, he specifically singles out the prevailing custom of “wind-water” to address his concern. The Chinese have a long history of believing that certain locations for and arrangements of houses and tombs would bring fortune for the living families. Yet this belief was an earlier obstacle to the building of railways, and it is still a barrier to the opening of new mines and the introduction of new industrial forces.49

In contrast, the general point of view of Confucianism is quite the opposite, though this philosophy, too, has its excellencies as well as weaknesses:


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It magnifies the importance of art, of culture, of humanity, of learning and moral effort. Naturally, therefore, this doctrine influenced the scholars and upper classes much as Taoism spread among the people. Yet in many respects the actual effect of Confucianism has been like that of Taoism. In inculcating reverence for the classic literature of the past as the well-spring of wisdom, it supplied intellectual reasons for conservatism. In exalting moral and intellectual, as superior to physical power, it taught patient disregard for display of military and political force, which is sure, in the end, to be brought to naught by reason.  

Dewey does not dismiss the “wind-water” custom as utterly superstitious; nor does he depreciate the Chinese tendency “to rely upon pacific reason rather than upon brawling force for settlement of troubles.” With all his admiration for the good qualities of the people, however, the philosopher painfully feels the inadequacy of their confidence in the superiority of moral to material forces:

In her external relations, China undoubtedly faces a new situation. It is not safe to argue that, because she has always conquered her conquerors before, she is certain to do so this time. Her conquerors before were her inferiors in everything but military power and skill. Now she deals with peoples who are her superiors in natural science and in its applications to industry and commerce. Conquest of China by economic penetration that will reduce her population to a proletariat working for foreign capitalists backed by superior military resources, is a very different thing from direct military subjugation. Yet the reasons for China’s historic confidence are still not wholly shaken.  

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49 Ibid., pp. 223-224.
50 Ibid., p. 224.
51 Ibid., pp. 224-225.
52 Ibid., p. 226.
Transformation from Within

Clearly, the Chinese cannot count upon other nations, but must awaken from "a state of passive waiting." In this regard, the student movement has sharply blown the belief that "China itself is helpless and must be saved from without." The question left is: "Can an old, vast, peculiar, exclusive, self-sufficing civilization be born again?" "Made over it must be, or it cannot endure," Dewey answers. Since the country has primarily evolved her own civilization and has no genius for successful borrowing as Japan does, her real problem today is one of transformation, "of the capacity of the oldest and most complicated civilization of the globe to remake itself into the new forms required by the impact of immense alien forces."  

**Creating a New Mind**

The thoroughgoing transformation of China foreseen by Dewey is an enormous task. It is to effect "an inner modification rather than an outward adjustment" so that she can "penetrate to the principles, the ideas, the intelligence, from which western progress has emanated, and to work out her own salvation through the use of her own renewed and quickened national mind." For this reason, the philosopher stresses the necessity of an

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56 Ibid., p. 209.
intellectual and cultural renovation. When discussing the need for a reform of financial administration in China, Dewey opposes those foreign critics who advise changing China only in business and material ways:

The notion that, by the mere introduction of western economy, China can be “saved,” while it retains the old morality, the old set of ideas, the old Confucianism — or what genuine Confucianism had been petrified into — and the old family system, is the most utopian of sentimental idealisms. Economic and financial reform, unless it is accompanied by the growth of new ideals of culture, ethics and family life (which constitute the real meaning of the so-called student movement of today), will merely shift the sore spots. It will remedy some evils and create others.57

On the other hand, Dewey points out the mistake of the common Chinese belief that Western civilization is essentially materialistic, good only for battleships and machinery. “The real breakdown in Chinese national life is moral and intellectual,” he infers. “It implies a demand for new ways of thinking.”58 Fortunately, the intellectual side of the student movement has begun to head in this direction:

It is recognized that technology and other branches of applied science are dependent upon science as a method of thought, observation, registration, criticism, experiment, judgment and reasoning. The idea is gaining ground that the real supremacy of the West is based, not on anything specifically western, to be borrowed and imitated, but on something universal, a method of investigation and of the testing of knowledge, which the West hit upon and used a few centuries in advance of the Orient.59

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59 Ibid., p. 110.
Evolving a New Culture

The hopelessness of domestic politics, with corrupt officials and military governors in real control, turned Chinese youth toward the New Culture movement. "A universal feeling operates that the comparative failure of the [1911] Revolution is due to the fact that political change far outran intellectual and moral preparation." As the most ardent observer and supporter of this movement, Dewey notices several features of it. First, cultural reform is considered an antecedent of other reforms. Second, Western ideas and modes of thought are used to attack traditional Chinese ethics and institutions. Third, the hunger for new ideas stimulates the demand for freedom of thought and speech. Fourth, there is a conviction that what is best in Western thought is to be freely adopted, but must be adapted to Chinese conditions. Fifth, the students' patriotism is easily aroused to take a negative form, especially in the face of foreign powers. Last, the zeal for ideas exceeds persistence in getting relevant knowledge. As a result, for the most part the movement is still a feeling rather than an idea:

By making a clever selection of extracts from the writings put forth in its name one could easily hold up the whole movement to ridicule, as less than half-baked, as an uncritical and more or less hysterical mixture of unrelated ideas and miscellaneous pieces of Western science and thought.  

For better or for worse, Dewey believes, these are all genuine evidences of a general state of transition. Despite the uncertainty and confusion around it, the movement

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provides one of the firmest bases for hope for the future, because it shows that knowledge is being acquired for social application rather than as a conventional badge of culture. China is beginning to have her century of change. Yet as Dewey perceives, considering the obstacles and throes involved, the task of reconstruction is perhaps the most difficult one any civilization has ever known:

China has the alternatives of perishing, to the disturbance of the world, as well as itself, or of condensing into a century or so the intellectual, scientific, industrial, political and religious progress for which the rest of the world has taken several centuries.  

To prepare for the problems emerging from this process, the country needs to profit by the experience of the rest of the world. The philosopher thus reiterates that she must resort not to the Japanese way of copying external techniques but to the inspiration from Western intellectual capital, with which to redirect herself according to the demands and conditions of the modern world.  

**Dewey's Lectures in China**

The corpus of Dewey's major series of lectures in China would finally amount to three published English volumes. They were delivered in major cities of China, with

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62 Ibid., p. 120.

63 Ibid., pp. 119-120.

topics ranging from *Social and Political Philosophy*, *Philosophy of Education, Ethics, Types of Thinking, Three Contemporary Philosophers, Trends in Modern Education, Democratic Development in America, History of Philosophy*, to *Experimental Logic*, etc. In view of their wide scope, a complete examination of these lectures is an almost impossible task. For our purposes, only those most pertinent to the then Chinese circumstances will be stressed in what follows.

**Social and Political Philosophy**

Dewey's social and political philosophy underlies all of his ideas. However, it was not until his visit to China that the philosopher began to "formulate a coherent statement of a social and political philosophy based in pragmatism." In retrospect, the special significance of this series of lectures does not merely lie in the fact that it is Dewey's sole systematic treatment of the subject throughout his life. For those who are concerned about the fate of China, the lectures represent a serious effort to draw some implications from such a philosophy for the reform of this old country.

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65 For a complete list of these lectures (including other available facts concerning dates, places, audiences, and interpreters), see Keenan, 1977, *The Dewey experiment in China*, appendix A.

**The Third Philosophy**

Dewey begins this series of sixteen lectures by contrasting the effects of extreme idealism and extreme materialism upon the practical affairs of life. To advance a new point of view, he presents two broad categories under which many classical and contemporary social and political philosophies can be subsumed. On the one hand, the typical radical “is dissatisfied with and sharply critical of existing social institutions... He is not interested in improving what exists, but advocates replacing it with something entirely new and different.” On the other hand, the typical conservative “is also dissatisfied with existing institutions, but he recognizes the fact that each institution evolved to serve a human need... He assumes that the task at hand is to restore this original meaning rather than to replace the institution.” The philosopher cautions that the two positions have fallen into the trap of either-or, for the problems of human life cannot be solved “either by completely discarding our habits, customs, and institutions, or by doggedly hanging on to them and resisting all efforts to modify and reconstruct them.” He believes that what mankind needs most is “the ability to recognize and pass judgment on facts,” the ability to look for “particular kinds of solutions by particular methods for particular problems which arise on particular occasions.”

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The alternative position which Dewey stands for comes into being due to the introduction of the scientific spirit and is devised to deal with the present human environment. The formerly purely speculative philosophy is thus transformed into a new line:

Among the significant results of this shift, we see men judging on the basis of fact rather than armchair speculation, deciding on the basis of evidence rather than presumed "natural law," becoming experimental in attitude rather than having closed minds, and regarding scientific laws as hypotheses rather than as universal truths.68

This reconstructed way of looking at the world is regarded by Dewey as the third social and political philosophy. Its important features are as follows: (1) It is experimental. That is, ideas and theories must be "tested by practical application." Only when experimentation demonstrates that an idea is valid can it be "applied as a guide to human conduct." (2) It is specific. It does not resort to "sweeping generalizations" in the interpretation of social and political phenomena. Rather, it is concerned with "individual cases in particular situations" and does not advance "panaceas or universal laws." (3) It emphasizes application of knowledge and intelligence to social change. Its purpose is to "cultivate knowledge and intelligence" by use of which men may "remedy particular disorders and solve particular problems."69

For the third philosophy, it is better to work for progress in particular situations rather than to try to attack or defend existing institutions in toto. "Progress is not automatic, nor is it progress en bloc;" Dewey holds,

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it is cumulative, a step forward here, a bit of improvement there. It takes place day by day, and results from the ways in which individual persons deal with particular situations; it is a step-by-step progress which comes by human effort to repair here, to modify there, to make a minor replacement yonder. Progress is retail business, not wholesale. It is made piecemeal, not all at once.  

Here the philosopher responds to the urgent question he has been so often asked by his Chinese audiences: “Where should we start in reforming our society?” His answer is:

We must start by reforming the component institutions of the society. Families, schools, local governments, the central government — all these must be reformed, but they must be reformed by the people who constitute them, working as individuals — in collaboration with other individuals... Any claim of the total reconstruction of a society is almost certain to be misleading. The institutions which make up the society are not “right” or “wrong,” but each is susceptible to some degree of improvement. Social progress is neither an accident nor a miracle; it is the sum of efforts made by individuals whose actions are guided by intelligence.  

- *Economic Problems*

In the following lectures, Dewey discusses the problems concerned with social and political philosophy under three headings — political, cultural, and economic — and sometimes makes specific applications and recommendations based on the particular theory he is expounding. Considering that “a society cannot flourish when its basic needs are not satisfied,” the philosopher speaks of the last problems first. On the issues of government regulation of industry, he condemns both laissez faire individualism

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69 Ibid., p. 58.

70 Ibid., p. 62.

71 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
and Marxist determinism. With the criterion of social welfare in mind, the philosopher judges guild socialism to be a sort of “industrial democracy” and recommends it to the Chinese. He believes that the unique form and strength of their traditional guild system can be greatly useful at a time “when China is undergoing the transition between cottage industry and full-scale industrial production.” In addition, he proposes nationalization of China’s important economic resources — such as railroads, highways, mineral reserves, forests, and trade routes — to prevent any minority group from monopolizing.73

- Political Problems

With respect to political problems, Dewey criticizes both the school which advocates absolute power for the government and the school which favors classical liberalism or individualism. What he stands for is a philosophy of democracy. In a democratic society operated in accordance with such a philosophy,

there would be opportunities for individual development, opportunities for free communication of feeling, knowing, and thinking. The foundation of such a society would be free participation by each member of the society in setting its goals and purposes, full and willing contribution by each person toward the fulfillment of those goals.74

For the realization of the idea of democracy in China, the philosopher also offers some suggestions. He does not believe it necessary for the country to follow the Western pattern that went through an age of self-seeking individualism and then


employed the power of the state to equalize society. She might, he thinks, "amalgamate these two steps and achieve social equality at one stroke." After all, political individualism has not made headway in China, and her traditional paternalism can be modified into the concept of the protection of its citizens by a democratic government. The remaining task is to provide all with equal opportunities for self-development through universal education and to have scholars pursue specialized knowledge and devote their research activities to special problems.\textsuperscript{75}

In light of the current dark picture, Dewey is clearly aware of the distance between his democratic ideals and Chinese realities. Yet the philosopher insists on the necessity of developing such a depth of vision:

Although at the moment China is confronted with particular and exacerbating problems, these are temporary. China is certain to be faced with more lasting and more fundamental problems in the near future, and the two which are of the most far-reaching import are the inevitability of industrialization, and its concomitant problem of self-seeking individualism. The problem thus becomes one of conserving the positive aspects of individualism while at the same time avoiding its negative aspects.\textsuperscript{76}

\textbf{Cultural Problems}

In dealing with the problems of the cultural, intellectual, and spiritual life of man, Dewey first points out that today, the whole world is standing at the crossroads of change with regard to both knowledge and ways of thinking. In his view, the most pressing social problem in the modern age "is that of replacing the authority of tradition with the

authority of science.” The authority of tradition is opposed by the philosopher, because for the most part “it is not the result of observation and analysis, but is dictated by history (often unfounded), myths, rituals, and so on. When supernatural mysteries of this sort accumulate day by day without being examined or questioned, they become more mysterious than ever, and people, without taking thought, move into deeper thralldom to rules which are essentially absurd.” In contrast, the scientific attitude that Dewey advocates “places emphasis on fact, and follows observation and investigation of fact with a judgment about its value... Authority which cannot be justified on the basis of fact must be rejected, even if it has been operative for thousands of years.”

Although contending that man must be able to use his knowledge and his power of thought to change and modify his systems of traditions and beliefs “if his civilization is to advance to new levels,” Dewey believes that authority cannot be shifted all of a sudden, but only gradually and “by the combined efforts of many people.” It is in this sense that the philosopher pleads for freedom of intellectual life, which includes the right to think, to believe, to express opinions, to explore, and to publish:

The importance of discourse is that ideas are clarified and refined through public discussion; the more an idea is discussed, the more clearly it is possible to judge its merits and demerits. The greater the number of people who engage in the discussion, the greater the likelihood that the idea will be improved, or reformulated into a better idea.

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76 Ibid., p. 155.


78 Ibid., p. 167.

In a time of social ferment such as present-day China, Dewey’s advice is:
“reorientation of thought is what is called for, not suppression.” Obviously, this task can
only be undertaken wisely by a government ruling by persuasion. He thus concludes this
series of lectures by addressing the relationship between democracy and education:

Education is basic to democracy, because democracy, by definition, is based
on the conviction that most people have the capacity to be educated, and that
they are capable of learning. In fact, democracy means education; it is, itself,
a process of continuing education of all the people.80

**Philosophy of Education**

Dewey’s two series of lectures on philosophy of education were delivered at
National Peking University and National Nanking Teachers College, respectively.81
Although one was aimed at general intellectuals and the other at students of education,
both were consistent with the points of his educational works published prior to 1919.
The major differences between the two are that the Peking series was more popular and
made more reference to the current needs of China, which reflected more of the
philosopher’s diagnoses of the country’s problems, as well as prescriptions for their
solutions. Hence, for convenience of discussion, we will focus only on this series.

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80 Ibid., p. 180.

81 The Chinese version of the two series can be found in Dewey, 1920, 杜威五大講演 [Five
major lecture series of Dewey in Peking] and Dewey, 1920, 杜威三大演講 [Three major lecture
series of Dewey in South China].
Reconstruction of Education

At the beginning of the Peking series of lectures, Dewey discusses three conspicuous dangers that result from the overemphasis on the literary aspects of education by formal schooling — the production of an elite out of sympathy with the masses, of an education excluding the daily activities of life, and of schools isolated from the real needs and interests of society. In his view, the most important educational problem confronting us is how we can enable schools “to conserve and transmit the best of our traditional cultural heritage” and at the same time “to cultivate personalities which can successfully cope with their environment.” In response to this challenge, he declares:

We are modern men living in the twentieth century, and the culture handed down to us from our past is not sufficient for our needs. We must reconstruct the traditional aims, methods, and subject matter of education so that it may adequately serve the needs of our age.82

Thus, in the following lectures, Dewey devotes himself to this modern task by examining three fundamental elements of education — the child (the beginning point of education), the society (from which the aims of education are derived), and the subject matter (the bridge between the child and his society). The philosopher indicates that the most serious fault of contemporary education is the exaltation of subject matter to the center of the educational process, to an extent that we have lost sight of the development of the child and of his social context. In his view, what we really need is a method of education that is based on the innate capacities and interests of the child, so that society can get maximum returns out of its investment:
As we have already said, fruitful and creative participation in society is the end at which we aim in education; the child as he is when he comes to us is the point from which we start; and the school is the bridge linking the child and his society. The business of education is to help the child walk across this bridge and become a useful, contributing member of his society.  

With regard to the means by which the goals of social living can be achieved in schools, Dewey singles out “extending the limits of the child’s environment” as the most important and particularly urgent one in China today. In spite of the fact that China has received more ill than good from contacts with the West, he argues that isolation from the influences of Western culture would not be a wise choice for the country:

The only method by which China can remedy the present sad state of affairs is to speed up cultural exchange between East and West, and to select from Western culture for adaptation to Chinese conditions those aspects which give promise of compensation for the disadvantages which accrued from earlier contacts. This is a task which calls for men and women of wide knowledge and creative ability. The men and women who will do this are now children in our schools.  

● The Significance of Science

The underlying message in Dewey’s above argument is expanded and made more explicit in his discussion about science. He notices that there is a fundamental difference between Europe and China in terms of the historical development of knowledge and thought. The introduction of modern science caused conflict in Europe which lasted for three hundred years, while in Chinese society, where people were

\[82\] Dewey, The need for a philosophy of education, in Lectures in China, 1919-1920, p. 188.


traditionally more concerned with a philosophy of life than the natural sciences, the same thing was not seen as revolutionary, at all. The philosopher perceptively points out the disadvantage of the latter instance:

in the East, where science was not developed to a degree that had any marked effect on social outlooks, the introduction of new ways of thinking did not provoke any marked reaction, because people did not comprehend the significance of what was happening, and had no reason to suppose that it applied in any real sense to the situations in which they lived… Science does not develop when we are not conscious of its significance. The reaction to the introduction of modern science in Europe was a sign of progress; the stronger the reaction, the greater the progress. When people are indifferent to the introduction of new ways of thinking, this is evidence that the new thought does not have much influence on their lives. And when this is the case, the development of new thought is slowed down and narrowed.\(^85\)

In the West, the development of modern science, which was accompanied by the struggle for intellectual freedom, has exercised tremendous influence on both material progress and moral concepts. Western people now can employ their intelligence to get rid of ignorance and ameliorate human suffering. In contrast, by confusing the applications of scientific knowledge — technology — with science itself, the Chinese have failed to develop a scientific attitude and have been consequently “unable to adjust effectively to the innovations which development of their material civilization has brought about.”\(^86\) In light of this danger, Dewey finds it necessary to clarify the real meaning of science. The basic significance of science, he explains, does not lie in “a


mere accumulation of knowledge,” but instead, in “a method of pursuing knowledge which enables man to predict and control the future on the basis of his past experience.” This new method is a purposeful process, which involves observing existing facts, forming hypotheses, drawing up a plan for experiments, and verifying or refuting the outcomes generated from an implemented plan.\textsuperscript{87} Hence, the philosopher disagrees with an age-old Chinese proverb that “to know is easy, to act is difficult”:

This is just the opposite of the experimental method, for in this method it is only after we have acted upon a theory that we really understand it. There can be no true knowledge without doing.\textsuperscript{88}

To respond to the rapid development of modern science, it is necessary for schools to modify their practice. Not only should the natural sciences be brought into the curriculum, but the traditional methods of teaching science, which are mere pouring of terminology and information, should also be replaced. According to Dewey, the only alternative is to encourage students to learn “the procedures by which scientists have discovered scientific truths.” He recommends teachers to start with “the daily experience of children” and then go on to “the more theoretical aspects of the subject.” Besides, the philosopher considers it better for the Chinese to popularize education in science, rather than concentrate on the production of a few specialists.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{87} Dewey, Science and knowing, in Lectures in China, 1919-1920, pp. 245-248.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 247.

Directions of Development

In the last five lectures of the Peking series, Dewey offers more specific suggestions for the directions of development in Chinese education. Stressing the critical importance of childhood, he indicates that the aim of elementary education is not so much "the inculcation of knowledge" as it is "the cultivation of basic abilities, techniques, and habits which will affect the course of subsequent development." 90 Regarding the teaching of geography and history in secondary schools, he criticizes the traditional emphasis on memorization of facts and proposes a problem-based approach to help students develop "the ability to think critically and to judge independently." 91 In dealing with the issues of vocational education, he reiterates that not only the skills but also the intelligence is to be developed. Besides, recognizing the rapidity of technological progress, the philosopher reminds the Chinese that such education should cultivate "fundamental methods and techniques" so that students can easily adjust to change. 92

On the individual aspect of moral education, Dewey indicates that direct and theoretical moral instruction in ethics classes is profitless. Instead, the better way to significantly influence behavior is to "cultivate the habits of mind which make up morality — such qualities as open-mindedness, intellectual honesty, and responsibility." 93

91 Dewey, Geography and history, in Lectures in China, 1919-1920, p. 278.
93 Dewey, Moral education — The individual aspect, in Lectures in China, 1919-1920, p. 293.
As to the social aspects of moral education, he uses the formulation of a common written and spoken language in China as an example to illustrate that all school subjects must have a social function. Moral education takes place everywhere, the philosopher maintains, and “the moral aim of education can be realized only when the social function of all school subjects is recognized.”

Finally, after mentioning his obsession with the Chinese student movement, Dewey expresses his earnest hope that the accidental, sentimental, and negative aspects of this movement will be redirected toward more fundamental concerns and more rational reconstruction of society. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the concluding remark of the Peking series seems to neatly reflect both his basic principles of philosophy and his critical observations of China:

I do not deprecate emotion; emotion is essential, but it must be under the control of intelligence if it is to contribute to the solution of fundamental problems. The student movement now has this characteristic of controlled emotion; it is a conscious movement which hopes, with reason, that it can help build a new China. Using emotion merely for destructive ends, or reacting irrationally and emotionally to an accidental event is obvious foolishness. We have a proverb in the West to the effect that Rome was not built in a day. The problems facing China are complex and many faceted. The popularization of a national language, and the use in education of written characters which everyone can read, will contribute much. In economics, the problems are even more complex. The planned development of natural resources must be undertaken, so that China may not fall into the errors that have plagued the West, that have allowed great discrepancies to develop between the rich and the poor, and that have made the class struggle wastefully expensive. These are tremendous tasks, but China looks to you who have the privilege of higher education to exercise the leadership that will enable her to accomplish them.\footnote{Dewey, Moral education — The social aspects, in Lectures in China, 1919-1920, p. 298.}
In addition to what has been briefly presented above, some other works of Dewey are also important in terms of understanding his suggestions for China. Those will be examined when we proceed to the relevant sections of the following chapters.

\[95\] Ibid., p. 302.
CHAPTER 3

THE LIBERAL AND THE PRACTITIONER

Hu Shih and Dewey

*The Mind of a Liberal*

With concern about the future of China, Hu Shih (胡適, 1891-1962) had a strong desire for a practical philosophy during his university days in the U.S. In early 1914, for example, he wrote in his diary: “What our country urgently needs today is not novel theories or abstruse philosophical doctrines, but the methods by means of which knowledge may be sought, affairs discussed, things examined and the country governed.”¹ Bored by the objective idealism preached at the Sage School of Cornell University, he transferred to Columbia University in 1915 and studied under John Dewey until the summer of 1917. At least two reasons led Hu to respond to experimentalism positively. First, experimentalism considers truth to be relative, meaningful only in

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¹ Hu Shih, 1914, 今日吾國急需之三術 [The three things that our country urgently needs today], in 胡適留學日記 [Hu Shih’s diary while studying abroad], vol. 1; tr. Grieder, 1970, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance*, p. 48.
particular circumstances and always subject to reevaluation. This caught the fancy of
the intellectual rebel, who was already hostile to the authoritarian claims of Chinese
tradition. Second, the scientific methodology characterizing the philosophy transcends
Western experience and therefore is universally applicable. This gave it the potential to
solve the problems of Chinese society, which was in a time of disintegration and distress.

Such was also Hu’s basic understanding of experimentalism. Clearly, Dewey’s
stress on the importance of thinking contributed greatly to his intellectual development:

It is from Professor Dewey that I have learned that the most sacred
responsibility of a man’s life is to endeavor to think well. To think
sluggishly, to think without strict regard to the antecedents and consequences
of thought, to accept ready-made and unanalyzed concepts as premises of
thinking, to allow personal factors unconsciously to influence one’s thinking,
or to fail to test one’s ideas by working out their results is to be intellectually
irresponsible. All the greatest discoveries of truth, and all the greatest
calamities in history, depend upon this. ²

All his life, Hu wholeheartedly embraced Dewey’s teachings and openly acknowledged
that the American philosopher had a profound influence on his life and thought.
Undoubtedly, what benefited him most was to conceive of thinking as an art and a

technique by which true knowledge could be acquired:

in How We Think and Essays in Experimental Logic [Dewey] has worked out
this technique which I have found to be true not only of the discoveries in the
experimental sciences, but also of the best researches in the historical sciences,
such as textual criticism, philological reconstruction, and higher criticism. In
all these fields, the best results have been achieved by the same technique,
which in its essence consists of a boldness in suggesting hypotheses coupled
with a most solicitous regard for control and verification. This laboratory
technique of thinking deserves the name of Creative Intelligence because it is

² Einstein et al., 1931, Living philosophies, p. 255.
truly creative in the exercise of imagination and ingenuity in seeking evidence and devising experiment and in the satisfactory results that flow from the successful fruition of thinking.\(^3\)

After his return to China in 1917, Hu Shih became a leading personality in the New Culture movement. He taught at National Peking University and wrote extensively to advocate the literary revolution and experimentalism. It was not surprising to see that, as a liberal of the Deweyan model, Hu was particularly critical of the invisible social foundations and eager to change the outmoded ethics and ideas in terms of liberal values. In 1918, he began to focus his energy on the whole body of Confucian social attitudes and the family system. Such a decision was inspired by the European dramatist Henrik Ibsen, whose attack on bourgeois conventionality was heartily supported by Hu: “no social evil is greater than the destruction of the individual’s individuality.”\(^4\)

- **Genuine Individualism**

Hu’s design for social and intellectual reform was based on a new spirit of individualism. On the issue of the intellectual and social responsibilities of the individual, he had two observations. First, the individual should liberate himself from the bonds of self-deceit and thoughtlessness. That is, he must cultivate the intellectual honesty necessary for social progress:

The underlying sickness of human life is an unwillingness to look with open eyes at the condition of the world. Clearly, ours is a government of

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\(^3\) Ibid.

corrupt officials and vile bureaucrats — but we perversely sing of merit and chant hymns to virtue. Clearly, ours is a sickness unto death — but we insist that no sickness exists!... If we desire to cure an illness, we must first acknowledge that the illness exists; if we want good government, we must first acknowledge that the present political situation is in fact bad; if we want to improve society, we must first admit that our present society is in fact a society of thieves and prostitutes!... Because we cannot shake off our connection with society, we cannot but speak frankly.\(^5\)

Yet this was just a beginning. The second obligation of the individual was to fully develop his own natural ability. The purpose, as Ibsen indicated, was also ultimately social: “What I most desire for you is a true and pure egoism. It will cause you at times to feel that the only things that are important in the world are those that concern yourself, and that the rest are not worth counting... If you desire to be of use to society, the best thing you can do is to forge yourself — this lump of material — into a finished instrument... At times I feel that the whole world is like a ship sinking at sea, and that the most important thing is to save oneself.”\(^6\) Such egoism was what Hu called “the most valuable kind of altruism”:

A free society and a republican nation demand only that the individual have the power of free choice and that he bear the responsibility for his own conduct and actions. If this is not the case, then he does not possess the ability to create his own independent character. If society and the nation do not possess [men of] independent character, they are like wine without yeast, bread without leaven, the human body without nerves. Such a society has absolutely no hope of improvement or progress.\(^7\)

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 94.

\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 95.
On closer inspection, the type of individual ability Hu encouraged was not the maintenance of the fundamental social harmony championed by traditional education. It was the specialized competence giving one the license to deal with specific social problems that he would cordially approve: "'Let those who are managing affairs each preside over his own part of the business.' In these words is embodied an invaluable prescription for national salvation."

- **The Social Environment**

On the issue of the relationship between the individual and society, Hu emphasized changes in the social environment in which the individual acts. From his point of view, the old concept that the social reconstruction must begin with the reformation of the individual was not on the right track:

The fundamental error of this concept lies in...regarding the individual as something that can be set outside of society and reformed. It is important to understand that the individual is the result of numerous and varied social forces... The "best elements" in society are not born that way, nor are they created by individual self-cultivation. They are the result of [the fact that] among the various forces that contribute to their creation good influences somewhat outnumber the bad... Ancient social and political philosophy, unwittingly hoping to reform the individual in a vacuum, advocated such methods as setting the mind in order, sincerity of purpose, and attending to one's own virtue in solitude. Actually these are not methods at all, for they provide no starting place. Modern humanistic philosophy...has gradually...come to the realization that the place to make a start on social

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8 Hu Shih, 1915, 救國在「執事者各司其事」 [National salvation lies in the specialized competence of the people], in 胡適留學日記 [Hu Shih’s diary while studying abroad], vol. 3; tr. Grieder, 1970, Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance, p. 97.
reconstruction is with the improvement of the various forces that together create society — institutions, customs, thought, education, etc. When these forces have been improved, so also will men have been improved.⁹

It was due to this realization that Hu concentrated his attack on the social status of women and the doctrine of filial piety, both of which he believed had terribly inhibited the growth of individual personality and the creation of a good society. However, what Hu was aiming at was something more than the reform of specific customs. The greater issue, which lay behind either the question of women’s chastity or the habit of family dependence, was men’s uncritical acceptance of their social and cultural inheritance:

If we ask a man, ‘What is chastity?’ or ‘Why do you praise chastity?’ he will most certainly reply, ‘Chastity is chastity, and because it is chastity we praise it.’ Such reasoning is proof that present-day morality has declared itself bankrupt... The question of ‘chastity’ is by no means a matter of ‘unalterable principle’ but rather something which can be thoroughly studied and exhaustively discussed.¹⁰

Contending that the individual should assume the responsibility for his own ideas and feel responsible only to society, Hu considered the existence of the old morality, the old thought, and the old family system to be a sign of intellectual irresponsibility, the failure to think independently in terms of real and ultimate meanings. This was by no means a minor problem of China, and he was determined to provoke new awareness of and eradicate such a defect.


The Problems of China

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Hu Shih did not attribute China’s deepening crises exclusively to foreign imperialism. Nor did he trust the violent revolutionary approaches proposed by the communists and nationalists. His argument was simple but to the point: “Why were the unequal treaties unable to hinder the free development of Japan?” “Why is it that we, having knelt, cannot rise to our feet again?”\(^{11}\) Obviously, the real problems of China hid beneath the visible facade such as unequal treaties. In Hu’s view, those were problems that could be solved only by the kind of ‘revolution’ achieving its ends through education, legislation, and constitutional political processes:

China’s need today is not for that kind of revolution which is created by a violent despotism. Nor does China need that kind of revolution which fights violence with violence. Nor does China need that kind of revolution which fabricates imaginary enemies of the revolution in order to stir up a revolution. It is better to accept the epithet ‘counterrevolutionary’ than to accept these various kinds of revolution, for they are in every case capable only of wasting our energy, instigating a foolish and cruel pettiness of spirit, disrupting the peace of society and the nation, and sowing the seeds of mutual destruction and killing...

Our genuine enemies are poverty, disease, ignorance, greed, and disorder. These five evil spirits are the real opponents of the revolution, but they are not the kind that we can overthrow by resorting to violent methods. The real revolution against these five enemies has only one road to follow: Clearly to recognize our enemies, clearly to recognize our problems, and then to gather together [those of] ability and intelligence in the country at large, to adopt the knowledge and methods of the world’s science, and step by step to undertake conscious reforms, under conscious leadership, and thus little by little to harvest the results of constant reforms...

This method is very difficult, but we do not acknowledge any simpler or easier method. This method is very slow, but we know of no other, quicker road.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Creative Intelligence}

Hu’s enduring belief in the importance of controlled change can also be found in his opinion of the 1923 debate on science and metaphysics. Out of “a naturalistic conception of life and the universe,” he was sure that the individual is the product of history and governed by the relentless mechanism of the universe. But he insisted in the meantime that the individual can still exercise his intelligence to affect history and participate as a significant force in the creation of his society:

Even the absolute universality of the law of causality does not necessarily limit his freedom, because the law of causality not only enables him to explain the past and predict the future, but also encourages him to use his intelligence to create new causes and attain new results. Even the apparent cruelty of the struggle for existence does not necessarily make him a hardened brute; on the contrary, it may intensify his sympathy for his fellow man and make him believe more firmly in the necessity of cooperation, and convince him of the importance of conscious human endeavor as the only means of reducing the brutality and wastefulness of the natural struggles.\textsuperscript{13}

It was on this particular point that Hu disagreed with his friend Chen Tu-hsiu, who had by then committed to Marxism and argued for science from the viewpoint of historical materialism in this debate. In Hu’s eyes, not only economic but also intellectual factors had to be taken into account:


\textsuperscript{13} Hu Shih, 1923, 「科學與人生觀」序 [Preface to Science and the Philosophy of Life]; tr. Grieder, 1970, \textit{Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance}, p. 106.
Tu-hsiu has said, “The mind is one manifestation of matter”... It seems, in that case, that ‘objective material causes’ ought to include all ‘intellectual’ causes — knowledge, thought, self-expression, education, etc. If we explain the problem in this fashion, then Tu-hsiu's definition of historical materialism comes to read: “Only objective causes (including economic organization, knowledge, thought, etc.) can change society, explain history, and shape one’s philosophy of life.” This is no more than a bald view of history that need not wear a cap of any particular color... We who study history...know that the causes of historical fact are always multiple, and therefore, though we welcome the ‘economic view of history’ most enthusiastically as an important tool for the study of history, at the same time we cannot but acknowledge that such things as thought and knowledge are also ‘objective causes.’

**Critical Attitude**

The other reason, which led Hu to break with those heading for the promised land of Marxism, had much to do with his view of the qualities of intellectual independence—the key to freedom from the enslavement of the law of causality. As early as 1919, he had advocated developing a questioning habit of mind by which the individual would be able to look consciously at the meaning of his own ideas and actions:

The real significance of the new thought lies simply in a new attitude...“the critical attitude.”

In simple language, the critical attitude can be summarized as the application to all things of a fresh judgment as to whether or not they are good. In more detailed terms, the critical attitude comprises several specific demands:

1. Concerning institutions and customs handed down to us by habit we must ask: “Do these institutions retain at present any value to justify their existence?”

2. Concerning the sage precepts handed down to us by antiquity we must ask: “In the present day, does this phrase still hold true?”

3. Concerning [standards of] conduct and beliefs commonly acknowledged, in a muddled way, by society we must ask: “Must something be right because it is generally held to be so by all? If others do this, must I also do this?

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14 Ibid., p. 107.
Can it be that there is no other way of acting that is better than this, more reasonable, more beneficial?”

Hu believed that the adoption of such a mindset would lead to a “transvaluation of all values” and finally sweep away the sterile dogmas, habits, and institutions that had lost their significance and purpose. However, the function of the critical attitude should not be confined to destructive ends like attacking the encumbrances of the past. If used properly, it would guard against intellectual sins such as blind following and thereof contribute to a brighter future. So, for instance, when Chen Tu-hsiu asserted in 1919 that Confucianism, traditional rituals, and classical literature should all be opposed in order to support the aims of the new thought — democracy and science, Hu rejected his friend’s simple logic on the grounds that it addressed too much toward the denunciation of the old but too little toward the establishment of the new. The critical attitude, which Hu held so seriously, “acknowledges only right and wrong, good or bad, suitability or unsuitability — it does not acknowledge conformity to past or present, Chinese or foreign [standards].”

With the same reasoning, Hu also warned against the unthinking acceptance of foreign doctrines, especially Marxism, by his fellow intellectuals. In the 1919 controversy on problems and isms, he criticized that sweeping generalizations were celebrated without carefully examining their applicability to new situations and conditions:

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The great danger of ‘isms’ is that they render men satisfied and complacent, believing that they are seeking the panacea of a ‘fundamental solution,’ and that it is therefore unnecessary for them to waste their energies by studying the way to solve this or that concrete problem.\textsuperscript{17}

Hu’s discord with the radical point of view had arisen since then and remained constant throughout his life. “In Marxism he perceived all the intellectual sins that he had set himself to banish from the Chinese mind: dogmatism, adherence to arbitrary truths, an irresponsible use of terminology, and an uncritical acceptance of generalizations drawn from one historical and social context and applied to another. Moreover, Marxism offered the alluring and...illusory promise of quick and all-embracing solutions to the whole range of China’s problems, founded on an analysis of Chinese society that Hu did not think justified by the facts and on an interpretation of the revolutionary process with which he could not agree.”\textsuperscript{18} The study of specific and concrete problems held the key to the reconstruction of civilization, Hu insisted. It follows that his anticipation of a better future was always connected with the power of science. “In examining the demands of this age of ours,” he wrote in 1922, “we must recognize that the greatest responsibility of mankind today, and its greatest need, is to apply the scientific method to the problems of human life.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 111.

\textsuperscript{17} Hu Shih, 1919, 多研究些問題,少談些「主義」 [Study more problems, talk less of ‘isms’]; tr. Grieder, 1970, \textit{Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance}, p. 124.


\textsuperscript{19} Hu Shih, 1923, 五十年來之世界哲學 [World philosophy in the last fifty years]; tr. Grieder, 1970, \textit{Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance}, p. 112.
Scientific Method as the Solution

Unfortunately, desire like Hu's "to apply the scientific method to the problems of human life" was not heartily appreciated by the cultural conservatives. The 1923 polemic on science and metaphysics, as the historian Chow Tse-tsung observes, raised many issues such as the definition of the philosophy of life, the relationship between science and the scientific method, the problem of epistemology, the scope of science and philosophy, etc. All of them were "so big, so complex, and so confusing that the debate was bound to be inconclusive."\textsuperscript{20}

To get to the point of these arguments, it is necessary for us to first examine the fundamental difference between European and Chinese thought. In answer to the basic question "What distinguishes man from the animals?" at the beginning stage of their respective development of knowledge, the Europeans went for "reason" but the Chinese chose "morality." The consequence of such a difference in philosophical tendency, as the metaphysics defender Chang Tung-sun found, was that "Chinese philosophers had searched into the problem of the 'Good,' or the moral problem, and neglected the problem of the 'True,' or the logical problem." He perceptively pointed out that this negligence had been one of the major reasons for the lack of science in China, for Occidental science was bound up with the interest taken by the philosophers in the problem of truth.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Chow, 1960, \textit{The May Fourth Movement}, p. 335.

As we have seen, John Dewey was completely aware of this weakness of Eastern civilization during his two years of sojourn. The moral vision inherent in his experimentalism had linked science with social reform, and the American philosopher was more than willing to show his Chinese audiences the positive effects of the development of modern science upon man’s moral life:

modern science has produced a new honesty. I do not mean that honesty, as such, is a result of the development of modern science; all of us know quite well that honesty is one of the most important of the traditional virtues. But we must recognize that it is not easy for us always to be honest, because in order to be honest we must have some truth to tell. All too often something appears to be true, but later experience proves it to have been false. The development of modern science enables men to pursue truth, to discover what things actually are true, so that they can be fully honest in talking about them… When nature was presumed to lack systematic order…the desire to tell the truth was stifled under the pressures of selfishness, prejudice, partisanship, and other external forces… The sacrifice of truth and the nullification of the search for truth are always sooner or later followed by sacrifice of the social welfare.22

What Dewey tried to state here was that truth is a necessary condition for morality. In other words, reliable knowledge produced through the scientific method is indispensable for human happiness. This was exactly the ground that the supporters of science were taking in the debate. Also, it was the very reason why Hu Shih denied the validity of the conservative assertion that the materialistic civilization of the West is somewhat inferior to the spiritual civilization of the East. He insisted that no civilization that employs “the mind and intelligence of man to create machines to take the place of manpower” should

be denounced as materialistic. In spite of their “implements of human death and institutions of aggression and plunder,” the Western emphasis on the material well-being of the masses had contributed to the growing sense of kinship and sympathy. In contrast, the Chinese characteristics praised by the neo-traditionalists such as contentment in poverty and acceptance of suffering were in essence vices rather than virtues:

Such a civilization, which endures the bonds and the coercive power of the material environment and cannot free itself from them, which cannot use man’s reason and intelligence to temper his environment and improve his condition — this is the civilization of a lazy and retarded race. This is truly a materialistic civilization, [which] can only restrain man’s spiritual demands but never satisfy them.

With regard to the Western dissatisfactions with Western civilization that comforted the conservatives so much, Hu considered them merely casual complaints, “like the rich man who has eaten his fill of meat and fish and then wishes to taste a little salted vegetable or beancurd.” The high status of science in the West would not be easily shaken by such temporary reactions. But, he wrote in 1923, “at the present time, China has not yet enjoyed the blessings of science — how much the less, then, can we speak of the ‘catastrophes’ that science brings with it.”

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25 Ibid., p. 156.

Accordingly, Hu took sides with the geologist Ting Wen-chiang, who warned against the possible effects of a subjective and free-willed philosophy of life on the younger generation: “there would be no need to study nor to seek learning; knowledge and experience would come to be [regarded as] futile, and one would need only ‘to advocate what one’s own conscience ordains’…”\textsuperscript{27} To save the feeble race and to rejuvenate the dying civilization, the importance of scientific education could never be underestimated. Yet both Hu and Ting promoted science not so much for its own sake, as for the mental discipline and objectivity that it would inculcate. As Ting summed up their views so nicely,

\[\text{[Science] is the best instrument available for education, because the daily search for truth, the constant desire to banish preconceptions, not only gives the student of science an ability to seek truth, but, moreover, it inspires in him a sincere love of truth. No matter what he may encounter, he can always proceed to analyze and examine it with detachment and candor, seeking simplicity out of complexity and order out of confusion, using reason to discipline his thinking and thus increasing his power to think, using experience to guide his intuition and thus enlivening his intuitive powers.}\textsuperscript{28}\]

\textit{Efficacy of Going West}

Perhaps the significance of experimentalism was best perceived by Hu Shih among Dewey’s Chinese disciples and audiences, and without doubt he was also the one most committed to the cause of this philosophy. However, these facts do not mean that Hu’s


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 158.
understanding of his mentor’s ideas was completely correct, or all his thought was as deep as Dewey’s. Many studies have indicated that before going to Columbia University, Hu had already formulated his own conceptions of nature, science, and history, all of which were quite different from Dewey’s in some fundamental aspects, but very typical of the May Fourth intellectuals.\textsuperscript{29} For example, Dewey’s universe is open and free, “a universe without bounds in time or space, without final limits of origin or destiny, a universe with the lid off.”\textsuperscript{30} In contrast, Hu’s is fixed and rigid, a universe “where every motion in the heavens has its regular course and every change follows laws of nature, where causality governs man’s life and the struggle for existence spurs his activities.”\textsuperscript{31} The influence of classical mechanism and Social Darwinism on Hu’s vision is evident, and it is no wonder he believed that the purpose of applying thought to the guidance of all abilities is “to utilize the environment, to subdue it, to chain it, to control it.”\textsuperscript{32}

Yet more essential differences between Dewey and Hu lie in their outlooks on China and their conceived approaches to the solving of her problems. Insisting that China has


\textsuperscript{30} Dewey, Intelligence and morals, in Miller ed., 1954, \textit{American thought: Civil War to World War I}, p. 239.

\textsuperscript{31} Einstein et al., 1931, \textit{Living philosophies}, p. 262.

to be understood in terms of itself rather than Western standards, Dewey did not blame the country’s past for her existing backwardness. On the contrary, he agreed that “most of China’s present disabilities and dangers are due to no fault of its own, but to the sudden creation by the Western Powers of a new condition of things,” and thereof judged the real problem of China to be the one of “transition and transformation.” In his eyes, the moves to be made had to include reforms both in government, technology, and finance as well as in thought, belief, and morality. Yet the philosopher did not recommend the Chinese to turn their backs on their tradition: “You should carefully select from them, preserve the valuable ones...[and] wed the old to the new.”

As to the priority of change, Dewey stressed the catalytic role played by material forces of production — “an introduction of modern industrial methods is the only thing that will profoundly affect the environment.” It was in this sense that he could not approve of the anti-political bias held by the New Culture movement:

Chinese educated youth cannot permanently forswear their interest in direct political action. Their attention needs to be devoted more than it has been to detailed, practical economic questions, to currency reform, public finance and problems of taxation, to foreign loans and the Consortium.


Constantly standing at the front in the battles against Chinese conservatism, Hu Shih was not so sophisticated and balanced as his mentor in dealing with conflicting ideas. Although as early as 1917 he had perceptively recognized that the real problem of China was one of how to “best assimilate modern civilization in such a manner as to make it congenial and congruous and continuous with the civilization of our own making,” he gradually abandoned this reconciling stance after 1919 and came to call for severe self-criticism and total Westernization (or complete cosmopolitanization):

We must acknowledge our own mistakes. We must acknowledge that in a hundred ways we are inferior to others...
We have never once repented of our past misdeeds, or thoroughly reproached ourselves, or fully acknowledged our errors.
[We must] give up all hope, and go to study others. Speaking frankly, we must not be afraid of imitating.

In short, “going West” was Hu’s prescription for China’s ills. This was a stratagem he used to offset cultural inertia: “If we who are destined to be leaders speak emptily of compromise and selectivity, the result can only be the cherishing of useless remnants and the preservation of our shortcomings.” As optimistic as Dewey was about the luminous promise of the modern world, he was unaffected by the postwar crisis facing the Europeans and thus remained a steadfast defender and advocate of Western, especially

37 Hu Shih, 1922, The development of the logical method in ancient China. Introduction, p. 7. This work is a published version of Hu’s 1917 dissertation at Columbia University.


American values. Yet unlike his mentor, Hu was insensitive to the emotional and intellectual confusion of the situation in which his countrymen found themselves. Nor did he, like his friend Ting Wen-chiang, try hard to dissociate science from Western commercialism and militarism that embittered so many Chinese. As to the priority of change, he placed confidence in the renewal of thoughts and attitudes, believing that political reconstruction would come "as natural fruit of intellectual changes worked out in social, non-political ways."^41

As many of Hu’s critics point out, such a denunciation of China’s past and such a “cultural-intellectualistic approach”^42 to reform are quite problematic. For example, the historian Y. C. Wang considers Hu to be a contradictory figure:

gradualism is incompatible with the rejection of tradition. If China is inferior to the West in every respect, as Hu insisted, then only drastic social engineering can save China. On the other hand, if true amelioration could only be piecemeal, as Hu also asserted, then the cultural heritage has to be respected. By combining gradualism with a rejection of tradition Hu put himself in an untenable position.

Another historian, Maurice Meisner, contends that Hu’s program was doomed to failure, because it assumed that “there existed or would soon arise a viable social and political


^42 This term comes from Lin Yu-sheng, 1979, The crisis of Chinese consciousness, ch. 3.

structure within which problems could be studied and reforms implemented.” Yet the immediate problems facing China then were not the sicknesses of her tradition, but “the overwhelming social crisis within and the threat of foreign aggression from without.”

In fact, there is a more serious problem within Hu’s ideas. According to the Neo-Confucian philosopher Liu Shu-hsien (劉述先), Hu underestimated the significance of national pride and ignored the valuable resources which traditions could provide in China’s transition to modernity. On the latter point, his opinion coincided with Dewey’s statement on the function of intelligence:

In its large sense, this remaking of the old through union with the new is precisely what intelligence is... Every problem that arises, personal or collective, simple or complex, is solved only by selecting material from the store of knowledge amassed in past experience and by bringing into play habits already formed... The office of intelligence in every problem that either a person or a community meets is to effect a working connection between old habits, customs, institutions, beliefs, and new conditions.

The essential aim of experimentalism is to discover ways of bringing harmony out of tension rather than use the new to discredit the old. Failure to appreciate or to utilize this merit of Dewey’s philosophy must inevitably create a blind spot in Hu’s thought. Such a limitation could be seen more clearly if we contrast his arguments with those made by the pacifist Bertrand Russell and the Confucian Liang Shu-ming in Chapter 4.

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Tao Hsing-chih and Dewey

The Mind of a Practitioner

A man with an activist’s disposition, Tao Hsing-chih (陶行知, 1891-1946) was of the same generation of American-trained intellectuals as Hu Shih. When introduced to progressive ideas of education during his study of political science at the University of Illinois, he decided to devote his future career to educational administration and then transferred to Columbia University in 1915. Unlike Hu, however, he was not directly taught by John Dewey and consequently lacked contact with experimentalism during the following two years. The chief inspiration he drew from Dewey’s works, as shown in his later writings, was “the school is society,” “education is life,” “education is continuous reconstruction of experience,” and “thinking is the problem-solving process.” On the whole, the most important result Tao gained from his years at Teachers College was “strengthening in the Progressive — and Confucian — belief in education as the fundamental means of social, cultural, political, and economic renewal for China, a belief that would prove unshakable, and would distinguish Tao from Marxist educators.” Furthermore, infected with the reforming zeal of Progressive Education, he discovered such creeds as “science,” “democracy,” “experimentation,” and “progress,” “by which education itself could be prepared for the task of renewing society.”

After his return to China in 1917, Tao joined the staff of National Nanking Teachers College. There, he was confronted with conservative colleagues who stuck to old styles.

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47 Brown, 1990, Tao Xingzhi: Progressive educator in Republican China, Biography, 13(1), 101
of instruction and could not revise their direction. His proposal to base the teaching method on the method of learning did not get accepted until 1919 when the May Fourth Movement swept the Chinese intellectual circles. In the same year, Dewey began to lecture in the major cities of China, and Tao served as one of his hosts and interpreters when the American philosopher visited Nanking in 1920. Thanks to this extended direct formal contact, Tao’s understanding of Dewey’s philosophy of education was increased. In fact, with his concern about the concrete and practical rather than the abstract and theoretical, what Tao benefited from most was Dewey’s advice on the direction of Chinese new education:

The program of educational development for China must be worked out on the spot by those engaged in actual educational work. Prescription and detailed borrowing will both be fatal. Moreover, the program must not only be worked out on the spot but it must be developed experimentally, and be flexible and not uniform. Principles, however, are not things which are borrowed and lent or imposed. They are discovered and understood and the place where they are discovered is of no importance. The important thing is to understand them so as to work them out into detail in practice.

All his life, Tao never violated this precious advice. But following it finally produced an unexpected effect — he gradually turned against some principles of Dewey’s theory and had to revise them drastically.

48 See Chu Don-chean, 1966, Patterns of education for the developing nations, pp. 18-19.

The Problems of China

Strongly believing in the power of a new education to effect change in Chinese society, Tao initially focused his energy on the reform of formal school education. As he put it to Hu Shih one night in 1920, he wanted to “use a vigorous, openly-disseminated education to create a vigorous, openly-communicating society.” To achieve this aim, he recognized that it was necessary to first conduct rigorous research and fieldwork on China’s existing education. The subsequent visit to China in 1921 by Professor Paul Monroe, one of Tao’s teachers at Columbia University, helped to realize this idea. His survey report opened Tao’s eyes to the tragic conditions of Chinese education — over 80 percent of the people lived in poverty in the countryside and over 77 percent of the population was illiterate.

The Discovery of the People

With the sudden discovery of the neglected people by the warlord governments, Tao became increasingly aware that even a reformed school system would be too weak to respond to the prevailing miseries. China, he contended, could not “afford to wait for the nation’s elementary-school children to grow up and take over the nation’s

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responsibilities.” Obviously, national salvation required something more than formal schooling. Basic literacy education which was geared to the needs of ordinary people had to be spread on a broad scale.

The year 1923 thus marked a turning point in the direction of Tao’s career when he was introduced to James Yen (晏陽初, 1894-1990), a Princeton graduate who was launching a mass education movement that eventually covered much of central China. This was an event that completely reoriented Tao’s educational work. He quickly resigned from his university posts and completely threw himself into this campaign. At about the same time, Tao’s inner life also underwent a significant change. He began to reject the role of a Westernized intellectual and reassert his Chinese identity as well as peasant roots:

A few days ago I bought a cotton jacket, a pair of cotton leggings and a Chinese skull-cap. When I put them on, I felt I was completely a Chinese and felt much closer to people in general... By origin I am an ordinary Chinese. Unfortunately, ten years of school life gradually turned me in the direction of the foreign upper classes. School life has certainly had benefits toward my upbringing which cannot be erased. But this foreign upper-class air is a great deficiency. Fortunately, my Chinese-ness and my common-man’s characteristics are plentiful. My colleagues all say I am “one of the most thoroughly Chinese” returned students. Having passed through a bout of introspection, it was like the Yellow River bursting its dikes. I flowed back toward the path of the Chinese common man.53


53 Ibid., p. 170.
The Uniqueness of China's Situation

Due to such a new awakening, Tao grew increasingly critical of Western models for Chinese education. In early 1922 he had warned that promiscuous borrowing from abroad was "an unhealthy tendency; if we pick up ideas all over the place, then we shall never build anything satisfactory." In his 1923 report of Chinese educational conditions to the Teachers College, this attitude was taken even more firmly:

China has in the past followed her teachers rather blindly but as yet no one has succeeded in offering her a satisfactory solution for her problems. Each is helpful to her in some ways but wholesale adoption of any one system has led her astray. At first she sacrificed everything old for the new. Gradually she came to a realization that the old is not necessarily bad and the new is not necessarily good. Thus our schoolmen have become much more critical than in former years... Experiences in the past and in the outside world must be assimilated before they can contribute to the nation's vitality and well-being. The critical and experimental attitude is creative. It is only with such an attitude that a real Chinese education adapted to Chinese life is possible.

To Tao, the trouble caused by borrowing had been already evident in his own work.

In the process of developing educational programs for the common people, he was constantly put to the tension between foreign theory and domestic realities. For Dewey, the task was to make the school an idealized embryonic community that would foster individual growth and cooperative social spirit in a rich, industrialized nation. Yet for Tao, the goal was to save an impoverished, agriculture-based country by raising her

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54 Tao Hsing-chih, 1922, 我們對於新學制草案應持之態度 [The attitude we should take toward the draft of the new school system]; tr. Kuhn, 1959, T'ao Hsing-chih, 1891-1946, Papers on China, 13, p. 171.

55 Tao Hsing-chih, 1925, China, in Educational yearbook of the International Institute of Teachers College, Columbja University, 1924, p. 103.
citizens' living standards through basic literacy. Clearly, the uniqueness of China's situation must be taken into consideration. By the end of the 1920s, Tao had been criticizing the inapplicability of Dewey's ideas such as "the school is society" and "education is life" in the Chinese context. To move education out of schools and into society on a mass basis, he had to reverse the emphases of both principles:

Seven years' experience has informed me that this road is a dead end. Only under distressing circumstances did I become aware of the validity of the union of teaching, learning, and doing. Therefore, the idea of the union of teaching, learning, and doing came as a result of my search for a new road when putting the notion of "education is life" into practice had run headlong into a wall. The theory of "education is life" suddenly did a half-somersault. Those places which successfully united teaching, learning, and doing never again uttered the phrase "education is life." Here schools were no longer patiently transformed into a microcosm of society.\(^{56}\)

*Rural Education as the Solution*

Tao's initial efforts toward mass education proved to be an unqualified success. In some big cities, he created educational opportunities such as evening schools, people's reading circles, centers for itinerant workers and ricksha pullers, etc. Because of the shortage of teachers, he even invented a relay system in which each of the newly literate was responsible for teaching illiterates. Yet during those years, it was China's rural problems that constantly occupied Tao's mind. By late 1926, he had decided to begin a special campaign for rural education. It followed that his most famous experiment was conducted in a poor farming community near Nanking called Morning Village (曉莊).
The Morning Village Experimental Normal School (曉莊試驗鄉村師範學校) was established by Tao and his friends in 1927 and closed by Kuomintang troops in 1930.\textsuperscript{57} Despite its short life, it was an invention that best embodied Tao’s many important ideas. In view of the fact that the young intellectuals who became China’s teachers were cut off from the realities of village life, the first mission of the school was to train a new breed of teachers who had “agricultural skills, a scientific brain, and the will to reform society.”\textsuperscript{58} By integrating into village life and learning to virtually handle its technical, social, and political problems, the teacher candidates were expected to give the peasants exactly the sort of education they needed. On the basis of such an unusual program, the school was designed to address the whole range of issues concerning the welfare of the community. Its second mission was to lead village renewal so that the Chinese farmer would finally be transformed into an economically self-sufficient and politically responsible citizen. Tao outlined the kind of challenges the school was to meet:

Has all unused land in the village been opened for cultivation? Have all mountains been forested? Are village roads laid out to make transportation anywhere easily managed? Can each person in the village support himself? Has the village government already enabled the peasants to obtain, control, and enjoy things for themselves?\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} Tao Hsing-chih, 1929, 生活即教育 [Life is education]; tr. Keenan, 1977, The Dewey experiment in China, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{57} Several reasons led to the closure of this school. First, Tao and his students were frequently involved in nationalistic movements that embarrassed the authorities. Second, Tao accommodated some communists in his teaching staff. Third, the Kuomintang government wanted to control education, particularly teacher education. See Brown, 1990, Tao Xingzhi: Progressive educator in Republican China, Biography, 13(1), pp. 37-38.

However, Tao’s ambition went far beyond the reconstruction of Morning Village. In anticipation of an ever-expanding effect, he regarded his school as just a starting point of national renewal: “We welcome all our fellow countrymen to rise up and join the movement... With one mind and one spirit, we will build a new life for China’s one million villages, letting each village enjoy a totally new life. Join together and build a great new life for the Republic of China.”

**Knowledge and Experience**

To advocate the type of rural education he envisioned, Tao spoke and wrote extensively after the mid 1920s. Before then, he had long attached great importance to “the unity of knowledge and action,” a theory of the Ming dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yang-ming (王陽明, 1472-1529). But now, Tao was driven by the practical needs of his project to reject Wang’s subjective approach to knowledge. As a result, he came closer to Dewey’s conception of experience:

Mr. [Wang] Yang-ming says, “Knowledge is the beginning of action; action is the completion of knowledge.” I do not agree. Action is the beginning of knowledge, and knowledge is the completion of action. Let us begin with children. They know that fire is hot only after they have felt the heat.

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59 Ibid., p. 34.

60 Ibid., p. 35.

In accord with this change, Tao also came to take the same strong anti-intellectualism stance as Dewey. Denouncing that much of the present knowledge was confined to one class and did not begin from experience, he urged that learning should be integrated with the real life of the great majority:

If books are to be learned from, then everyone should have them. There certainly should not be one group of people learning from books called scholars and another group without books called non-scholars... one who only knows how to study will surely become a walking bookshelf. We advocate using books rather than studying them in order to avoid falling into the cunning trap of the false intelligentsia... each one of the 360 occupations must use books. If men of every trade use books, true knowledge will become more widespread and easier to discover. Books are the communal property of all 360 occupations, not the scholar's private possession.\(^{62}\)

Of course, books are but one kind of tool for doing. In Tao's view, even the knowledge provided by books was not sufficient for rural reconstruction. "Should life itself be considered as education, then there is social, economic, and political literacy as well as school literacy."\(^{63}\) Therefore, the education suitable for village life must start with its needs and use its resources both as subject matter and method:

We will teach whatever people need. If people need bread, we must live the life of a bread maker and receive bread-making education. If people need love, we must live a loving life and receive education in love... the kind of life that is led is the kind of education that is received.\(^{64}\)


\(^{63}\) Tao Hsing-chih, 1938, China, in Educational yearbook of the International Institute of Teachers College, Columbia University, 1938, p. 110.

*Life as Education*

From his experience at Morning Village, Tao developed his famous theory of “life education.” According to him, there were three historical phases in the relationship of education to life:

Phase one: Life is life, education is education, and the two are separated and unrelated.

Phase two: Education is life; the two flow together, but the socialization of school concept is produced.

Phase three: Life is education, and thus society is schools. It could be said that in this period, the car is put in reverse and driven back to the most ancient period because in the period of greatest antiquity, society was school. That is when education advanced to its highest level.  

America was still in the second of these historical phases, Tao believed. Yet it was the third phase that the Chinese should try to reach. For this reason, he took the central premise of Dewey’s philosophy — the inseparability of education and social life — very seriously. The approach Tao found out was to extend the influence of the school to its total environment. As he put it briefly, “the scope of our education encompasses all social activities.”

Indeed, life itself was the curriculum of the Morning Village Experimental Normal School. The teaching method was entirely learning-by-doing, and the whole community was the very classroom. Within three years, “the school established a village hospital with a trained nurse in charge. Adult literacy classes were begun. A ‘self-defense

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65 Ibid., p. 42.

66 Ibid., p. 41.
league' against bandits was organized among more than 240 villages in the area. Watch-towers and stone defenses were built. A few guns were bought and the peasants were given elementary military training by army officers invited for the purpose. To raise productivity, peasants were instructed in advanced agricultural techniques. Students from the school transformed village tea houses, by pressure and persuasion, into social centers. There, gambling and opium-smoking were forbidden; lectures and entertainment were organized by teacher-trainees.\textsuperscript{67} In addition to these, the political well-being of the villagers was improved in an educative way. For example, during a water supply conflict, the school called a village meeting and helped guide the group to solve the problem through democratic means. Three of the conclusions Tao drew from this experience were:

A social movement that does not regard society as school cannot be thoroughly implemented...

Public strength will become much greater than that of the school. If solutions are dictated by the school, there will be few people in society with any understanding. On the contrary, they will feel alienated...

A popular movement requires working with the people and not doing things for them. That is essential if we want to develop the Chinese nation.\textsuperscript{68}

\textit{Efficacy of Society as School}

Spending much of his time and energy making plans for innovations and founding new organizations, Tao Hsing-chih was primarily a practitioner rather than an educational


\textsuperscript{68} Tao Hsing-chih, 1930, 生活即教育 [Life is education]; tr. Seybolt, 1974-75, \textit{Chinese
theorist like Dewey. For all that, he was an independent thinker and active reformer, sharing with his mentor the same humane and democratic vision of education:

How to make opinion more public and more intelligent is the problem of popular education which has on its program the transformation of two hundred million illiterates into intelligent and responsible citizens...\(^{69}\)

While Tao had gone well beyond what Dewey had himself advocated, his admiration for the philosopher and American democracy had never diminished. In his teacher training programs, he always used Dewey’s original works as required textbooks. In one of his last letters to Dewey shortly before his death, he still asked his mentor for lessons from American educational and political experiences. For him, from end to end, Dewey was “a most dear friend to the Chinese people, one who understands what China needs the most.”\(^{70}\)

On the other hand, Tao was unlike many of his fellow intellectuals who were either totalistic iconoclasts or complete traditionalists. He was notably indifferent to the abstract polemics such as the 1923 controversy on science and metaphysics, which resulted from the postwar debate over the relative value of Eastern and Western civilizations. “Culture,” in Tao’s eye, was only “a tool for living,” simply “to satisfy human desires and living needs.”\(^{71}\) Such a pragmatic attitude enabled him to freely

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\(^{69}\) Tao Hsing-chih, 1925, China, in Educational yearbook of the International Institute of Teachers College, Columbia University, 1924, pp. 96-97.

adopt both Chinese traditions and Western experiences without feeling it necessary to make a painful choice. On this account, his analogy of grafting trees can almost be seen as a guideline on how China’s new education could take proper advantage of Dewey’s thought:

The question here is how to use knowledge gained from other men’s experience so that it becomes our own true knowledge instead of false knowledge. It is like grafting trees. One kind of tree branch can be grafted onto another kind of tree to make its foliage thicker, its flowers more beautiful, and its fruit sweeter. If we graft knowledge derived from other men’s experience onto the knowledge produced from our personal experience, then our knowledge will be exceptionally broad, and our lives exceptionally rich. We must make our own experience the root and the knowledge from it, the branches. Then, other men’s knowledge can be grafted onto this and will become an integral part of ours. This way, other men’s knowledge will be living in our experiences, and these will reach out to knowledge, flower, and bear fruit.\(^{72}\)

In the realm of education, what Dewey offered to the Chinese during his two-year visit was primarily a set of ideas for formal schooling at the elementary level. Despite his many perceptive observations about China, the American philosopher somewhat failed to address the critical issue of massive illiteracy at an adult level. In fact, the inability of his theory to meet China’s urgent educational needs was also the inability of formal education itself to meet such needs. After all, to center education in schools was not enough in a time of national crisis, even if the most advanced methods were introduced. It is in this sense that Tao’s considerable reshaping of his mentor’s

\(^{71}\) Tao Hsing-chih, 1930, 生活即教育 [Life is education]; tr. Seybolt, 1974-75, Chinese Education, 7(4), p. 44.

\(^{72}\) Tao Hsing-chih, 1927, 僞知識階級 [The false intelligentsia]; tr. Harris, 1974-75, Chinese
principles for the use of popular literacy was of particular value in the Chinese context. When learning that Dewey was amazed in his 1928 trip at the rural experiments of the Russian educator Stanislav Shatskii (1878-1934), Tao happily affirmed: “If Mr. Dewey were in Hsiao-chuang [i.e. Morning Village], I think he would have to advocate that ‘life is education.’”

Dewey never had a chance to visit Morning Village, but his disciple William Kilpatrick visited it in 1929. “He was deeply impressed by what he saw. Education in Morning Village was very much alive and real; even the preschool children ran a small farm where they fed their own animals and grew their own plants.” Tao was right in discerning that Dewey had begun to broaden his interests beyond the classroom, to the wider issues of social education. From his stay in the revolutionary countries (China, Turkey, Mexico, and the Soviet Union), the American philosopher, too, came to realize that “the educational system is part of the common life and cannot escape suffering the consequences that flow from the conditions prevailing outside the school building.”

Undoubtedly, Tao was one of the best students Dewey could ever have had in China, creatively experimenting with his theory and fulfilling his lifelong ambition to be a social activist. Yet the debate initiated by Tao over whether “school is society” or “society is

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75 Dewey, Introduction to The Use of Resources in Education by Elsie Ripley Clapp, in
school” was far from over. Since many of his ideas were taken and practiced by the communists after the late 1930s and later became central elements in the educational system of the People’s Republic of China, we will reexamine the issue of society as school in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER  4

THE PACIFIST AND THE CONFUCIAN

Bertrand Russell and Dewey

The Mind of a Pacifist

With his despair about Western civilization since World War I, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) went to China in the autumn of 1920 at the invitation of the Chinese Lecture Association just founded by Liang Chi-chao.¹ The British philosopher arrived in the country at a time when various economic systems, such as capitalism, Marxism, guild socialism, and syndicalism, were becoming hot topics of debate. Prior to his visit, Chinese intellectuals had known of Russell’s commitment to a more just and progressive social order through translations of Principles of Social Reconstruction (1916), Political Ideals (1917), Roads to Freedom (1918), etc. Surely, Dewey’s praise for Russell’s achievements in mathematical and social philosophy also contributed to the popularity of

¹ This organization was closely connected with the National Peking University. Its job was to bring in world-renowned figures to enhance cultural and intellectual interchange between China and other nations.
the latter. However, different camps had obviously different expectations of him. The Marxists had regarded Dewey’s reform approach as too conservative and therefore were eager to consult Russell about methods of social change. On the other hand, the liberals had admired his view that institutions were good or bad according to how far they encouraged creativity, and possessiveness was “the ultimate source of war, and the foundation of all ills from which the political world is suffering.” Particularly, “Russell’s rejection of syndicalism and state socialism, and his belief in guild socialism — ‘autonomy within each politically important group, and a neutral authority for deciding questions involving relations between groups’ — struck them as valuable, even though he had not been thinking of China when he advocated them.”

Russell himself had been basically sympathetic to some causes of socialism but was very disillusioned about Bolshevism practiced in the Soviet Union. In his recent travel to that country, where the tyrannical Russian authorities were conducting unprecedented control of individual lives, he found nothing he could like. The British philosopher thereof realized “how profound is the disease in our Western mentality, which the Bolsheviks are attempting to force upon an essentially Asiatic population.” Yet China was an entirely different story, and Russell was deeply attracted to the beauty of her

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2 See Dewey, Three contemporary philosophers, in Types of thinking, pp. 164-179. This series of lectures was given in March 1920 and probably was the immediate stimulus leading to the invitation to Russell.

3 Russell, 1917, Political ideals, p. 42.

traditional civilization. His first impression was one of admiration: “People seem to be rational hedonists... They prefer enjoyment to power. People laugh a great deal in all classes, even the lowest.” In a letter to his family, he even declared, “I have no home on this planet. China comes nearer to one than any other place I know, because the people are not ferocious...”

During his ten months of visit, Russell gave five series of lectures in Peking, which were entitled: _The Problems of Philosophy, The Analysis of Mind, The Analysis of Matter, The Science of Social Structure_, and _Mathematical Logic_. With strong desire for the newest knowledge of the West, his Chinese audiences responded to these lectures enthusiastically and looked to him for an immediate answer to every problem of China. Like Dewey, Russell also pointed out to the Chinese people the importance of the scientific method, experimental attitude, intellectual freedom, and evolutionary ways of change, but he did not directly address the many crises that were then facing the country, except in certain occasional speeches. It was not until his return to England that the philosopher published _The Problem of China_ (1922) to fully express his observations and suggestions. Although this work was originally aimed to dissuade the Great Powers from continuing their imperialist foreign policies, it can be used here to understand

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7 Russell was critically ill with pneumonia after March 1921 and consequently could not finish delivering his more directly practical lectures — _The Science of Social Structure_.

8 For a more detailed analysis of this aspect of _The Problem of China_, see Feng Chongyi, 1996, _羅素與中國：西方思想在中國的一次經歷_ [Bertrand Russell and China: A Western mind
Russell's opinion of the essential nature of China's problems. Based upon Russell's conviction in 1965 that "the parts which are not topical still...[are], in the main, correct," the following discussion will focus on those issues which the philosopher considered pertain the most to Chinese culture and the then efforts to search for solutions.

*The Problems of China*

Like Dewey, Russell also classified the current problems of China into three categories — economic, political, and cultural. The three were intimately bound up with one another, and he, too, regarded the cultural questions as the most important ones: "If these could be solved, I would accept, with more or less equanimity, any political or economic system which ministered to that end." On this particular category, however, Russell adopted a very different approach from both Dewey and many of the May Fourth intellectuals. Instead of stressing the need for inner transformation or digging out the dark sides of Chinese culture, he primarily devoted his attention to the problem of whether the country could retain some of the good qualities, which had made her so delightful, on the road to freedom. Therefore, the theme Russell set for his discussions of the future of China was closely connected with his concern about the future of human beings:

experienced by the Chinese], pp. 143-158.

9 Russell, 1993, *The problem of China*, p. 8. The fact that the philosopher decided to reprint this book unaltered in 1966 (the beginning year of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in mainland China) may indicate how significant he still considered the problem of China to be for the world.
Chinese problems, even if they affected no one outside China, would be of vast importance, since the Chinese are estimated to constitute about a quarter of the human race. In fact, however, all the world will be vitally affected by the development of Chinese affairs, which may well prove a decisive factor, for good or evil, during the next two centuries...

...Can Chinese virtues be preserved? Or must China, in order to survive, acquire, instead, the vices which make for success and cause misery to others only? And if China does copy the model set by all foreign nations with which she has dealings, what will become of all of us?^{11}

To expose Chinese virtues to those arrogant Westerners who viewed themselves as "missionaries of a superior civilization," Russell offered criteria for comparing one culture with another. First, he urged that one should first force oneself to ask such fundamental questions as: "What are the things that I ultimately value? What would make me judge one sort of society more desirable than another sort? What sort of ends should I most wish to see realized in the world?" To Russell, the philosopher and pacifist, things like organic view of nature, impulse of art, joy of life, and relations of friendship or affection were what he valued most on their own account, not merely as means to other ends. Through industrialism, these spiritual values that made life worth living had been gradually lost in the West, and Westerners had been reduced to a mechanized existence. Nevertheless, they were still extremely abundant in the pre-industrial China. Second, he suggested that "not only how much of good or evil there is within the community, but also what effects it has in promoting good or evil in other communities, and how far the good things which it enjoys depend upon evils elsewhere"

^{10} Ibid., p. 10.

^{11} Ibid., pp. 9-10.
should be taken into consideration. In this respect, Russell contended, the West was still inferior to China. This was because the prosperity of the former was obtained “by widespread oppression and exploitation of weaker nations,” while the latter secured whatever they enjoyed “by means of their own merits and exertions alone.”

● A Nation of Artists

In Russell’s eyes, China was an artist nation built upon a completely different standard of values from that of the West. What he liked most about the people was their understatement, their courtesy and wit, their obvious appreciation of beauty, and their gentle, contemplative nature, though these qualities were not without shortcomings. For example, “there is one traditional Chinese belief which dies very hard, and that is the belief that correct ethical sentiments are more important than detailed scientific knowledge.” Although Russell praised the Chinese for their not being misled by technical efficiency, he found that they had the defect of “believing that good intentions are the only thing really necessary.” In a private letter reporting his Eastern experiences to one of his friends, the philosopher wrote:

The Chinese community constantly remind me of Oscar Wilde in his first trial, when he thought wit would pull one through anything, and found himself in the grip of a great machine that cared nothing for human values... I would do anything to help the Chinese, but it is difficult. They are like a nation of artists, with all their good and bad points. Imagine [the painter, Mark]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\text{Ibid.}, pp. 11-12.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{13}}\text{Ibid.}, p. 79.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\text{Ibid.}, p. 80.\]
Gertler and [Augustus] John and Lytton set to govern the British Empire, and you will get some idea how China has been governed for 2000 years.\textsuperscript{15}

According to Russell, some great ancient sages like Confucius accounted much for the excellent features of traditional Chinese civilization. The one he personally admired most was the founder of Taoism, Lao-Tze (老子), who suggested that the ends of life should be — “production without possession, action without self-assertion, development without domination.”\textsuperscript{16} The profound influence of such a philosophy was the unusual love for peace, freedom, and justice among the Chinese, and Russell purposely contrasted these merits with the sicknesses of Western civilization:

There is much less desire than among the white races to tyrannize over other people. The weakness of China internationally is quite as much due to this virtue as to the vices of corruption and so on which are usually assigned as the sole reason. If any nation in the world could ever be “too proud to fight,” that nation would be China. The natural Chinese attitude is one of tolerance and friendliness, showing courtesy and expecting it in return. If the Chinese chose, they could be the most powerful nation in the world. But they only desire freedom, not domination. It is not improbable that other nations may compel them to fight for their freedom, and if so, they may lose their virtues and acquire a taste for empire. But at present, though they have been an imperial race for 2,000 years, their love of empire is extraordinarily slight…

...The Chinese in the West seek knowledge, in the hope — which I fear is usually vain — that knowledge may prove a gateway to wisdom. White men have gone to China with three motives: to fight, to make money, and to convert the Chinese to our religion... the soldier, the merchant, and the missionary are alike concerned to stamp our civilization upon the world; they are all three, in a certain sense, pugnacious. The Chinese have no wish to convert us to Confucianism; they say “religions are many, but reason is one,” and with that they are content to let us go our way...

\textsuperscript{15} Moorehead, 1992, \textit{Bertrand Russell: A life}, p. 328.

...It seemed to me that the average Chinaman, even if he is miserably poor, is happier than the average Englishman, and is happier because the nation is built upon a more humane and civilized outlook than our own. Restlessness and pugnacity not only cause obvious evils, but fill our lives with discontent, incapacitate us for the enjoyment of beauty, and make us almost incapable of the contemplative virtues. In this respect we have grown rapidly worse during the last hundred years.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{The Quest for Independence}

With all his affection for the Chinese, Russell realized that their graceful way of life was too delicate and serene to survive the brutality of the modern world. Like Dewey, he was anxious about the unpromising future waiting for the race:

The obvious charm which the tourist finds in China cannot be preserved; it must perish at the touch of industrialism. But perhaps something may be preserved, something of the ethical qualities in which China is supreme, and which the modern world most desperately needs. Among these qualities I place first the pacific temper, which seeks to settle disputes on grounds of justice rather than by force. It remains to be seen whether the West will allow this temper to persist, or will force it to give place, in self-defence, to a frantic militarism like that to which Japan has been driven.\textsuperscript{18}

As mentioned above, the reasons why Russell was so concerned about the fate of China actually went far beyond his personal preference. In view of the fact that the Japanese had adopted the faults of the Western manner of life and kept their own, the British philosopher hoped that the Chinese would make an opposite selection and contribute toward securing permanent peace. However, threatened with slavery, this highly civilized race had started changing itself rapidly, which was "traceable ultimately to the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 195-197.
military superiority of the West.” The vast effects of such a direction of change upon the whole world were foreseeable. If the Chinese were not allowed the freedom to develop their country in their own way, Russell was afraid that two great dangers would likely arise:

The first danger is that they may become completely Westernized, retaining nothing of what has hitherto distinguished them, adding merely one more to the restless, intelligent, industrial, and militaristic nations which now afflict this unfortunate planet. The second danger is that they may be driven, in the course of resistance to foreign aggression, into an intense anti-foreign conservatism as regards everything except armaments. This has happened in Japan, and it may easily happen in China.19

The best parts of Chinese tradition should not be discarded in order to meet temporary historical demands, Russell insisted. In his opinion, China’s quest for independence, if it was to be successful and safe, must be accompanied by the best development of her culture:

…the Chinese must seek salvation in their own energy, not in the benevolence of any outside Power.

The problem is not merely one of political independence; a certain cultural independence is at least as important… the Chinese are, in certain ways, superior to us, and it would not be good either for them or for us if, in these ways, they had to descend to our level in order to preserve their existence as a nation.20

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18 Ibid., pp. 212-213.
19 Ibid., pp. 13-14.
20 Ibid., p. 241.
Respecting Human Values as the Solution

Having the serious question — “Can China preserve any shadow of independence without a great development of nationalism and militarism?”\(^{21}\) — on his mind, Russell prescribed for Chinese reformers the following solutions: (1) establishment of an orderly government, (2) industrial development under Chinese control and in some form of socialism, and (3) spread of education.\(^{22}\) Here his main argument was that in order for China to be strong enough to resist aggression but at the same time to avoid becoming intolerant and bellicose, she must seek to synthesize the merits of both her own and Western civilization:

Independence is to be sought, not as an end in itself, but as a means towards a new blend of Western skill with the traditional Chinese virtues. If this end is not achieved, political independence will have little value.\(^{23}\)

In Russell’s opinion, the distinctive merit of the West primarily lay in the scientific method. However, without human values being properly cherished, the Western way of life had demanded strife, exploitation, restless change, discontent, and destruction. “Efficiency directed to destruction can only end in annihilation,” he warned. By comparison, a just conception of the end of life was China’s merit and would be the best cure for the diseases brought by industrialism. “The Chinese have discovered, and have practised for many centuries, a way of life which, if it could be adopted by all the world,

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 16.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., pp. 242-250.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 242.
would make all the world happy." 24 With such vision, the philosopher asserted that the task for the Chinese intellectuals was to acquire Western knowledge without acquiring "the mechanistic outlook," which existed equally in Imperialism, Bolshevism, and the Y.M.C.A. and which distinguished all these from the Chinese outlook:

What I mean is the habit of regarding mankind as raw material, to be moulded by our scientific manipulation into whatever form may happen to suit our fancy. The essence of the matter, from the point of view of the individual who has this point of view, is the cultivation of will at the expense of perception, the fervent moral belief that it is our duty to force other people to realize our conception of the world. The Chinese intellectual is not much troubled by Imperialism as a creed, but is vigorously assailed by Bolshevism and the Y.M.C.A., to one or other of which he is too apt to fall a victim, learning a belief from the one in the class-war and the dictatorship of the communists, from the other in the mystic efficacy of cold baths and dumbbells. Both these creeds, in their Western adepts, involve a contempt for the rest of mankind except as potential converts, and the belief that progress consists in the spread of a doctrine. They both involve a belief in government and a life against Nature. 25

The new China Russell hoped to see was a country which would be good at utilizing modern science and continue to respect human values. To create such a country, the Chinese would need to follow their traditional wisdom to think in long stretches of time, and not to effect changes in the sweeping, violent, and impatient style of the Bolsheviks. The gradualism recommended by the philosopher consisted of two essentials: education and leadership. Russell pointed out that three things concerning the two issues would require considerable efforts in the long process of reconstructing China. First, the

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24 Ibid., p. 17.
25 Ibid., p. 82.
masses had to be educated to form effective political opinions. "Where the bulk of the population cannot read, true democracy is impossible." Second, foreign control of Chinese education had to be terminated, because those educated in mission schools tended to become "de-nationalized" and to have "a slavish attitude towards Western civilization," which made them unfit for "taking a useful part in the national life." Third, "a clear conception of the kind of civilization to be aimed at" had to be formed among different groups of returned students, and both intellectual and political leadership needed to be inspired.  

26 In sum, the aim to be pursued by China was of equal importance to the world:

Out of the renaissance spirit now existing in China, it is possible, if foreign nations can be prevented from working havoc, to develop a new civilization better than any that the world has yet known. This is the aim which Young China should set before itself: the preservation of the urbanity and courtesy, the candour and the pacific temper, which are characteristic of the Chinese nation, together with a knowledge of Western science and an application of it to the practical problems of China. Of such practical problems there are two kinds: one due to the internal condition of China, and the other to its international situation... Both classes of problems demand Western science. But they do not demand the adoption of the Western philosophy of life.

...if Chinese reformers can have the moderation to stop when they have made China capable of self-defence, and to abstain from the further step of foreign conquest...they can...devote their freedom to science and art and the inauguration of a better economic system — then China will have played the part in the world for which she is fitted, and will have given to mankind as a whole new hope in the moment of greatest need.  

26 Ibid., pp. 247-250.

27 Ibid., pp. 250-252.
Efficacy of Securing Hope of World Peace

Unlike Hu Shih, the leading iconoclast during and after the May Fourth Movement, Bertrand Russell did not find any reason to believe that the Chinese were inferior to the white race in every respect. With exceptional ability to see beyond China’s rather backward veneer, the British philosopher unintentionally contributed to clarifying the relative value of Eastern and Western civilizations, a topic that had agitated many Chinese intellectuals since the late Ching. His finding delight in traditional Chinese culture certainly annoyed many avant-garde reformers, but he was hailed by most moderates as one of the few Westerners who had really considered China’s problems from the point of view of the Chinese. Ex-President Sun Yat-sen, for instance, was reported to have said that Russell was the only Englishman who had ever understood China. The fact that The Problem of China is still widely read by the Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Straits may further testify to the philosopher’s shrewd perceptions and astute foresight.²⁸

It is also interesting to see that although Russell and Dewey never really liked each other,²⁹ their observations on China’s problems and their appreciation of her civilization coincided in many respects—for example, both condemned the united foreign


exploitation of China, both recognized the connection between China’s freedom and future world peace, and both found that they learned a great deal from the Chinese. Probably due to such remarkable similarities, the review written by the American philosopher on The Problem of China said much in praise of the British philosopher:

...the Problem of China...in Mr. Russell’s treatment becomes the problem of our Western civilization...
...His method permits Mr. Russell to make a lucid exposition of the external, or political and economic, problem of China — with a lucidity which, emerging in an obscure world, must always be close, as it is with Mr. Russell, to irony. For, of course, it is precisely the restless predatory energy of the Occident which in itself and as communicated to Japan has created the present political and industrial problems of China. With biting precision and his accustomed artistry of selection and elimination Mr. Russell has depicted this situation to all who still have eyes to see.30

Although noticing that Russell had idealized Chinese civilization and used it as a whip to “lax: the backs of complacent Westerners,” Dewey did not regard this fact as a serious defect. He wrote, “for my own experience in China convinces me that Mr. Russell has justly stated the direction in which Chinese excellence exists.”31 It was on the internal and deeper problem of China that the American philosopher profoundly disagreed with the British philosopher:

A sense of the deepest problem of China as it exists in the consciousness of thoughtful Chinese is what one misses in Mr. Russell’s pages. As a good European, he is perhaps chiefly interested in European culture and what


31 Ibid., p. 217.
Europe has to learn from Asia; in comparison the stupendous and marvellous problem of the intrinsic remaking of the oldest, thickest, and most extensive civilization of the world does not attract his attention.

...Contact with the West has induced in China a ferment of reawakening, a true Renaissance...an awakening which seemed necessary to prevent further decay of what was good in old culture as well as necessary to a new and richer life.\(^\text{32}\)

To some extent, Dewey’s criticism was accurate. But he did not completely do justice to what the British philosopher was trying to accomplish. As we have seen, Russell, like Dewey and those Chinese liberals who insisted on gradual reforms as the major solution to China’s problems, truly believed that the optimum choice for the country was to develop an inner strength over time through political, economic, and educational modernization. However, the growing Chinese miseries caused by foreign aggression and the radical element in Chinese politics constantly reminded Russell of the possible sad outcome of China’s “transformation from within.” Since, in Russell’s judgment (which was more realistic than Dewey’s), nationalism and militarism would inevitably become the only choices for the Chinese, China’s great tradition of pacific thought had to be emphasized in order to secure hope of world peace.

Unfortunately, Russell lived to see his worst fears became a reality. In an article written in 1926, he had already sensed the impending danger:

The events of the last few years have greatly increased the gravity of the outlook. It now seems highly probable that the Powers will continue to bully China until that country is forced into militarism, and that when that day

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 218.
comes all foreigners except Russians will be driven into the sea, while the Chinese themselves, by acquiring all our vices, will lose the qualities which have earned them the respect and affection of all who knew them well.³³

In his autobiography written in 1943 (the sixth year of China’s second war against Japan), the pacifist predicted China’s future with great regret:

I loved the Chinese, but it was obvious that the resistance to hostile militarisms must destroy much of what was best in their civilization. They seemed to have no alternative except to be conquered or to adopt many of the vices of their enemies.³⁴

A man committing himself to bringing calm and peace to a violent and tumultuous world, Russell left human beings a noble hope, the realization of which still calls for substantial endeavors on the part of the Chinese. Nevertheless, preserving China’s independence without a great development of militarism and nationalism was a very difficult task during and after the May Fourth period. Since the renowned Confucian Liang Shu-ming, the communist leader Mao Tse-tung, and the nationalist leader Sun Yat-sen responded quite differently to Russell’s ideas, we will revisit him in the following section and in Chapter 5.

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Liang Shu-ming and Dewey

The Mind of a Confucian

Amid the brutal and wholesale repudiation of traditions characterizing the new thought tide, Liang Shu-ming (梁漱溟, 1893-1988) acutely sensed the crises of both Western and Chinese civilizations when he began his teaching career at National Peking University in 1917. The philosopher was initially a devout Buddhist, but since then, he gradually focused his energy on the study of Confucianism, feeling that he had the responsibility to expose its modern worth to the world:

I see the pitiful condition of the Westerners... I also see Chinese slavishly imitating the shallowness of the West, and some [of them] mistakenly studying Buddhism... [They are also] searching everywhere... Should I not guide them to that best and most beautiful of lives, the Confucian one?... Really, if it were not for my coming to propagate [Confucius], would there be [anyone] to do so? This is the reason that forced me [personally to change and] lead a Confucian life.36

Liang chose an unconventional approach to achieve this goal. At a time when cultural issues were so important but so confusing on the minds of many Chinese, he was

35 One such example can be found in an article written by the anarchist Wu Chih-hui: “This notorious ‘national heritage’ was originally always associated with concubinage and opium-smoking; and concubinage and opium-smoking were always associated with the notion of seeking promotion in office and getting rich. In Chinese history any government under which the national learning flourished was corrupt. This is because Confucius, Mencius, Lao-tze, and Mo-tze were all the products of a country in turmoil...Their books should be deposited in the privy for thirty years. For the present, let us encourage a dry and dull material civilization. When others shoot us with machine guns, we will shoot back at them. It will not be too late to reorganize the national heritage after China has ensured her survival.” See Wu Chih-hui, 1923, 簡洋八股化之理學 [A warning to foreign-formalized ‘Neo-Confucianism’]; tr. Chow, 1960, The May Fourth Movement, p. 319.

36 Liang Shu-ming, 1921, 東西文化及其哲學 [Eastern and Western civilizations and their
the first and only person who used a systematic framework to analyze the features and predict the future development of world civilizations. The published form of his lectures on this subject — Eastern and Western Civilizations and Their Philosophies (東西文化及其哲學, 1921) — quickly attracted national attention and won Liang a reputation as a cultural conservative. Without doubt, the public was deeply impressed by the three questions dealt with in this volume: (1) What was Western civilization and what was Eastern civilization? (2) Did Eastern civilization have any significance in the modern age? (3) Was it possible for the Chinese to blend their own civilization with Western civilization?

With the determination to search for a new road to China’s rebirth, Liang first examined the growing belief since the end of World War I that a synthesis of Eastern and Western thoughts was possible, and thus a superior new civilization would emerge in the future. Such a belief could be found not only in the works of leading Chinese intellectuals like Liang Chi-chao, but also in the lectures of famous foreign philosophers like John Dewey and Bertrand Russell. Even the notable iconoclast Hu Shih expected that Chinese philosophy would finally contribute to the creation of world philosophy.\(^{37}\) For his part, Liang Shu-ming did not oppose the idea of cultural blending. What really troubled him and became his life’s concern was “how” such a blending could happen, since Western and Eastern civilizations seemed to be so incompatible with each other:

\(^{37}\) See Liang Shu-ming, 1921, 東西文化及其哲學, ch. 1.
[All who advocate a blending of East and West] feel that both cultures have their faults, so they think up [a culture] that meets their subjective demands and call it perfect. They do not understand that the reason one culture is that culture in the first place is certainly not due to anything else but its [underlying attitude]. Their mistaken ideas [about blending] arise from this [misunderstanding]. Really, how can one fundamental spirit be combined with the fundamental spirit of another culture?  

**The Development of World Civilizations**

Liang's theory of civilization was based on his assumption that a civilization was “a way of life,” and life was the manifestation of infinite “will.” According to his observations, three major world civilizations — Western, Chinese, and Indian — respectively represented three ways of life:  

1. Western civilization since the Renaissance was based on the will going forward to seek satisfaction. It emphasized reason, rationalism, knowledge and the conquest of nature, and a life of struggle. This Liang called the first way of life. He recognized its splendid achievements — science and democracy — but criticized its fault in view of life.  

2. Chinese civilization was based on the will’s self-adjustment, self-sufficiency, and the golden mean. It looked neither forward nor backward, but sideways. This Liang called the second way of life. By maintaining a balance between their desires and the environment, the Chinese achieved great inner happiness in life. However, they suffered in material welfare, which Westerners could easily secure.  

3. Indian civilization was based on the will going backward to look for ultimate enlightenment. When encountering difficult problems, an Indian often tried to banish them from his mind instead of solving them.

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either by satisfying the will or adjusting himself to circumstances. This Liang called the third way of life. Through self-denial and austerity, the Indians fully developed their religion, but their material conditions were consequently even worse than that of the Chinese.\(^39\)

In Liang’s eyes, the evolution of a civilization, if it was to be successful, should observe the following sequences: from the Western way to the Chinese way, and finally to the Indian way. Liang’s major reason was that the material welfare of human beings must be first attended to before their other advanced needs could be met. Obviously, the first way of life was now a dead end for Westerners, because their intellectual calculation for individual profit had profoundly alienated individuals from each other and from nature. Liang warned that such an attitude would finally drown human feelings and life itself:

*Intellect is a tool for life, for convenience in arranging and calculating and for creating the [imaginary] hypothesis of dividing life. But to take such a division as real is not merely a mistake, but a gravely dangerous one. Life is a whole. If you divide it into segments and make one contingent on another, then it loses its relish. When life’s integrity is maintained, all parts have their own inherent meaning or interest. If this attitude [of calculation] is taken, the individual moments of life all become means. Living in a house becomes merely for the sake of eating and sleeping [in it], and eating and sleeping, in turn, become merely a means to the end of reproducing, and gradually a person’s whole life has meaning only in something external to itself. The fun of living would no longer be in the living itself, but in some other purpose extraneous to it.*\(^40\)

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\(^{39}\) See Liang Shu-ming, 1921, 東西文化及其哲學, chs. 2-3.

To prevent further destruction, Liang held that Western preoccupation with material accomplishments had to be changed, and problems of metaphysics and of human interrelations would become increasingly important in that society. Seeing the rise of anti-intellectualism, of psychology, and of the theories of Bergson, Eucken, Russeil, Kropotkin, James, Dewey, and Einstein, he was quite sure that the West was about to adopt the second way of life, which was essentially Chinese.\footnote{See Liang Shu-ming, 1921, 東西文化及其哲學, ch. 5.}

- **The Value of Chinese Civilization**

Although Chinese civilization had failed to produce science and democracy, Liang contended that its metaphysics and view of life would greatly contribute to the spiritual reconstruction of the world. The core of Chinese metaphysics was a theory of “change,” which focused on fluid reality and argued that the ultimate reality was pure change. Its method was intuition, and its features were to advocate relativism and the nonverbalization of many basic ideas. In Liang’s judgment, such metaphysics was best captured by Confucius, whose philosophy of life was characterized by the following fundamental principles: (1) praise of life; (2) pliancy and moderation; (3) intuition; (4) benevolent love, which was conscientiousness secured by intuition; (5) actions without consideration of interest but justice; and (6) happiness in self-contentedness. Since intuition and intellect were more successfully blended together in Confucianism, Liang affirmed that the sage had landed in the realm of a more perfect humanity:
Ordinary people traveling the road of [intellectual] calculation always want to use means to attain their end. Consequently, they must first get something, and only then are they joyful. If they do not get it, they suffer. Their joy is completely tied to the thing that is their goal, and so it is dependent on the external… Confucius was different from this. From the very start he had no concern for fixing [the external material environment into calculable quantities and certain categories], or calculating [and thus] connecting his emotions to the external. He had not the slightest concern for success or failure, but an abundant, rich zest for life. His vital force was very strong. There was no situation in which he was not at ease and self-possessed. Never for a moment was his heart not elated.43

Contrary to the prevailing belief that Confucianism was stagnant and oppressive, the real Confucian universe rediscovered by Liang was permeated by the idea of living and the breath of spring. On this account, Confucianism meant nothing more than living a full, rich life in accord with the principles of nature. Using rites and music to create an emotional and spiritual stability for human life, it had performed the functions of a great religion but avoided the faults of religion such as superstition.44 This was why Liang assigned an absolute universal value to Chinese civilization, of which Confucianism had constituted the most important part:

The line of vision of the Westerners is gradually coming ever closer to the vision of Confucius. Confucius wholeheartedly focused upon the emotional side of humanity… The difference between Confucius and the Westerners — their basic point of conflict — lies precisely in this! Therefore, I do not doubt that [the Westerners] will take Confucius’ path.45

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42 Ibid., ch. 4.


44 See Liang Shu-ming, 1921, 西洋文化及其哲學, ch. 4.

The Problems of China

Compared to the West, China was confronted by a totally different situation due to her particular course of evolution. In this regard, the major problem of the country was very similar to that of India. Because the Chinese had not thoroughly developed the first way of life, they unfortunately created a premature civilization that was unable to deal with the challenges of the modern world:

We did not continue to struggle with the forces of nature and conquer nature; as a consequence, we are now, in every way, thralls to nature. We did not wait to develop a concept of ego, but just passed over [that stage] and put value on compromising the self and yielding to others, so now we are enslaved by myriad kinds of authority. We did not wait for the development of the intellect, but skipped [that stage] and went on to esteem illogical spirit and favor the use of intuition alone, so now our thought is muddled and our scholarship is unsystematic. Because we took the second course before the first, we are suffering [various] afflictions. We have no capacity to resist nature and so are at the mercy of natural disasters... We are [as a people] bullied internationally [by imperialism] and domestically [by warlords]. [We have] an oppressive military and a poverty-stricken national economy... In a world dominated by problems of the first course [we] have walked but a few steps on the first course.\(^46\)

The other problem of China, in Liang’s opinion, was that she had failed to fulfill the true spirit of Confucius. If the original doctrine of the sage was based on an intuitive grasp of the constant flux of reality, then it could have no fixed objective rules of conduct like the formal ethical code practiced since the Sung Dynasty (960-1279). The historical emphasis of Confucian thinkers on external restraints was basically anti-Confucian, Liang argued. Without Confucianism being really understood, the obdurate dogmatism held

\(^{46}\) Ibid., pp. 117-118.
by Chinese society had caused serious harm: "For thousands of years it has made us
impotent in any attempt to liberate ourselves from various authorities, and so
individuality could not develop. Society could not develop either. This is [our] biggest
point of inferiority compared to the West." On the other hand, due to the fact that the
rites and music — Confucius's original method for institutionalizing his spirit — did not
flourish, a truly Confucian social order was not achieved: "For thousands of years of
Confucian-dominated Chinese history, the life attitude of the ordinary people had actually
been Taoist."\textsuperscript{47}

Such was the circumstances in which the New Culture movement was launched and
expected to bear fruit. Accused as a cultural conservative by his opponents, Liang in
fact had no interest in defending the "stiff rotten goods" of the past. On the contrary, he
enthusiastically supported the current efforts to promote science and democracy: "The
two spirits are completely correct. We must accept them unconditionally. The urgent
task facing us today is [to know] just how to introduce [them effectively]."\textsuperscript{48}
In Liang's opinion, since "a man must establish his life on a firm foundation before he can move
forward," some kind of spiritual element was indispensable for the success of the
movement:

The new party advocates nothing more than Chen Tu-hsiu's science and
democracy and Hu Shih's 'critical spirit'... I approve of all of this, but I feel
that these alone do not provide [us with] a philosophy of life. Superficial
methods [that do not reach the inner person] are of no practical value...

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., pp. 103 & 105.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., pp. 118 & 120.
... Only if [we] solidly establish a way of life, can we really absorb and digest science and democracy effectively. If we do not [first have a secure philosophy of life], then I dare predict that the New Culture movement cannot produce any results.\(^4^9\)

In short, Liang believed the spirit to be the source of the demands that men made of their environment, and thus the reform programs he would wholeheartedly agree to must incorporate a proper philosophy of life. This was a view indeed very close to Russell’s. However, the Chinese philosopher had no sympathy at all with the British philosopher’s favorite, Taoism, considering its passivity the source of China’s weaknesses and difficulties. Hoping to recover the spiritual power of the country, he chose to be the modern spokesman of Confucianism and accorded it the responsibility of national salvation:

The attitude I want to put forth is the “resoluteness” (剛) of Confucius... Only this sort of dynamism can make up for the former Chinese shortcomings, save the Chinese from their present afflictions, avoid the faults of the Westerners, and enable the Chinese to cope with the needs of the world. The Chinese originally walked this road, but [later] they tended too much toward passivity, softness, subordination, quiescence — that is [they were] nearer to Lao-tze’s way. It has not been the vigorous, resolute, active way of Confucius.\(^5^0\)

\textit{Modernization through Cultural Revival as the Solution}

The three solutions Liang proposed to cure China’s grievances were as follows: (1) flatly reject the Indian way, (2) completely accept Western culture but fundamentally

\(^{4^9}\) Ibid., p. 123.

\(^{5^0}\) Ibid., pp. 122-123.
reform its defects, and (3) critically reappraise and bring forth anew China’s original attitude toward life. To put it briefly, what the Chinese should do was to walk the Western road in a Confucian spirit:

Our urgent needs at present... all require that we take the first course... But if we do not blend the life of the second course into it, we will not be able to avoid its dangers and mistakes.\(^{51}\)

After solving China’s cultural crisis on the philosophical level, Liang began to grope for a concrete program of action that would embody and fulfill his ideas. What most caught his eye was the connection between China’s rural problems and the new educated elite. On this particular point, his criticism was very similar to the professional educator Tao Hsing-chih’s warning against the false intelligentsia:

Once a child from the countryside goes to higher primary school in the city, he can no longer live the old, simple life. He cannot eat the old food, wear the old clothes, drink the tea, or smoke the tobacco. He looks down on everything and has no patience with it. But, as for the knowledge and ability that a rural family needs, he has not a whit! Instead he has some half-baked, irrelevant, scientific knowledge in English, physics, and chemistry. He cannot actually do any farm work; instead he can play ball and do [Western] calisthenics and has developed the habit of lazy loafing.\(^{52}\)

The current Western-style educational system had failed to make China a strong country and had destroyed China’s cultural roots, Liang contended. First, the knowledge and skills taught in schools had little to do with the real needs of the masses. So it was

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 122.

that the peasants said “one more student in a family is one more useless person.”

Second, unlike its traditional counterpart, the educated class of the day had no idea of proper conduct, self-cultivation, and being a moral influence on society. Its members “wrangle openly over private advantage. Their ability to become rich in business is not only considered proper and justified, but even praised as really making use of what one has studied.”

Third, since the educated class had become an intellectual elite based on money and material consumption, it was living an exploiter’s life in the cities which was totally alienated from the lifestyle and interests of the masses. Last, the Westernized Chinese educators had discarded all that was of value in their traditional education. They now simply imparted “knowledge and techniques,” feeling no concern about the psychological, physical, and moral well-being of their students. This dissatisfied Liang quite a bit. He maintained, “if you want to educate, then you must become intimate friends with the student, and only after that can you understand him and be a guide to him.”


54 Ibid.


56 Ibid., p. 142.
The Chiang-Hsueh Model

Believing that China’s modernization must wait upon the spiritual reconstruction and reintegration of all her citizens, Liang had thought out a general direction for instituting his quasi-religious mass movement in 1921: “What I want is a re-creation of the custom of philosophical discourse [chiang-hsueh (講學)] like that of the Sung and Ming [dynasties] using the [way of] life [and relationship] of Confucius and Yen [Hui, Confucius’ favorite disciple] to solve the melancholy problems of life that afflict our youth today.”57 Later in 1924 and 1928 when Liang took over the management of two middle schools, chiang-hsueh played a central role in his educational reform program. Basically, it was a teaching model which combined moral and intellectual improvement through the mutual interaction, encouragement, and criticism experienced in small intimate student-teacher groups. By replacing the rigid, inflexible class-hour-credit system, Liang’s schools intended to provide education for the whole man, including emotional and moral guidance as well as intellectual nourishment.58

However, Liang’s ambition went far beyond the reforms of the regular school system. After two visits in 1928 to the Morning Village Experimental Normal School established by Tao Hsing-chih, the Confucian’s own program of social reform began to take shape, and he, too, focused his attention on training a new breed of teachers who would assume the leadership in China’s rural reconstruction.


58 See Alitto, 1986, The last Confucian, pp. 149-150 & 164-165.
● *Teachers as Moral Paragons*

Liang’s most famous experiment was conducted in a county of Shantung province called Tsou-ping (鄔平). At its heart was the Shantung Rural Reconstruction Institute (山東鄉村建設研究院), which was founded in 1931 according to his vision and destroyed in 1937 due to the Japanese invasion. The Tsou-ping Normal School (鄔平師範學校) affiliated with this institute was staffed by Tao’s former colleagues and students and resembled Tao’s creation at Morning Village in almost every aspect. It not only conceived of the school as the basic administrative organ at the local levels, but also sought to remedy the political, social, and economic backwardness of China’s countryside through popular education. On the whole, the major feature of Liang’s project lay in his principle of modernization through cultural revival. While Tao was indifferent to cultural issues, the Confucian always insisted that rural reconstruction had to be a cultural rather than a political movement, for China’s various problems — political, social, economic, and moral — were all manifestations of the underlying cultural crisis.  

In view of the disordered rural life and the demoralized peasants, Liang proposed some organizational forms like *hsiang-yueh* (鄉約, a kind of rural community-action and mutual-aid institution) to promote modernization and revitalize China’s ethical society. They would call for intelligent and moral leadership, and only the inspired, robust, 

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cultivated, sage-like teachers trained through the new *chiang-hsueh* model would exert
significant influence on the mind of the masses and contribute to the formation of an
organized and motivated peasantry, Liang believed. Accordingly, those who worked for
this cause had to be both teachers and some kind of moral paragons:

*Such a teacher* will help the peasants raise their morale, using his ambition,
vitality, and vigor to inspire ambition, vitality, and vigor in the peasants. He
will make everyone have ambition, vitality, and vigor to act consciously,
spontaneously, and voluntarily. 61

*Efficacy of Taking a Middle Course*

In spite of his remarkable ability to reveal the enduring ideals of Confucius that had
been obscured by the accumulated distortions, Liang Shu-ming considered himself
primarily a social activist rather than an ivory-towered philosopher. For him,
“Confucianism is not a kind of thought, but rather a way of life.”62 In this regard, he
traveled a route very like that of Tao Hsing-chih, devoting his life to investigating actual
rural conditions and developing appropriate programs for the peasants. However, his
mediating role between Western-style modernity and Chinese cultural heritage has been
constantly misunderstood since the May Fourth period. The leading iconoclast Hu Shih,
for example, was among those who attacked Liang most relentlessly. In his sarcastic
review of *Eastern and Western Civilizations and Their Philosophies*, Hu accused the

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61 Wan Chuan-fang, 1996, *梁漱溟對中國問題之研究* [A study of Liang Shu-ming in the
Chinese problem], op. cit., p. 123.

Confucian of using oversimplified generalizations and vague abstractions to construct a fundamental solution. Without giving careful consideration to Liang’s arguments against environmental determinism and for qualitative cultural differences, Hu held that human needs were basically the same everywhere and thus any statement about the special character of a particular culture was by its nature arbitrary and invalid. In sum, he maintained that all peoples actually walked the same road as Westerners but only at unlike paces:

Because of environmental difficulties or lack of them, and because of the [different degrees of] urgency of the problems [facing the various peoples], there are differences in the speed with which they [the peoples] travel... We can only say that, in the past three hundred years, the European peoples were confronted with an urgent coercive environment [which made them] get ahead a few steps.⁶³

As to why the seventeenth-century European environment suddenly altered, Hu gave no answer to his readers.

Unhappy about being seen as an enemy of the New Culture movement, Liang wrote a rejoinder to protest against Hu’s casual reading of his book. As an admirer of Dewey’s philosophy, the Confucian referred several times to the fact that Hu’s revered teacher had spoken in such terms as “a kind of style,” “a kind of coloration,” “a kind of tendency,” or “a kind of spirit” when he discussed cultures.⁶⁴ Indeed, Liang was fully justified in his

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⁶⁴ See Liang Shu-ming, 1923, 答胡評「東西文化及其哲學」 [Answering Hu Shih’s criticism of Eastern and Western civilizations and their philosophies], pp. 36-38, 42, & 46.
position. Far from what Hu might have been willing to admit, Dewey’s awareness of
the uniqueness of Chinese civilization was much nearer to Liang’s than to his number one
Chinese disciple’s:

The visitor spends his time learning, if he learns anything about China, not to
think of what he sees in terms of the ideas he uses as a matter of course at
home. The result is naturally obscurity rather than light. But it may be
questioned whether the most enlightening thing he can do for others who are
interested in China is not to share with them his discovery that China can be
known only in terms of itself, and older European history. Yet one must
repeat that China is changing rapidly; and that it is as foolish to go on thinking
of it in terms of old dynastic China...as it is to interpret it by pigeon-holing its
facts in western conceptions. China is another world politically and
economically speaking, a large and persistent world, and a world bound no
one knows just where. 65

On closer inspection, the Confucian and the American philosopher still shared many
points of similarity — for example, both stressed the necessity of China’s thoroughgoing
inner modification, both advocated an organic growth of China from her own past, and
both viewed education in terms of individual and social life. It was on the belief system
that the two really differed with each other. Probably due to his wish to replace the
authority of tradition with the authority of science, Dewey was silent about the positive
role Confucianism might play in the modern age, even though he did discover some
amazing merits of it. 66 In contrast, recognizing the insufficiency of science in


66 These merits included the supremacy of moral and intellectual values, the notion of the
intellectual’s social responsibility, the importance of education, and the extraordinary reverence
for the teacher. See Dewey, 1921, New culture in China & Dewey, 1922, As the Chinese think,
strengthening China, Liang was not hesitant to suggest that the Confucian life attitude should be well utilized to provide the Chinese with the spiritual momentum necessary in the process of national reconstruction.

In short, taking a middle course was Liang's prescription for China's ills. By basing modernization on the humane insights of Confucianism, he was able to construct a stratagem that would both restore some measure of China's national pride and facilitate her endeavors to meet the challenge of transformation. This was why Tsai Yuan-pei (蔡元培, 1867-1940), the revered chancellor of National Peking University, judged Liang's work to be of universal human significance and said that "Mr. Liang has raised the most important problem in the contemporary philosophical world." Since on the harmony-struggle dichotomy Liang took a fundamentally different stance from the communist leader Mao Tse-tung, we will revisit his ideas when proceeding to Chapter 5.

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CHAPTER 5

THE MARXIST AND THE NATIONALIST

Mao Tse-tung and Dewey

The Mind of a Marxist

After finishing five years of teacher education in Hunan province, Mao Tse-tung (毛澤東, 1893-1976) went to Peking in 1918 and took a menial job in the library of National Peking University. There he met the leading Chinese Marxist, Li Ta-chao, and began to move steadily in the direction of Marxism. Meanwhile, as an activist in the May Fourth Movement, Mao had actually attended John Dewey's lectures in early 1920 and was interested in experimentalism.\(^1\) It is said that he not only highly recommended the volume Five Major Lecture Series of Dewey in Peking (杜威五大講演, 1920), but also

carried it in the very first stock when he opened a revolutionary bookstore in Hunan that year.² The other foreign visitor that impressed Mao was Bertrand Russell. In a speech delivered in late 1920, the British philosopher “took a position in favor of communism, but against the dictatorship of the workers and peasants. He said that one should employ the method of education to make the propertied classes conscious [of their failings], and that in this way it would not be necessary to limit freedom or to have recourse to war and bloody revolution.” Mao’s response to such a viewpoint can be summed up in a few words: “this is all very well in theory; in reality it can’t be done.”³

Apparently, Mao had by then accepted the basic Marxist-Leninist assumption that education is a part of the superstructure of social organization and a propaganda tool in the hands of the bourgeois ruling class. This was why he questioned Russell’s belief in education as the means of social reform and argued for the necessity of a violent struggle: “If we use peaceful means to attain the goal of communism, when will we finally achieve it? Let us assume it will take a hundred years. How, during these hundred years, are we going to deal with the unceasing groans of the proletariat (who are in fact ourselves)?”⁴ As many other Chinese intellectuals did at that time, the young man eventually chose the radical line over the gradual reform approach advocated by both

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³ Mao Tse-tung, 1920, 給蕭旭東、蔡林彬並在法諸會友的信 [Letter to Xiao Xudong, Cai Linbin and the other members in France]; tr. Schram & Hodes, 1992, Mao’s road to power, vol. 2, p. 8.

⁴ Ibid., p. 10.
Dewey and Russell. In 1921, he participated in the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Shanghai (上海) and began his political life committed to building a socialist kingdom.

It was not surprising to see that, as a revolutionary leader and finally the head of communist China, Mao was well aware of the power of ideas to effect change. Although agreeing with Karl Marx in his view that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness,” the Chinese Marxist recognized that there also existed the reaction of the mental on the political and economic:

Any given culture (as an ideological form) is a reflection of the politics and economics of a given society, and the former in turn has a tremendous influence and effect upon the latter; economics is the base and politics the concentrated expression of economics.⁵

To open the road to the ideal society of the future, Mao in fact put more emphasis on the mental: “Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes.”⁶ Since the Chinese revolution directed by Mao “is fundamentally an educational task, its success or failure dependent on the degree to which the Chinese population are ‘educated’ to accept and work for the achievement of Communist goals,”⁷

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⁶ Ibid., p. 382.

⁷ Hu Chang-tu, 1974, Chinese education under communism, p. 43.
the following discussion will focus on those issues which the heroic figure considered pertain the most to Chinese culture and the educational efforts to search for solutions.

**The Problems of China**

As early as 1919, Mao had made a dire diagnosis of Chinese affairs: "The decadence of the state, the sufferings of humanity, and the darkness of society have all reached an extreme." Like the professional educator Tao Hsing-chih and the Confucian Liang Shu-ming, Mao did not really turn his attention to China’s vast majority until the 1920s, when large-scale peasant movements began to appear in the countryside. In a 1927 fact-finding tour, the prospective communist leader not only found that rural society was being turned upside down, but also observed the relationship between education and the emerging mass culture:

In China education has always been the exclusive preserve of the landlords, and the peasants have had no access to it. But the landlords’ culture is created by the peasants, for its sole source is the peasants’ sweat and blood. In China 90 per cent of the people have had no education, and of these the overwhelming majority are peasants. The moment the power of the landlords was overthrown in the rural areas, the peasants’ movement for education began. See how the peasants who hitherto detested the schools are today zealously setting up evening classes! They always disliked the “foreign-style school”... The texts used in the rural primary schools were entirely about urban things and unsuited to rural needs... Now the peasants are enthusiastically establishing evening classes, which they call peasant

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8 Mao Tse-tung, 1919, 民眾的聯合 [Great Union of the popular masses]; tr. Terrill, 1980, Mao: A biography, p. 44.
schools... The peasants are very enthusiastic about these schools, and regard
them, and only them, as their own... The development of the peasant
movement has resulted in a rapid rise in their cultural level.⁹

The year 1927 also marked the start of Mao’s military life, in which he had to
combat local warlords, Kuomintang troops, and Japanese armies. At the turn of 1940,
the Marxist formed his famous theories of “Chinese revolution” and “new democracy,” in
which he reflected on his own country and drew a blueprint for its future. Like Dewey
and Russell, Mao also considered the cultural issue highly important. Yet his way of
interpreting Chinese conditions was quite different:

There is in China an imperialist culture which is a reflection of imperialist rule,
or partial rule, in the political and economic fields. This culture is fostered
not only by the cultural organizations run directly by the imperialists in China
but by a number of Chinese who have lost all sense of shame. Into this
category falls all culture embodying a slave ideology. China also has a semi-
feudal culture which reflects her semi-feudal politics and economy, and whose
exponents include all those who advocate the worship of Confucius, the study
of the Confucian canon, the old ethical code and the old ideas in opposition to
the new culture and new ideas. Imperialist culture and semi-feudal culture
are devoted brothers and have formed a reactionary cultural alliance against
China’s new culture... Unless it is swept away, no new culture of any kind can
be built up.¹⁰

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⁹ Mao Tse-tung, 1927, 湖南農民運動考察報告 [Report on an investigation of the peasant
movement in Hunan]; translation from Selected works of Mao Tse-tung, 1961, vol. 1, pp. 53-54.

¹⁰ Mao Tse-tung, 1940, 新民主主義論 [On new democracy]; translation from Selected
*Feudalism*

Mao's view of China's whole problems was based on his analysis of China's history. He claimed that Chinese society had been a feudal society for three thousand years, and the main features of its old economic and political system were as follows: (1) A self-sufficient natural economy predominated. (2) The feudal ruling class (i.e., landlords, the nobility, and the emperor) owned most of the land, while the peasants had very little or none at all. (3) The feudal ruling class lived on the heavy rent and service extorted from the peasants. (4) The emperor reigned supreme in the feudal state and relied on the landed gentry as the mainstay of the entire system of feudal exploitation. The Marxist thus pointed out that the major conflict in China had been between the peasantry and the landlord class:

It was under such feudal economic exploitation and political oppression that the Chinese peasants lived like slaves, in poverty and suffering, through the ages. Under the bondage of feudalism they had no freedom of person. The landlord had the right to beat, abuse or even kill them at will, and they had no political rights whatsoever. The extreme poverty and backwardness of the peasants resulting from ruthless landlord exploitation and oppression is the basic reason why Chinese society remained at the same stage of socioeconomic development for several thousand years.

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11 The terms “feudal” and “feudalism” were used by the communists to describe the manifold abuses of the past — the social inequities, the political oppression and corruption, and the moral decadence of Chinese life. See Grieder, 1970, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance*, p. 207.


13 Ibid., p. 308.
Imperialism

According to Mao, Chinese society remained basically unchanged until the last hundred years. "After the Opium War of 1840 China gradually changed into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Since the Incident of September 18, 1931, when the Japanese imperialists started their armed aggression, China has changed further into a colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal society."\textsuperscript{14} The means used by the imperialist powers to seize China's territory and wealth were as follows: (1) launching wars of aggression against China, (2) forcing her to sign numerous unequal treaties, (3) controlling her trading ports and customs, (4) utilizing her raw materials and cheap labor on the spot, (5) monopolizing her banking and finance, (6) establishing a network of comprador and merchant-usurer exploitation, (7) forming reactionary allies with the feudal lords and the trading and money-lending bourgeoisie, (8) keeping the warlords fighting against one another by supplying them with munitions and military advisers, (9) poisoning the minds of the Chinese through missionary work, schools, newspapers, and inducing Chinese students to study abroad.\textsuperscript{15} In the event, penetration by foreign capitalism not only undermined China's self-sufficient natural economy but also produced the Chinese bourgeoisie and proletariat, which interacted, but were antagonistic toward each other.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 309.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 311-312.
Since the politics, economy, and culture of present-day Chinese society were predominantly colonial, semi-colonial, and semi-feudal, Mao judged the targets of the Chinese revolution to be primarily two:

They are imperialism and feudalism, the bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries and the landlord class of our country. For it is these two that are the chief oppressors, the chief obstacles to the progress of Chinese society at the present stage.\(^{16}\)

In other words, the basic nature of the Chinese revolution had to be anti-imperialist and anti-feudal. Accordingly, the new culture of the Chinese nation also had to be an “anti-imperialist and anti-feudal culture of the people,” aiming to liberate them from all sorts of oppression. In Mao’s vision, the revolution had to be scientific, standing “for seeking truth from facts, for objective truth and for the unity of theory and practice.” Above all, he believed this culture of New Democracy “should serve the toiling masses of workers and peasants who make up more than 90 per cent of the nation’s population and should gradually become their very own.”\(^{17}\)

**Ideological Transformation as the Solution**

Mao’s hope for a great proletarian state required him to treat the whole society as a big school and to promote communism as the only suitable ideology in the revolutionary process: “Beyond all doubt, now is the time to spread communist ideas more widely and

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\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 315.

\(^{17}\) Mao Tse-tung, 1940, 新民主主義論 [On new democracy]; translation from Selected works of Mao Tse-tung, 1961, vol. 2, pp. 381-382.
put more energy into the study of Marxism-Leninism, or otherwise we shall not only be unable to lead the Chinese revolution forward to the future stage of socialism, but shall also be unable to guide the present democratic revolution to victory."\(^{18}\) Convinced that a new China would be born as all Chinese transformed themselves ideologically, the heroic figure had articulated a concrete educational policy for his Soviet base areas as early as 1934. Here, education was viewed in the broad political, economic, and cultural framework, and its function was to achieve complete and rapid change within the individual and society:

With a view to victory in the revolutionary war, consolidation and development of soviet political power, mobilizing all the forces of the popular masses to participate in the great revolutionary struggle, and creating a new revolutionary generation, the soviets must carry out cultural and educational reform to remove the spiritual shackles imposed on the masses of workers and peasants by the reactionary ruling class and create a new soviet culture of the workers and peasants...

Wherein lie the general guidelines of soviet culture and education? They are in using the communist spirit to educate the broad masses of toiling people, in making culture and education serve the revolutionary war and the class struggle, and in linking education with physical labor.

What are the central tasks of soviet cultural construction? They are the institution of universal and compulsory education, the development of broad social education, striving to eliminate illiteracy, and the creation of large numbers of high-level cadres to lead the struggle.\(^{19}\)

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 379.

After proclaiming the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Mao’s new regime launched a massive campaign to eradicate illiteracy and introduce communist ideology. “This was a nationwide movement not restricted to the schools. ‘Workers, peasants, and urban citizens have been organized for education and study,’... The trade unions were involved. Newspapers and radios joined in a common effort to impart knowledge about the new regime and its characteristics. Classes were held inside and outside the schools, for adults as well as children, to study the basic documents spelling out the organization of the new government and to learn how the new China was different from the old. Government offices, factories, business enterprises, urban neighborhoods, and villages organized ‘study’ sessions for their personnel, and the entire nation was involved in an information program of unprecedented scale. Besides the ‘study’ of official documents, the movement brought together millions of people in small groups to listen to news reports, to read and hear discussed the works and ideological concepts of Marxism-Leninism. Some of these ‘study’ sessions were used for ‘criticism and self-criticism,’ the effective vehicle for ideological remolding that has been extensively used down to the present day.”

It was clear that for Mao, education was a comprehensive process that was ideologically connected to the political and economic goals of the society he envisaged. Although the supreme leader declared in a 1957 speech that “our educational policy must enable everyone who receives an education to develop morally, intellectually and

physically and become a worker with both socialist consciousness and culture,” he was actually more on the side of “redness” (i.e., political correctness) than the side of “expertise” (i.e., scientific knowledge):

Both students and intellectuals should study hard. In addition to the study of their specialized subjects, they must make progress ideologically and politically, which means they should study Marxism, current events and politics. Not to have a correct political orientation is like not having a soul… All departments and organizations should shoulder their responsibilities for ideological and political work. This applies to the Communist Party, the Youth League, government departments in charge of this work, and especially to heads of educational institutions and teachers.21

Additionally, Mao believed the old concept that the educated elite were to direct others must be overthrown. In his kingdom, the intellectuals would be facilitators in academia and allies and pioneers in social progress, but they had to be subject to the leadership and reeducation of the working class:

China needs the services of as many intellectuals as possible for the colossal task of building socialism…

Although large numbers of intellectuals have made progress, they should not be complacent. They must continue to remould themselves, gradually shed their bourgeois world outlook and acquire the proletarian, communist world outlook so that they can fully fit in with the needs of the new society and unite with the workers and peasants.22

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22 Ibid., p. 404.
Efficacy of Indoctrination and Propaganda

As a great revolutionary educator, Mao Tse-tung exerted tremendous influence on the educational system of communist China. Under his guidance, some positive gains were quickly made. These included the expansion of educational opportunity, the wide variety of schools and educational programs outside schools, and the close cooperation of school and society. As one of Mao's critics has noticed, "educational theorists in the West have dreamed of using education as an agency for social change and of a comprehensive program of education that takes into account the total impact of all influences on the human mind and heart. Such a broad concept of education is not merely a dream in Maoist China. Education is, indeed, 'coextensive with life,' as the educational theorists would say. The 'open door' operation of schools has torn down the walls that used to segregate schools from society. Maoist education has also succeeded in changing the class balance of Chinese society and has contributed directly to the class revolution projected by the Communists. It has effectively raised the status of the proletariat and brought down the bourgeoisie from their previous favored position. Education, to use a cliché, is a positive force for remaking society."

With all its dazzling achievements, however, Mao's educational policy had many fundamental defects in its underlying ideology. These defects could be seen more clearly if we contrast Mao's problematic stance with the more thoughtful ones taken by those whom we have examined so far. First, on the issue of truth, liberals like Hu Shih

23 Chen, 1974, The Maoist educational revolution, p. 188.
had discovered the unscientific nature of Marxism long before it was realized in China. To his critical mind, such catchwords as “feudalism” and “imperialism” would only obscure rather than clarify the genuine problems facing the country. Second, on the issue of society as school, the ideas of the practitioner Tao Hsing-chih had greatly inspired the communists since the late 1930s. Yet a man of democratic vision, Tao would not agree to use education for achieving a dictatorial system. Third, on the issue of how to conduct social change, the pacifist Bertrand Russell had warned against the inhumanity of Bolshevism during his stay in China. In his eyes, socialism had to be combined with freedom, for “the main purpose and inspiration of any reconstruction which is to make a better world must be the liberation of creative impulses.”  

Last, on the issue of social relationships, the Confucian Liang Shu-ming argued that glorifying class struggle could only throw China into chaos and stop progress. He kept insisting that “friendly feeling is the thing most capable of energizing vital activity. Talk about benefits! This is fundamentally the most precious of all. If it is destroyed, then imperceptibly there is incalculable loss.”

In short, the fatal mistake of Maoist education would lie in its inability to seriously cultivate the Chinese mind and heart and thereby to significantly contribute to the

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development of Chinese civilization. Such a problem was not a recent one, but had been discerned by a Western observer on Yenan (延安, Mao's base of operations from 1936 to 1946) education:

even in this period one can see the unresolved contradiction between education and indoctrination. This contradiction is implied in the orthodox Marxian view about the nature of scientific judgments, the assumption that a single, definite and certainly correct answer can be found to almost any question from the data known at any particular time... The Communist position is ambivalent. On the one hand there is recognition of the educational value of discussion and experiment. On the other there is the belief that, on any question where an official Party decision has been made, only one opinion can honestly be held and no alternative hypotheses can be considered or tested... On the one hand the Communists want people to think; on the other, they are, in certain respects afraid of the possible results of thinking.  

The effects of Mao's educational policy on China were most evident in a series of campaigns oriented to remodel her millions of intellectuals and educators. Since the new-democratic culture "can be led only by the culture and ideology of the proletariat...and not by the culture and ideology of any other class," it would be necessary for the communists to continue purging the Chinese mind of both "feudal" and "imperialist" remnants. Mao stated this very plainly:

In our country, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology and anti-Marxist ideologies will persist for a long time. Basically, the socialist system has been established in our country. While we have won basic victory in transforming the ownership of the means of production, we are even farther from complete victory on the political and ideological fronts... We still have

26 Lindsay, 1950, Notes on education problems in communist China, pp. i-ii.


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to wage a protracted struggle against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology. It is wrong not to understand this and to give up ideological struggle. All erroneous ideas, all poisonous weeds, all ghosts and monsters, must be subjected to criticism; in no circumstances should they be allowed to spread freely.\textsuperscript{28}

Due to his profound influence on Chinese education, John Dewey was among the first to be officially vilified. Since 1950, his philosophy of education had been severely criticized for its “reactionary” position.\textsuperscript{29} Moreover, he, together with Bertrand Russell, was accused of supporting imperialist aggression in China and of sabotaging the Chinese proletarian revolution.\textsuperscript{30} Dewey’s revered disciple Tao Hsing-chih was posthumously blamed for his “reformism,” a tool used by the ruling class to blunt the class struggle.\textsuperscript{31} Derogation and condemnation of the leading liberal Hu Shih, who had fled to the U.S. but was still admired in Chinese intellectual circles, amounted to more than three million words in 1954 and 1955.\textsuperscript{32} Later, a similar number of pieces and volumes was devoted


\textsuperscript{29} For example, see Cao Fu, 1950, 杜威批判引論 [Introduction to the critique of John Dewey], 人民教育 [People’s Education], 1(6), pp. 21-28.


\textsuperscript{31} See Pan Kai-pei, 1952, 陶行知教育思想的批判 [A critique of Tao Hsing-chih’s educational thought].

\textsuperscript{32} On the causes and development of this massive campaign against Hu, see Chu Hsi-chang, 1983, 中共批判胡適思想之研究 [The Chinese Communist’s criticisms on Hu Shih’s thought].
to denouncing Liang Shu-ming, who had constantly quarreled with Mao since the 1930s. The most violent attacks on Dewey came from another of his influential disciples Chen Ho-chin (陳鶴琴, 1892-1981), who was required to totally deny the validity of his mentor’s educational theories:

The child-centered curriculum in living education has destroyed scientific knowledge’s nature of system, design, and organization, debased the leading role of the teacher, obstructed the child’s potentiality in world reconstruction through the mastery of scientific knowledge and consequently discouraged the will of the child and the youth to reconstruct the fatherland and defend world peace. This is the consequence of my being hit by Dewey’s second gunshot, namely, his pragmatic, reactionary theory of the child-centered curriculum — school is society, education is life.

Although Mao indeed embraced science and democracy — the keynote of the May Fourth Movement — in his cultural theory, his educational policy actually ignored the two principles and consequently deepened China’s cultural crisis rather than solved it. Fortunately, Dewey did not live to hear all of the charges brought against him in China. Yet we can somewhat anticipate his response through his earlier views of Bolshevik Russia. In his 1928 trip to the U.S.S.R., the American philosopher acutely sensed that “propaganda is education and education is propaganda. They are more than confounded;

chs. 2-3. Those who were forced to vilify Hu even included his own son and his favorite students.

33 For example, see Ai Siqi, 1956, 批判梁漱溟的哲學思想 [A critique of Liang Shu-ming’s philosophy].

34 Chen Ho-chin, 1956, 批判杜威反動教育學的哲學基礎 [A critique of the philosophic bases of John Dewey’s reactionary pedagogy]; tr. Clopton & Ou, 1973, Lectures in China, p. 27. During the 30 years after Dewey’s visit, Chen actively promoted Dewey’s theory and helped develop China’s kindergarten and elementary education.
they are identified.”35 While recognizing the importance of certain national control in elevating labor from the bottom of the social scale to the top, he had not believed since then that the “immense amount of indoctrination and propaganda” should supersede the “power of independent judgment.”36 Nine years later, after the Moscow trials and the Trotsky hearings,37 the philosopher formally expressed his great disillusionment, particularly as an educator, with the Soviet experiment:

The great lesson for all American radicals and for all sympathizers with the U.S.S.R. is that they must go back and reconsider the whole question of means of bringing about social changes and of truly democratic methods of approach to social progress...

... The dictatorship of the proletariat has led and, I am convinced, always must lead to a dictatorship over the proletariat and over the party...

... A people that is kept in systematic ignorance of what is going on in the world and even in their own country and which is fed on lies has lost the fundamental leverage of progress. To me, as an educator, this is the great tragedy of the Russian situation.38

The tragedy of the Chinese situation would be far greater than Dewey could have ever imagined. As the disastrous results of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) revealed, Mao in fact did not know how or where the nation should be

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37 In the Moscow trials, Leon Trotsky was accused of engaging in sabotage and attempting the restoration of capitalism in the U.S.S.R., both of which Dewey found to be frame-ups.

 Clearly, a hopeful China still needs to be created. Since the nationalist leader Sun Yat-sen dealt with the issue of reconstruction quite differently, we will revisit the ideas of the Marxist in the following section.

Sun Yat-sen and Dewey

The Mind of a Nationalist

Starting as a Western-trained physician who was to cure the diseases of the human body, Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙, 1866-1925) ended up as a professional revolutionary who was determined to cure the ills of his beloved country. When the continuing rebellions led by him finally overthrew the corrupt Ching government in 1911, Sun was eager to turn his lifelong ambitions and the fruits of his years of investigation into a plan for national construction. Yet the Republic founded according to his democratic vision unexpectedly declined into autocracy within two years. After the death of the notorious president Yuan Shih-kai in 1916, the country was quickly divided up by dozens of warlords, who fought against one another at the cost of the well-being of the people under their control.

39 The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was in coordination with the Socialist Education Movement, which called for a comprehensive attack on whatever was foreign and old. As a result, tens of thousands of intellectuals and teachers were cruelly persecuted and even murdered, most institutions of higher education were shut down for a long time, and a generation of Chinese youths turned out to be ill-educated. Up to now, China has not yet recovered from those great losses. For the educational aspects of this revolution, see Kwong, 1988, Cultural revolution in China’s schools, May 1966-April 1969.
Still hoping to establish a democratic order in China, Sun participated in almost every important political and military movement to end the prevailing chaos. Meanwhile, he spoke and wrote extensively to explain how China’s national development could be launched and why his principles could serve to modernize China’s polity and economy. However, his reconstruction programs were constantly discouraged by his followers. There were even skeptics who said, “Sir, your ambitions are lofty. Your plans are grand and profound. But what can one do if it is easy to understand and difficult to act?”

When John Dewey landed on Shanghai in May 1919, the frustrated but optimistic leader had just invented a new theory in order to overcome such an intellectual failing of the Chinese. In their first meeting, Sun conferred with Dewey on this new theory, and the American philosopher was quite impressed with Sun’s thinking and effort:

Ex-President Sun Yat-sen is a philosopher, as I found out last night during dinner with him. He has written a book, to be published soon, saying that the weakness of the Chinese is due to their acceptance of the statement of an old philosopher, “To know is easy, to act is difficult.” Consequently they did not like to act and thought it was possible to get a complete theoretical understanding, while the strength of the Japanese was that they acted even in ignorance and went ahead and learned by their mistakes; the Chinese were paralyzed by fear of making a mistake in action. So he has written a book to prove to his people that action is really easier than knowledge.

Due to the popular awakening brought by the May Fourth Incident, Sun did not take a long time to break the spell of Chinese conservatism. The leading political figure not

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only gave immediate and positive support to the student movement, but also seized the opportunity to recruit a large number of active youths into his Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) geared to the ultimate unification of China. Apparently, the political outlook represented by Sun was very different from those represented by Dewey, Hu Shih, Tao Hsing-chih, or Liang Shu-ming. In speeches delivered in the fall of 1919, the nationalist rejected the idea that the first step to save China was to carry out educational reform, industrialization, or local self-government, acutely pointing out that the existing corrupt regimes would not permit the accomplishment of such aims. In his opinion, the first step had to be a political revolution through which the old bureaucrats, militarists, and politicians could be wiped out. Only after such destruction had been achieved would genuine reconstruction become possible.\(^2\) And the current tide of intellectual innovation, Sun believed, would lay a foundation for the success of such a Chinese revolution:

After the May Fourth Movement was initiated by the students of the National Peking University, all patriotic youths realized that intellectual reform is the preparation for reform activities in the future. By this means public opinion develops rapidly and publications become prosperous with public support... Society thus has been considerably influenced... This kind of


\(^{42}\) See Sun Yat-sen, 1919, 改造中國的第一步只有革命 [The first step to the reform of China is only revolution], in 國父全書 [Complete works of Sun Yat-sen], 1960, pp. 715-716; Sun Yat-sen, 1919, 救國之急務 [The urgent task of saving the nation], in ibid., pp. 882-883. The validity of Sun’s argument can be best verified by Dewey’s reflections on the dilemma facing Chinese educators: “no political reform of China without education; but no development of schools as long as military men and corrupt officials divert funds and oppose schools from motives of self-interest. Here are all the materials of a tragedy of the first magnitude.” See Dewey, 1922, America and Chinese education, in *John Dewey: The middle works, 1899-1924*, vol. 13, p. 231.
new culture movement reflects indeed an unprecedented change among the intellectuals of China today… with awakened consciousness and determination to strive unto death, almost everybody joins in the patriotic activities. There is no doubt that the movement will produce great and everlasting effects if it continues to grow and expand. The success of the revolution which is carried on by our party must depend on a change of thought in China, just as the ancient Book of Strategy by Sun Tze says that to attack the mind is more effective than to attack a city... Therefore, the new culture movement is really a most valuable thing. ⁴³

Shortly before his death, Sun laid down in The Three Principles of the People (三民主義, 1924) a framework that he believed necessary to revitalize and modernize Chinese civilization. To a considerable extent, this doctrine did successfully capture the minds of the whole of China (till 1949 on mainland & till now on Taiwan) as he had long wished. When appearing in print, it “won instant acceptance throughout the country. Few accepted it in its entirety, but it was a broad program, and there was something in it to touch the emotional mainspring of almost every thinking Chinese... Thousands, perhaps millions, were willing to admit that his theories were right...”⁴⁴ For our purpose, the following discussion will focus on those issues which the nationalist considered most pertain to China’s existence in the world and the then efforts to search for a brighter future.

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The Problems of China

Sun's political, social, and cultural theories started by examining the pressing problems of China. Why was the country once exceedingly powerful and civilized so humiliated in the modern age? Why did her situations become so distressful and her people so miserable? Sun's first diagnosis was simple but to the point—it was because the Chinese in general had lost national spirit, so that their unity stopped short at the family and clan and did not extend to the nation. One cause of this problem, he indicated, was China's long subjection to alien rule, which weakened her nationalistic consciousness. The other was her earlier ambition to be a world empire, which led the country to evolve from nationalism into cosmopolitanism and thereof undermined her capacity to resist conquest. In view of this lesson, Sun considered nationalism to be a great asset rather than an unworthy burden as some cultural reformers (like Hu Shih) had claimed:

Now we want to revive China's lost nationalism and use the strength of our four hundred millions to fight for mankind against injustice; this is our divine mission. The Powers are afraid that we will have such thoughts and are setting forth a specious doctrine. They are now advocating cosmopolitanism to inflame us, declaring that, as the civilization of the world advances and as mankind's vision enlarges, nationalism becomes too narrow, unsuited to the present age, and hence that we should espouse cosmopolitanism. In recent years some of China's youths, devotees of the new culture, have been opposing nationalism, led astray by this doctrine. But it is not a doctrine which wronged races should talk about. We, the wronged races, must first recover our position of national freedom and equality before we are fit to discuss cosmopolitanism... We must understand that cosmopolitanism grows out of nationalism; if we want to extend cosmopolitanism we must first
establish strongly our own nationalism. If nationalism cannot become strong, cosmopolitanism certainly cannot prosper. Thus we see that cosmopolitanism is hidden in the heart of nationalism.\textsuperscript{45}

The second problem of China, in Sun's judgment, was that she was simultaneously subject to the pressure of natural, political, and economic forces. Chinese population was sharply decreasing due to hunger and natural calamities, while the Great Powers continued to gain rapid growth in their populations. In addition to this conceivable danger of racial extinction, China was faced with the disaster of being dismembered from without through military power and diplomacy, as the huge amount of occupied territory manifested itself. Yet the most severe and invisible force was foreign control of China's economy. Due to the stolen rights and privileges such as tariff, freight charges, and taxes, the country yearly suffered heavy losses, and her people were deprived of their means of living. The final result was that China became everyone's colony but no one's responsibility:

The people of the nation still think we are only a "semi-colony"... Whose "semi-colony" is China? China is the colony of every nation that has made treaties with her, and the treaty-making nations are her masters. China is not the colony of one nation but of all, and we are not the slaves of one country but of all. Would it be better to be the slaves of one nation or of many nations?... When, a few years ago, North China experienced a natural disaster for which the foreign nations did not feel they had any obligation to send relief, and only those foreigners who were in China were raising funds for the sufferers, Chinese observers talked of the munificent philanthropy of other countries so far removed from the treatment which would be accorded a subject people! This shows that we are not yet up to Annam and Korea and

\textsuperscript{45} Sun Yat-sen, 1927, The three principles of the people, pp. 88-89.
that subjection to one power is a far higher and more advantageous position than subjection to many powers. So “semi-colony” is not the right designation for China; I think we ought to be called a “hypo-colony.”

*Developing Internal Unity and Strength as the Solution*

The solutions Sun proposed to save China from its current fate of decline were three fundamental principles that respectively addressed the issues of nationalism, democracy, and livelihood. As he clearly stated, these principles meant government “of the people, by the people, and for the people”—that is, “a state belonging to all the people, a government controlled by all the people, and rights and benefits for the enjoyment of all the people.”

And their ultimate aims were to “elevate China to an equal position among the nations, in international affairs, in government, and in economic life, so that she can permanently exist in the world.” In other words, developing internal unity and strength would be the nationalist’s priority in building a new China.

- *The Principle of Nationalism*

Sun’s first principle concerned the recovery of a national spirit which would assure China’s unity and independence. Besides political measures to mobilize and organize the people, he contended that the issue of cultural development could not be ignored if the Chinese state hoped to govern long and exist at peace: “Moral character is essential...

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47 Ibid., p. 444.
Because of the high moral standards of our race, we have been able not only to survive in spite of the downfall of the state, but we have had power to assimilate these outside races.\textsuperscript{49} Such advocacy of China's political and cultural well-being was very close to Bertrand Russell's.\textsuperscript{50} Yet the nationalist stressed more the importance of Confucian heritage, believing that its core values, such as loyalty, still suited the demand of the new age:

As for China's old moral standards, they are not yet lost sight of by the people of China. First come Loyalty and Filial Devotion, then Kindness and Love, then Faithfulness and Justice, then Harmony and Peace... But since our domination by alien races and since the invasion of foreign culture which has spread its influence all over China, a group intoxicated with the new culture have begun to reject the old morality, saying that the former makes the latter unnecessary. They do not understand that we ought to preserve what is good in our past and throw away only the bad. China now is in a period of conflict between old and new currents and a large number of our people have nothing to follow after.

...To say that ancient loyalty was due to kings and, since now we have no kings, we do not need loyalty and can do as we please, is absolutely wrong. Now everybody who talks about democracy breaks down all the old moral standards, and the fundamental reason is right here. In a democracy it stands to reason that we should still show loyalty, not to princes but to the nation and to the people. Loyalty to four hundred millions must naturally be on a much higher level than loyalty to one individual; so I say that the fine moral quality of loyalty must still be cherished.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 4.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., pp. 124-125.

\textsuperscript{50} Sun was very impressed by the British philosopher's high regard for Chinese civilization. See ibid., pp. 136 & 138-139.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., pp. 126-128.
Among those traditional virtues, Sun considered genuine love for harmony and peace to be an outstanding quality of Chinese character. "In individual relationships great stress has been laid upon 'humility and deference'; in government the old saying was, 'He who delights not in killing a man can unify all men.'"52 Compared with foreign ideals such as "might is right," this pacifist morality was the true spirit of the Chinese race and the real meaning of cosmopolitanism. Nonetheless, Sun did not think that reviving the political and moral powers of China alone would advance her to a first place among the nations. He held that Chinese intellectual powers, which had created a splendid civilization but were now on the decline, also needed to be revived through learning the merits of the West: "In the study of science, for instance, this will mean the saving of two hundred years... now that we know how [to restore the standing of our state], we ought to follow the world currents and study the best features of Western nations; we certainly should go beyond other countries in what we study and cause the 'last to be first.'"53 With regard to what China should do after recovering her predominant position in the family of nations (a question Russell would be very concerned about), the farsighted leader again directed his countrymen to a traditional ideal—"Rescue the weak, lift up the fallen":

Because of this noble policy China prospered for thousands of years... If we want China to rise to power, we must not only restore our national standing, but we must also assume a great responsibility towards the world. If China cannot assume that responsibility, she will be a great disadvantage not an

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52 Ibid., p. 133.

53 Ibid., p. 145.
advantage to the world, no matter how strong she may be. What really is our duty to the world?... Only if we "rescue the weak and lift up the fallen" will we be carrying out the divine obligation of our nation. We must aid the weaker and smaller peoples and oppose the great powers of the world. If all the people of the country resolve upon this purpose, our nation will prosper; otherwise, there is no hope for us... This is the great responsibility which devolves upon our four hundred millions... you must all shoulder this responsibility and manifest the true spirit of our nation.54

- The Principle of Democracy

Sun's second principle concerned the establishment of a democratic polity which would prevent China from political disorders and civil wars. One achievement he made here was to instill republican ideas into the mind of his audiences: "From ancient times in China, men of great ambition have all wanted to be king... When we have a real republic, who will be king? The people, our four hundred millions, will be king."55 Such was Sun's basic definition of democracy, and the strength of his political philosophy lay in his acute observations of Chinese society as well as Western politics. For example, when mentioning the current proposals made by some intellectuals (such as those from the liberal or communist position) to fight for liberty and equality, he perceptively indicated that they were talking wide of the point. China's real weakness today, Sun argued, was not the lack of liberty and equality but the lack of political democracy:

foreigners criticize the Chinese...for being disunited as a sheet of loose sand... The [Chinese] people had little direct relation to the emperor beyond

54 Ibid., pp. 146-148.

55 Ibid., pp. 181 & 187.
paying him the annual grain tax — nothing more. Consequently, the political consciousness of the people has been very weak... To use the figure "loose sand," what is its chief characteristic? — Its absolute freedom, without which there can be no such thing as loose sand... [Therefore,] the trouble from which the Chinese are suffering is not lack of liberty...

In the revolutions of Europe, the people spent much effort and made untold sacrifices in their struggles for equality and liberty... But China's former inequality was not so serious as Europe's... Because of the earlier advance of government in China, the feudal system here was destroyed two thousand years ago... Chinese have never really understood what [liberty and equality] mean. The reason for this is that China's autocracy, in comparison with Europe's, has not been at all severe...

... China has never before had a war for liberty and equality. All the wars in China's millenniums of history have been struggles for the throne... Europe fought for [liberty and equality] over a hundred years ago, but the result was really democracy; only when the people won their rights did liberty and equality have a chance to survive. Without democracy, liberty and equality would have been but empty terms.\(^{56}\)

The other achievement Sun made was to design a constitutional form of government in which a group of specialists would be selected and prompted to work for the welfare of all the people. Through clarifying the powers of such a government and the rights of its citizens, Sun sought to resolve the tough issue of abusing the idea of equality that could accompany popular awakening and then cripple administrative ability.\(^{57}\) For instance, in commenting on a labor movement launched with slogans like "we workers do not want long-gowned leaders" and "we workers are fighting only for bread; we don't care about

\(^{56}\) Ibid., pp. 191, 198, 203-205, 222, 225, 235-236.

\(^{57}\) According to Sun, when the four political rights of the people (suffrage, recall, initiative, and referendum) control the five governing powers of the government (executive, legislative, judicial, examination, and supervisory), there will be a completely democratic government organ, and the strength of the people and of the government will be well balanced. See ibid., pp. 350-358.
politics,” Sun pointed out the blind spot of this kind of thinking: “Without good leadership the workers open their mouths only to blunder. Such labor organizations cannot prosper and will soon break up. They are too stupid if they do not know that bread is an economic problem and that politics and economics are closely related.”

But how could people with varying natural endowments and social statuses reconcile their different interests in the new republic? The devoted leader answered this question by preaching the moral ideal of service:

Everyone should make service, not exploitation, his aim. Those with greater intelligence and ability should serve thousands and ten thousands to the limit of their power and make thousands and ten thousands happy. Those with less intelligence and ability should serve tens and hundreds to the limit of their power and make tens and hundreds happy. The saying, “The skillful the slaves of the stupid” is just this principle. Those who have neither intelligence nor ability should still, to the limit of their individual power, each serve one another and make one another happy. In this way, although men now may vary in natural intelligence and ability, yet as moral ideals and the spirit of service prevail, they will certainly become more and more equal. This is the essence of equality.

- **The Principle of Livelihood**

Sun’s third principle concerned the development of a modern economy which would ensure China’s material prosperity and social harmony. To begin with, the nationalist offered a theoretical examination of the issues raised by Karl Marx, who, from his years of scientific study, concluded that all human history gravitated toward material forces and that class war was the driving force of social progress. Although praising Marx as a

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58 Ibid., p. 243.
great social philosopher, Sun forcefully opposed the concept of class struggle and the theory of surplus value. He contended that various measures like social and industrial reform, public ownership of transportation and communications, direct taxation, and socialized distribution could be taken to stop social evils and enhance human happiness. In view of the fact that Western society had recently evolved along this line and obtained positive results, he judged that society progressed through the adjustment of major economic interests rather than through the clash of interests:

mankind’s struggle for continuous existence has been the reason for society’s unceasing development, the law of social progress. Class war is not the cause of social progress, it is a disease developed in the course of social progress. The cause of the disease is the inability to subsist, and the result of the disease is war. What Marx gained through his studies of social problems was a knowledge of diseases in the course of social progress. Therefore, Marx can only be called a social pathologist; we cannot say that he is a social physiologist.  

China’s extreme poverty was another reason for Sun’s disapproval of applying communist methods to social reconstruction: “All of us have a share in the distressing poverty of the Chinese people. There is no especially rich class, there is only a general poverty. The ‘inequalities between rich and poor’ which the Chinese speak of are only differences within the poor class, differences in degree of poverty.” Accordingly, the prescription Sun proposed to improve China’s material conditions and prevent the emergence of social problems together was to adopt capitalism but modify it through such

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59 Ibid., p. 245.
60 Ibid., p. 391.
61 Ibid., p. 417.
policies as equalizing land ownership, regulating private capital, developing state industries, borrowing foreign capital and brains, renovating production techniques, and abolishing all unequal treaties. Without doubt, popular education must play a pivotal role in carrying out such a reconstruction plan. As Sun always emphasized, "The strength or weakness of a nation depends on the quality of its students... there can be no reconstruction without learning." 62 Besides intellectual progress, the affectionate leader considered ethical endeavors indispensable to the opening of a new, humane epoch in economic and social relations:

Chinese industry in the future shall be placed on a cooperative basis. Both politics and industry shall be thoroughly democratized, and every class will be dependent on every other class and all will live in an atmosphere of complete confidence and mutual love... In the industries to be developed, everybody shall have a due share in the benefits in proportion to his contribution to the work, enjoy the full fruits of his labor, obtain better working conditions, and have plenty of leisure to attend to matters outside of his bread-earning activities. In this way the workers will become more and more intelligent and enjoy adequate recreation and lead a happy life... It is my wish to see that all members of the nation be guaranteed opportunities to make a living and be completely free to order their own lives in their own way without outside interference. 63

**Efficacy of Openness, Eclecticism, and Construction**

At a glance, Sun Yat-sen's proposal for China's future development was quite in accord with the direction suggested by the pacifist Bertrand Russell and the Confucian

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62 Sun Yat-sen, 1912, 非學問無以建設 [Reconstruction is impossible without learning]; tr. Wei, Zen, & Chao, 1994, Prescriptions for saving China, p. 80.

63 Sun Yat-sen, 1912, 中國之鐵路計畫與民生主義 [Railway plans for China and the
Liang Shu-ming. On the one hand, he valued those traditional virtues which could continue to supply the Chinese race with spiritual strength in the modern age. On the other hand, he recognized the West’s great achievements in developing various kinds of methods and institutions to enhance human happiness. To transform China into a revitalized nation-state would require a synthesis of Eastern and Western merits. And Sun’s approach was to use Western theories and experience as points of reference and formulate new solutions on the basis of China’s unique situations and particular needs. For instance, in one section discussing how to reform the Chinese government, the nationalist stated:

If we copy Western government as we are copying Western material science, we shall be making a great mistake... For thousands of years Chinese social sentiments, customs, and habits have differed widely from those of Western society. Hence methods of social control in China [should be] different from those used in the West... We must think out a radically new method; if we only blindly follow others, we shall work serious injury to our national welfare and to the people’s living... Only as we adapt ourselves, according to our own social conditions, to modern world tendencies, can we hope to reform our society and to advance our nation...

Can we find a real way to carry out democratic government? Although we cannot wholly copy Europe and America, we can observe them and study their experience in democracy very carefully... Western nations...have gained not a little experience in the past century, and this experience, along with their various new theories, should be used as data in our study. Otherwise, we shall waste time [on making a lot of mistakes] or simply follow in the [past wrong] tracks of the West. 64

It was due to such open attitude and careful consideration that Sun was able to not only point out to his countrymen where to look, but also offer them concrete programs

principle of livelihood]; translation from The three principles of the people, 1990, pp. 222-223.
that were sufficiently reasonable and realistic for implementation in China. The latter accomplishment was especially beyond comparison. Of course, comparable discussions on the efficacy of foreign ideas can also be found in the works of other figures we have mentioned. Most noteworthy would be the communist leader Mao Tse-tung, who, in a speech delivered in 1941, attempted to hammer home his belief that Chinese reality, not foreign doctrine, ought to be the communists’ major concern:

Many of our comrades regard this ignorance, or partial knowledge, of our own history not as a shame but on the contrary as something to be proud of... Since they know nothing about their own country they turn to foreign lands... during recent decades many foreign-returned students have made this mistake. They have merely been phonographs, forgetting that their duty is to make something useful to China out of the imported stuff they have learned. The Communist Party has not escaped this infection.\(^6^5\)

In spite of such similarity, the Marxist and the nationalist differed fundamentally in many respects. As some critics observe, most significant is their respective concepts of revolution.\(^6^6\) For Mao, “a revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.”\(^6^7\) In this sense, revolution meant nothing more than power struggle or complete destruction, and the principle of “continuous revolution” even

\(^6^4\) Sun Yat-sen, 1927, The three principles of the people, pp. 288 & 291-293.

\(^6^5\) Mao Tse-tung, 1941, 改造我們的學習 [Reform our study]; tr. White & Jacoby, 1980, Thunder out of China, p. 238.

\(^6^6\) For example, see Liu Xiaogan, 1996, 毛澤東與孫中山：關於革命與建設 [Mao Tse-tung and Sun Yat-sen: On revolution and construction], in 五四後人物 - 思想論集 [Characters and Events after the May Fourth Movement], pp. 49-71.

\(^6^7\) Mao Tse-tung, 1927, 湖南農民運動考察報告 [Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan]; translation from Selected works of Mao Tse-tung, 1961, vol. 1, p. 28.
guided the latter half of his life.  

By contrast, Sun tended to limit the scope of the fight and identify revolution with construction: “Revolution involves extraordinary destruction such as the eradication of the imperial system and the overthrow of dictatorial rule. Given this extraordinary destruction, there must be extraordinary construction. This means that revolutionary destruction and revolutionary construction must proceed side by side like our two feet or the two wings of a bird.” In this sense, “the conclusion of national construction [is] the completion of the Revolution.” Such essential difference to some extent explains why Mao ended up neglecting Chinese reality and rejecting all things foreign (except Marxism), while Sun left his beloved country several well-planned schemes, in which ethics, democracy, and science would be really fulfilled to lift her to the level of a modern state.

In short, openness, eclecticism, and construction were Sun’s prescriptions for China to meet the changing, confusing, and increasing demands of the modern age. What would be Dewey’s response to the ex-President’s principles and programs? We have seen in the previous reviews that the American philosopher was not a purely cultural reformer. His broad suggestions for creating a hopeful China included not only

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70 In addition to The three principles of the people, Sun’s important schemes include 民權初步 [First steps in democracy], 孫文學说 [The doctrine of Sun Yat-sen], 資業計劃 [The international development of China], 建國大綱 [The outline of constructing the Republic], etc. See 國父全書 [Complete works of Sun Yat-sen], 1960.
intellectual renewal but also economic, political, and social democracy. Accordingly, the two men should have little difficulty in agreeing with each other, though there is no direct evidence that they ever exchanged ideas about these issues. One of Dewey’s lectures on ethics happened to sum up such points of similarity very nicely:

The worth of democracy lies in the cultivation of open-mindedness which enables people to be concerned with the welfare of society rather than indulging in the pursuit of individual self-interest. We should be aware that it is one thing to love our country, but quite another to be anti-foreign, which is a negative sort of feeling. A well-devised plan for construction is indispensable if the Chinese people are to build democratic institutions and to promote the welfare of their society. It is far easier to indulge in sentimentality than it is to do constructive work. I hope that you will concentrate your energies on constructive enterprises, such as the popularization of education,...the development of industry,...and the enhancement of both productive and consumer power.

The aim of democracy is the cultivation of creative power, of independent thinking, and of broadmindedness. I suggest that the Chinese people might well forego sentimentality and anti-foreignism for the time being, and concentrate on the broader aim of developing a social spirit, or fraternity, which is the central element in democratic institutions.71

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CHAPTER 6

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEWEY

IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE EDUCATION

Education, as we see, is a way a civilization renews itself. This study has attempted so far to reveal the virtues or defects of the major positions concerning which course Chinese civilization should take and how modern education can help to arrive at that chosen destination. From the proceeding chapters, one might draw plenty of practical implications about the critical issues mentioned in the last part of Chapter 1, such as the aim of education, the type of knowledge, the way of thinking, the method of teaching, the shift of belief systems, the object of education, the suitability of foreign doctrines, etc. Moreover, it should be apparent that three elements essential to the progress of Chinese civilization have emerged from the disputes initiated by the May Fourth intellectuals: ethics, democracy, and science. The stronger arguments in this continuing dialogue have all indicated that a new China that lacks any of the three elements will not give
much hope either to its people or to the wider world. The question left is: What is the significance of John Dewey's philosophy for the future development of modern Chinese education?

The Problem of Literature about Dewey in China

As mentioned in the literature review section, Dewey is probably the most controversial foreign figure in twentieth-century Chinese education. During the May Fourth period, he was widely revered for the progressive messages he brought in. Thirty years later, in the same country, educational ideas associated with him were forcibly condemned as poison necessary to be extirpated. Like his fate in his homeland, Dewey has suffered from substantial distortion as well as unwarranted attack in communist China. Apparently affected by Dewey's declining reputation, recent English studies of his visit to China have been largely caught in this controversy and have tended to emphasize the "failure" of the liberal experiments conducted by Dewey's followers.

For example, the historian Chow Tse-tsung believes that the overfocusing on cultural issues by Chinese liberals is the major cause of their waning influence: "The significant economic problem discussed by Dewey did not attract enough attention from his Chinese students and friends and other Chinese liberals... Few of them considered seriously the problem of the application of democracy in China in terms of economic

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Another historian, Maurice Meisner, contends that in the Chinese context Dewey's doctrine was "neither conservative nor radical but largely irrelevant," because the extreme poverty and the widespread illiteracy of the masses, the oppression of foreign imperialism, and the lack of responsible government all negated "the possibility of the general social consensus that Dewey's program presupposed." For these external constraints, Jerome Grieder has a more direct and conclusive comment: "Liberalism failed in China...because Chinese life was steeped in violence and revolution, and liberalism offers no answers to the great problems of violence and revolution." The most standardized interpretation of Dewey's achievement in China is made by Barry Keenan, who holds that the American philosopher had spoken very little about power and was thus unable to see the inapplicability of his theory: "Deweyan experimentalism, as a way of thinking, as a way of acting politically, and as a component of democratic education, offered no strategy his followers could use to affect political power. Militarists dominated the cultural and social environment as they did the political environment. Without such a strategy,...[his followers'] reformism was paralyzed by

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dilemma. Critics like Thomas Berry and Amaury de Riencourt even go so far as to declare that Dewey helped to turn the Chinese people against their own better humanist traditions and had to be responsible for the victory of Marxism in China.6

Obviously, Berry’s and de Riencourt’s charges were groundless. From previous chapters we have known that Dewey never encouraged the Chinese to turn their backs on their tradition, and the rise of Marxism in China was due to socio-politico-economic reasons rather than the introduction of experimentalism. Yet those judgments made by Chow, Meisner, and Grieder are basically indisputable — it was a chaotic and hostile environment that precluded the possibility of making gradual progress, and those dedicated reformers who avoided the issue of revolution would be doomed to failure. On the latter point, Keenan is right to say that Dewey did not offer his Chinese followers a program of action to deal with militarists. But his conclusion is problematic. Although Dewey was heard by many Chinese, he was after all a foreign visitor. It would be unreasonable to ask him to construct a revolutionary strategy as Mao Tse-tung or Sun Yat-sen did. Besides, Keenan’s work has an essential weakness: he is discussing a prominent philosopher without directly confronting his thought, much less care about his insights into the tough issues regarding the transformation of Chinese civilization. The liberal reforms in China did fail, but this does not mean that cultural and, especially, intellectual issues were of no importance to the Chinese. In the long run, the problems


6 See Berry, 1960, Dewey’s influence in China, in Blewett ed., John Dewey: His thought
acutely perceived by Dewey and Hu Shih on the two aspects would turn out to be more and more serious. As Maoist policy has demonstrated, without enough intellectual strength on the part of both the leaders and the public, ethics and democracy will easily become slogans rather than realities.

In addition, those studies that are focused on the “failure” of progressive education in China will have difficulties in explaining why the communists were so eager to root out Dewey’s “reactionary” influence and why contemporary Chinese are still interested in the American philosopher’s ideas. It seems that Chinese educators responded to Dewey enthusiastically not just because he was famous or because he could link education to social progress. There must be something that China’s traditional philosophy of education had fundamentally lacked but was efficiently provided by Dewey’s ideas. Throughout the past decades, some scholars have found signs showing that Dewey’s educational principles are more or less practiced on both mainland China and Taiwan.⁷ It is at this level that most literature produced by Western researchers cannot give us much information. To understand the significance of Dewey in China, we have to go back to consult the Chinese themselves.

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The Significance of Dewey in China

A striking similarity of the five Chinese leaders discussed in this study is their strong concern about science, especially those issues regarding epistemology (i.e., what can be known) and methodology (i.e., how knowledge can be obtained). On closer inspection, the five were all directly or indirectly associated with Dewey through these issues and came to stress the importance of actual experience, action, investigation, or experimental methods. In addition, a comment made by Hsu Ko-shih (許恪士, b. 1897), who once followed Dewey from city to city to hear his lectures and later became a professor of the Philosophy Department of National Taiwan University, was worth noting. In 1967, Hsu told his interviewer Keenan that “he was fascinated by Dewey’s attention to the methods of attaining knowledge and truth, which contrasted with the assumptions of the Chinese classics. The five stages of thinking and the critical method described in Dewey’s How We Think posed an alternative to the notion that fixed principles of truth lay in the accumulated experience of great men.”

This phenomenon cannot be explained as a casual coincidence. As we have seen in the 1923 debate on science and metaphysics, many Chinese intellectuals had by then been aware that their traditional philosophy lacked an effective epistemology and methodology to produce reliable knowledge and solve the various problems of China. In this regard, Dewey’s experimentalism seemed to be of particular value in the Chinese context, since it “approached epistemological issues in a genetic and naturalistic fashion, and aimed to

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understand how we acquire problem-solving competence in a great variety of contexts. In the realm of social and political philosophy, Dewey conceived of science in the broadest possible way as an attitude, a method, and an outlook based on facts, openness, and publicity. His pedagogy owes much to his theory of knowing and places intelligence and creativity in a central position in the learning process (see Chapter 2). Such emphasis on intellectual development, together with the moral purpose (i.e., democracy) behind it, should be one of the major reasons for Dewey’s lasting appeal for Chinese educators.

Since the 1980s, the changing political and economic situations in mainland China have brought about a new epoch. It is reported that “both policy-makers and intellectuals have tried hard to grasp at an ideology that would guide China into a more definite and better future.” As a result, a serious reevaluation of Dewey’s philosophy of education has begun to emerge. Instead of continuing to vilify the American philosopher, the focus now is on whether his ideas can be used to improve current Chinese education.

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10 For example, two professors from Hong Kong, Ou Tsun-chen (吳俊升) and Juan Yen-ming (阮雁鳴), have expressed their deep appreciation of Dewey’s philosophy in terms of this feature. See Ou Tsun-chen, 1953, 杜威的知識論 [Dewey’s epistemology], in 教育與文化論文選集 [Essays on education and culture], pp. 259-286; Juan Yen-ming, 1966, 杜威學說與中國教育 [The educational theory of John Dewey and the education of China], pp. 74-79 & 161-167.

According to the literature produced up to now, mainland Chinese educators have been primarily concerned about Dewey’s thought in terms of such theoretical issues as educational purpose (for individual growth or social development?), curriculum and instruction (teacher-centered or child-centered?), learning by doing (experience-oriented or subject-oriented?), etc. Although some of them still classify experimentalism as “bourgeois” philosophy serving the interests of “capitalist” society, many agree that the current educational system can critically borrow and then benefit from certain useful elements of such a philosophy.

On the other hand, a few scholars better trained in philosophy have recently begun to delve into the more liberal aspects of experimentalism. They not only pay special attention to Dewey’s view of democracy, freedom, individualism, and science, but also well recognize the close connection between education and these values. It seems that after so many years of search for a new road, some Chinese are again willing to listen to

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14 For example, see Ju Shiqun (朱士群), 1997, 杜威的自由、民主與科學統一觀 [Dewey’s unity of freedom, democracy, and science], in Chen Wentong ed., 現代西方政治哲學引論 [An introduction to modern Western political philosophy], pp. 249-262; Chu Hongqi, 1998, 杜威教育
Dewey with their whole heart and proceed in the frame of mind he suggested. In that case, what would be the American philosopher's advice on the current aspirations and efforts to reconstruct China, if he were still alive? I believe that an argument Dewey made during World War II has expressed his central philosophical message to Americans. And here I would venture the judgment that he would probably say something similar to encourage the contemporary Chinese:

Democracy is not an easy road to take and follow. On the contrary, it is "a supremely difficult one. Upon the whole we are entitled to take courage from the fact that it has worked as well as it has done. But to this courage we must add, if our courage is to be intelligent rather than blind, the fact that successful maintenance of democracy demands the utmost in use of the best available methods to procure a social knowledge that is reasonably commensurate with our physical knowledge, and the invention and use of forms of social engineering reasonably commensurate with our technological abilities in physical affairs.

This then is the task indicated. It is, if we employ large terms, to humanize science. This task in the concrete cannot be accomplished save as the fruit of science, which is named technology, is also humanized. And the task can be executed in the concrete only as it is broken up into vital applications of intelligence in a multitude of fields to a vast diversity of problems so that science and technology may be rendered servants of the democratic hope and faith. The cause is capable of inspiring loyalty in thought and deed. But there has to be joined to aspiration and effort the formation of free, wide-ranging, trained attitudes of observation and understanding such as incorporate within themselves, as a matter so habitual as to be unconscious, the vital principles of scientific method. In this achievement science, education, and the democratic cause meet as one. May we be equal to the occasion.15

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