China as a Contesting Ground for Ideologies: Examining the Social and Ideological Forces that Influence China's Educational System

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Abstract

From 1919 to 1921, John Dewey travelled and lectured in China. He received a thunderous welcome and exercised a tremendous influence in China, however, very little has been written about it.

The first purpose of this article is to investigate Dewey's visit to China and his influence on Chinese education. The second is to examine the various social and ideological forces with which Dewey's progressivism co-existed and interacted in shaping China's current educational system, and to determine which force(s) exert the strongest influence.

China's educational system today is defined and guided by a synthesis of various social and ideological forces—traditional Confucianism, Deng's pragmatism, Maoism, and

Résumé

De 1919 à 1921, John Dewey a voyagé et donné des conférences partout en Chine. Cependant, on ne trouve que très peu de documentation à ce sujet, et ce, malgré une réception étourdissante ainsi qu'une énorme influence exercée sur la Chine.

Le premier but de cet article est d'étudier la visite qu'a fait Dewey en Chine et aussi l'influence qu'il a exercée sur l'éducation chinoise. Le deuxième but est d'examiner les diverses forces sociales et idéologiques avec lesquelles le progressivisme de Dewey a coexisté et interagi pour façonner ensemble le système d'éducation actuel en Chine, et pour déterminer les forces ayant exercé la plus grande influence.

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Dewey's progressivism. These forces, although often theoretically exclusive of one another, have in practice been woven into the tapestry of the system at all levels. This paper encourages readers to learn from others in improving their own educational systems.

Le système d'éducation actuel en Chine est défini et dirigé par une synthèse de diverses forces sociales et idéologiques : le confucianisme classique, le pragmatisme de Deng, le maoïsme, et le progressivisme de Dewey. Ces forces, bien qu'elles soient souvent théoriquement exclusives l'une de l'autre, ont généralement été tissées dans la tapisserie de tous les niveaux du système. Dans cet article, les lecteurs sont encouragés à apprendre des actions des autres lorsqu'ils s'apprêtent à améliorer leur propre système d'éducation.

Introduction

John Dewey may well be the single most influential philosopher of education the United States has produced, and his impact on all forms of education is immense (Elias & Merriam, 1995). His intimate association with recent Chinese history and education is among the most interesting, but the least known (Su, 1995). From May 1919 to July 1921, Dewey travelled extensively in China, lecturing on philosophy, in general, and the philosophy of education, in particular. Specifically, he addressed topics such as the goal of education, the relationship between school and society, moral education and democracy, and experiential learning. Among the many nations and regions he visited during his lifetime, Dewey spent more time in China than in any other foreign country. Researchers claim that China was the foreign country in which Dewey exercised his greatest influence, particularly in the field of education (Clopton & Ou, 1973; Su, 1995; Xu, 1992). According to his daughter, Jane (Dewey, 1939), China had become the country nearest to his heart after his own.

This paper serves two purposes. First, it attempts to fill a gap in Dewey's scholarship by investigating his visits to China and his influence there, especially on the development of contemporary education. During his tenure in China, Dewey challenged Confucianism, the philosophy that dominated

China's educational landscape at the time. In Mao's "new China," Dewey's ideas met with heavy criticism; however, recent research (Su, 1995, 1996) showed that the American educator's progressivism was gaining new momentum and acceptance. Therefore, this paper's second purpose is to examine the various social and ideological forces with which Dewey's progressivism co-existed and interacted to bring China's educational system to its current state and to determine which of these forces exert the strongest influence today.

The paper is divided into five parts. Part one starts with a review of the major theories of Dewey's progressive education. Part two provides a brief introduction to the history of Chinese education, especially of Confucian education, in order to gain a better understanding of the historical context of Dewey's visit. The third part investigates Dewey's visit to China and his influence on education in China. The fourth part compares Dewey with Mao Zedong, who founded Communist China and led the campaign against Dewey's progressivism in the 1950s. The final part of the paper examines the various social and ideological forces that co-exist with Dewey's progressivism and considers which of these forces exerts the strongest influence on China's current educational system.

Dewey's Progressive Education

Major Theories of Progressive Education

John Dewey is widely regarded as the chief exponent of progressive education. In reviewing Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Experience and Education* (1938), the following major tenets of progressive education are identified.

Growth as an Aim of Education

Dewey (1916) believed that personal growth is the ultimate aim of education. Growth is possible because human beings possess "plasticity," or the capacity to retain and carry over from prior experience factors that modify subsequent activities. This plasticity signifies our human capacity to acquire habits or to develop definite dispositions and, by extension, the capacity of a thoughtfully constructed educational environment to shape these. Dewey rejected the idea that education is preparation for work. Instead, he believed that schools should focus on the present lives of learners.

Education for Social Reform and Reconstruction

Dewey (1916) believed that education had a role to play in social reform and reconstruction. In his view, education has both a conservative and a reconstructive function. In *Democracy and Education* (1916), he placed education at the very heart of social reform. He argued that education would flourish

if it took place in a democracy; in turn, democracy would develop only if there were true education. For Dewey, a democratic society is committed to change and a democratic education produces a society that is in a constant and positively directed state of growth and development.

Child-Centred Approach to Education

For Dewey (1916), the primary task of education was to develop the potential of the child. Dewey and other progressives contended that people are born neither inherently "good" nor "bad." Rather, we are born with unlimited potential for development and growth. Dewey argued that a person could achieve a more satisfying life through the application of the scientific method and experimental thinking, and he emphasized the interests, needs, and desires of learners in forging educational experiences. The teacher's task is not just to capitalize on the interests that already exist in the learner, but also to pique his or her interest in subjects that are deemed educationally desirable.

Learning by Experience

Dewey (1916) defined education as the reconstruction and reorganization of experience, which increases our ability to direct the course of subsequent experience. In 1938, he distinguished between traditional education, in which students learn from texts and teachers, and progressive education, in which learning occurs through experience. Experience was described as the interaction of the individual with the environment; interaction and continuity were two fundamental principles stated to constitute experience (Dewey, 1938).

Problem Solving

According to Dewey (1916), intelligence is developed through the solving of problems, which ideally should occur in a co-operative social context in which people can work collaboratively. Problem solving, both as an individual and a group process, plays a central role in Dewey's overall concept of education. He believed that problem-solving activities in educational settings not only develop intelligence and facilitate growth, but also develop problem-solving skills that transfer to life in general. According to Dewey, learning is not dictated by the teacher; rather, the teacher first attempts to help the learner identify problems and then acts as a resource.

The New Teacher-Student Relationship

Dewey (1938) argued that in traditional education, books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past. Teachers serve as mere agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct are enforced. Dewey defined education as the reconstruction of experiences through interactive processes with one's

environment, and learning as the outcome of the learner's personal experiences. The educator's task, therefore, is to guide, direct, and evaluate these experiences.

Introduction of Practical and Utilitarian Education

The traditional or liberal philosophy of education confined the aims of education to intellectual development through a study of certain academic disciplines. Dewey's progressivism broadened the concept of education through the introduction of a practical, pragmatic, and utilitarian approach to curriculum development. Dewey (1916) also argued that education should be both liberal and practical, that education for work should be balanced by education for leisure. He stated that a broadened view of education "reconciles liberal nurture with training in social serviceableness, with ability to share effectively and happily in occupations which are productive" (p. 260).

Progressivism and Adult Education

Many people associate Dewey's theory of education with the schooling of children, but, in fact, his ideas are also applicable to other forms of education and learning. Elias and Merriam (1995) pointed out that "progressivism has had a greater impact upon the adult education movement in the United States than any other single school of thought" (p. 45). The authors also maintained that all major adult education theorists, including Knowles, Rogers, Houle, Tyler, Lindeman, Bergevin, and Freire, were influenced by progressive thought. Dewey's (1916) argument that education should be a lifetime commitment laid the basis for lifelong learning. He stated:

> Education must be reconceived, not as merely a preparation for maturity (whence our absurd idea that it should stop after adolescence) but as a continuous growth of the mind and a continuous illumination of life. In a sense, the school can give us only the instrumentalities of mental growth; the rest depends upon an absorption and interpretation of experience. Real education comes after we leave school and there is no reason why it should stop before death. (p. 25)

The preceding discussion demonstrates that Dewey's progressive education differs from traditional education in many aspects. For example, instead of learning from texts and teachers, progressive educators maintain that learning occurs through experience and solving problems. Instead of using a teacher-centred approach, progressivists advocate student-centred education. Progressivism rejects the idea that education is solely for the purpose of preparing for work and argues instead that the ultimate aim of education is personal growth. Furthermore, progressive educators maintain that education plays an important role in social reform and reconstruction. Finally, according to progressivists, education should be a lifelong pursuit.

History of Chinese Education

To facilitate a better understanding of Dewey's visit to China, this part of the paper briefly reviews the historical development of Chinese education, especially of Confucian education.

Confucius (551-479 B.C.)

Confucius was the greatest and most highly revered of all traditional Chinese philosophers. He was not only a great philosopher, but also a great educator, who has greatly influenced Chinese education since the Han Dynasty (207 B.C.–220 A.D.). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss Confucius in detail; however, it is necessary to introduce some of his most important political and educational ideas as a way to understand the sweeping impact of this great sage.

One of Confucius's most important philosophies was *Ren,* or benevolence. Its fundamental meaning was "to love others"; it also meant "self-cultivation." Benevolence included filial piety and loyalty. The purpose of advocating benevolence was to establish a stable and peaceful social order.

Confucians as a group regarded education as the most important thing in life. Confucius said: "In teaching there should be no distinction of classes" (Legge, 1960, p. 305). This is one of his greatest educational contributions. He advocated that people should have education whether they were rich or poor, although this tends to be a contemporary interpretation of his philosophy. Galt (1951) argued that during Confucius's time, there was no conception of real democracy in China.

Besides basic educational theories, Confucius also suggested some specific studying and teaching methods. He developed the method of elicitation and advocated a discussion method among his disciples and himself. There is no evidence that Confucius advocated the recitation method; it was his followers who distorted his teaching methods and overemphasized rote learning and memorization. In fact, Confucius encouraged people to understand the meaning of the context and apply it to practical use. He said:

> Though a man may be able to recite the three hundred odes, yet if, when entrusted with a governmental change, he knows not how to act, or if, when sent to any quarter on a mission, he cannot give his replies unassisted, not withstanding the extent of his learning, of what practical use is it. (Legge, 1960, p. 265)

Confucius taught rites, music, archery, chariot, writing, and arithmetic. His curriculum content exhibited a kind of intermingling of moral and intellectual education (Zhu, 1992). Rites and music were the most important subjects according to Confucius. He compiled his own textbooks, including the

Book of Poetry, the *Book of History,* the *Book of Rites,* the *Book of Music* (which, unfortunately, is lost), the *Book of Changes,* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals.* His other five books were revered as the Five Classics by later Confucian educators and students alike and were recited by thousands of scholars in preparation for the Civil Service Examination.

Education after Confucius to 1911

What is particularly interesting in the evolution of education in China is not so much the finer points of its content, but its overarching ethos and values, which may help us to understand educational practice before Dewey's visit (Zhou, 1988). Since the Han Dynasty (207 B.C.–220 A.D.), Confucian philosophy and educational ideology has played an essential role in shaping the Chinese educational system. P. W. Kuo (1914), Dewey's first Chinese doctoral student at Columbia University Teachers College, pointed out that this high veneration for Confucius and the principles he represented had an important bearing upon the subsequent history of Chinese education. From the Han Dynasty forward, Kuo argued, Chinese education became less liberal than it once was, and the content of education became narrowly confined to the Confucian classics.

The primary goal of traditional Confucian education was to prepare the ruling elite and to mould the character of its citizenry (Zhou, 1988). The whole process of learning was geared toward the memorization of ideas of antiquity, by way of the Five Classics of Confucius and the Four Books—*The Analects*, *The Great Learning*, *The Way of the Mean*, and *The Mencius*—compiled by Zhu Xi, a neo-Confucian scholar in the Song Dynasty (960–1127). These works constituted the content that had to be mastered for the Civil Service Examination. Success in the examination marked the end of learning (Cheng, Jin, & Gu, 1999). This curriculum, with its sole reliance on classics, excluded natural sciences and technical subjects. Furthermore, for centuries the emphasis in Chinese education was on rote learning. This form of teaching tended to suppress the spirit of free inquiry and did not encourage any initiative on the part of students. It was assumed that they would be submissive. The passivity of the learner was further compounded by the status and power of the teacher. In traditional China, teachers were listed among the five beings who should be most admired by society: the God of Heaven, the God of the Earth, the emperor, parents, and the teacher (Zhou, 1988).

Dewey's Visit to China and an Evaluation of his Influence

This part of the paper explores Dewey's visit to and his influence in China; it includes the historical context before Dewey's visit in 1919 and a review of

his visit and lectures. Finally, an evaluation is provided of his visit from both Chinese and American perspectives.

Historical Background Before Dewey's Visit

Dewey visited China at a very significant time in Chinese history. The Opium War in 1840 marked the decay and decline of the feudal dynasty and heightened the ensuing social crisis. Many intellectuals began to turn toward the West for solutions and alternatives for reinvigorating the nation. They recognized the need to learn Western science and technology and otherwise reform the old system of education. In 1911, Dr. Sun Yat-sen led the Democratic Revolution, overthrowing the rule of the last dynasty and establishing the Republic of China. The following year, a new Ministry of Education was established, which went on to devise a new educational system for the entire country.

However, the democratic government soon lost its power to the warlords, triggering the famous May Fourth Movement in 1919. In one sense, it was a nationwide student movement opposing Japanese imperialism and domestic Chinese corruption; more broadly, it was a struggle between Eastern and Western civilization. Was China to threaten her own culture and traditions by embracing the Western ideals of democracy and scientific inquiry? Confucianism was challenged and criticized as part of this movement, and Confucius himself was regarded as the symbol dividing the new culture from the old. As a result, classics were forbidden in all schools. For the first time in Chinese history, Confucianism, a force that had bound and directed the Chinese way of life for more than 2,000 years, was criticized and cast aside. It was during these most critical years of modern Chinese history that Dewey, an established scholar in American educational philosophy and a Columbia University professor, was called upon by his former students in China to speak before the professors and students of the new Chinese universities.

Dewey's Visit to China

Dewey arrived in Shanghai on May 1, 1919 (Clopton & Ou, 1973). His original intention was to stay only a few months in China. As he became more fascinated by the country's struggle for a unified and independent democracy, he and his wife, Alice Dewey, altered their plan to return to the United States in the summer of 1919. Dewey applied to Columbia University for another year's leave and stayed in China for a total of two years and two months (Keenan, 1977). During this time, he travelled to 12 of the then 22 provinces, giving speeches in most of the cities and towns he visited, often to overflowing audiences.

Dewey's Lectures

From 1919 to 1921, Dewey addressed Chinese audiences from some 78 different lecture forums, including several series of between 15 and 20 lectures a piece (Keenan, 1977). Major Chinese journals and literary supplements throughout the country reprinted the Chinese versions of these lectures; five anthologies were published as well. Nearly 100,000 copies of his principal series of lectures in Beijing (a 500-page book) were in circulation throughout China in 1921. Some continued to be reprinted for the next three decades, until the founding of the People's Republic of China. Clopton and Ou (1973) recorded his five major series of lectures in Beijing, a total of 58 lectures that included "three lectures on modern tendencies in education … sixteen lectures on social and political philosophy … sixteen lectures on philosophy of education … fifteen lectures on ethics … [and] eight lectures on types of thinking" (pp. 7–9).

Dewey based his lectures largely on three of his own books: *The School and Society* (1900), *Democracy and Education* (1916), and *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920). Generally, his audiences were undergraduate students with little background in Western thought. A number of Dewey's former students interpreted his lectures into Chinese; the translation and the publications in the Chinese journals were a relatively accurate version of what he actually said (Keenan, 1977).

Modern Science, Democracy, and Education

Dewey's lectures in China fell under three main themes: modern science, democracy, and education (Keenan, 1977). Some of these themes have already been touched upon; they are presented here for comparison with traditional Confucian education. Keenan (1977) argued that perhaps the most characteristic aspect of Dewey's lectures in China was his insistence that the fields of philosophy, education, and political theory incorporate modern science. Dewey linked the democratising of society directly to the scientific revolution. His audiences in China were introduced to democracy and the philosophy of experimentalism in the same breath, with both portrayed as related developments in the history of Western thought.

Dewey's series of lectures on education usually dedicated as much as one-third of their content to defining the revolution in knowledge that led to the erosion of the authority of tradition. He attacked the notion of teachers passing knowledge on to students as if that knowledge were ready-made and enshrined as permanent truth. Education could be liberated from passive learning by conceiving of knowledge not as an end in itself, but as an instrument for intelligently directing human activity.

In his China lectures, Dewey felt it important to emphasize the child-centred curriculum: a shifting of emphasis from the subject matter to the

growth of the child. He dedicated one of his first lectures in Beijing to a discussion of the natural instincts and inherent dispositions of a child, which he considered the natural foundation of education. Dewey felt that child-centred education should be a priority for China as a departure from the stratified society or authoritarian tradition that tended to view teaching as simply keeping children still and "pouring in" accepted subject matter. If a child were being conditioned to occupy a predetermined role and status, packaged knowledge might prepare him or her for the future. But in Dewey's vision for a democratic China, there had to be equal opportunity for each child to develop his or her potentialities and become a participating citizen. Dewey further noted that in a period of rapid social change, his recommended reforms would build the younger generation's capacity to adapt to new conditions.

The content of Dewey's lectures in China certainly could have earned him the right to represent and incarnate the "Mr. Science" and "Mr. Democracy" slogans popular among liberal reformers since 1915 (Clopton & Ou, 1973). There is no doubt that when Dewey was in China, he delivered the message of science and democracy to his Chinese audiences. At the same time, he attacked the authority of the traditional Confucian education, both explicitly and implicitly.

An Evaluation of Dewey's Influence

Although Dewey influenced China in many ways, this section focuses more specifically on his impact upon education. Dewey's influence is assessed from both American and Chinese perspectives.

American Evaluation

In the United States, the focal point of contention is whether the Dewey experiment in China was in large part a success or a failure (Su, 1995). This debate took place among researchers such as Clopton and Ou (1973) and Keenan (1977). Clopton and Ou maintained that Dewey's influence on Chinese education was significant and lasting. They claimed his influence on Chinese education to be general, and even total. Dewey's philosophy of education dominated the teaching of educational theory in all Chinese teachers' universities and colleges for many years. The success of his influence on education was also evident in practice. It was manifested in forming educational aims and principles, making educational policies, and revising curriculum and teaching methods. Clopton and Ou concluded that of all Western educators, Dewey most influenced the course of Chinese education.

Keenan (1977) saw Dewey's influence on Chinese education in a different way. He argued that Dewey's experimentalism in China was, for the most part and in the end, a failure. Keenan seemed to believe that although

Dewey profoundly impressed his Chinese audiences, he did not leave a lasting message. Dewey's influence on education, though original and decisive, was not enough to overcome strong opposition from Confucian scholars and Marxists. Confucian scholars objected to the iconoclastic attitude adopted toward the cultural traditions of the past. Marxists, such as Mao and his followers, saw a valid path to the modern world in Chinese communism. Dewey's liberalism simply failed to take hold and grow in the chaotic, old China.

Chinese Evaluation

A second perspective on Dewey's influence comes from Chinese scholars. While some "praise him as a saint," others "condemn him as an enemy" (Su, 1995, p. 310). For the purposes of discussion, a historical review of Chinese responses to Dewey can be categorized into three stages. The first stage covers the 1920s to the 1940s, when Dewey's pragmatic educational theory dominated the Chinese education field. The American's influence on Chinese education was intensive and prominent. Nearly all of his educational works were translated into Chinese, and some of them were used as textbooks in teacher education. His ideas were also adopted in the transformation of China's educational system (Ou, 1970; Zhou, 1991). His former students and disciples in China (e.g., Chen Heqin, Hu Shi, and Tao Xingzhi, among several others) played an important role in implementing Dewey's essential ideas. Many of these individuals were already intellectual leaders in the country.

The second stage was from the 1950s to the 1970s, after the new People's Republic was founded in 1949. This period of time was characterized by severe criticism and a complete reversal of Deweyan experimentalism (Su, 1995). Dewey was portrayed as "anti-Marxist," "reactionary," "a defender of American imperialism," and an "enemy of the Chinese people" (Chao, 1950; Chen, 1957). These criticisms were based on some of the arguments he made in his lectures in China and in his writings. One example was his opposition to the use of violence to overthrow the old system. Although Marxists believed that communism would win the final victory in the world, Dewey maintained that the future was highly uncertain. Because of his emphasis on children's interests and experiences in the educational process, his educational ideas were criticized as lacking discipline, teacher authority, and rigour. In sum, critics called Dewey's theories "poisonous and harmful" to China (Su, 1995).

Critical response to Dewey shifted again in the latest stage, which began in the 1980s and continues to the present. Over this period, the political and philosophical climate in China moved from Marxism to pragmatism. As the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping put it, "No matter if it is a white cat or black cat; as long as it catches a mouse, it is a good cat" (Su, 1995, p. 315). This famous quote proposed that if the economic theories and practices of

capitalist countries had resulted in a better living for the ordinary people, then there must be something of value for the Chinese people to learn from and to apply to their own situation. Deng's political and economic pragmatism paved the way for Chinese intellectuals to become infatuated once again with Western pragmatism.

The new political situation sparked a serious re-evaluation of Dewey's influence on Chinese education. Moving beyond the blanket denouncements of the Communist era, Chinese thinkers turned to more critical appraisals, seeking ways to borrow and adapt Dewey's ideas for China's educational needs. Su (1995) argued that this period of re-evaluation is in many ways drastically different from the early embrace of Deweyan education in the 1950s. New thinking centres on the contributions that Dewey made to world education, the similarities between Dewey and some Chinese educators and politicians, and the utility of his ideas for the improvement of China's educational practices. Clearly, Chinese educators are on the path toward a balanced perspective that honours the needs and traditions of the established educational system, while remaining open to useful Western thought, including the work of Dewey.

It appears that there were discrepancies between the American and the Chinese perceptions of Dewey's visit to China, but in fact the evaluations in the two countries complement each other. When Clopton and Ou (1973) claimed that Dewey's influence on Chinese education had been a great success, they based their discussion mainly on how people in China received Dewey and progressivism from the 1920s to the 1940s, before the People's Republic of China was established. The severe criticism and rejection of Dewey during China's Marxist era provided evidence for some American claims that Dewey's experimentalism in China was a failure. Under the current pragmatic Chinese government, Chinese educators are reassessing Dewey's influence. Some efforts are underway to reintroduce Dewey's progressive theories into China's educational practices. So, too, American educators should begin a re-evaluation of Dewey's influence in China, taking care to pursue a balanced approach rather than labelling the American's impact in absolute terms of success or failure.

At this stage, it is important to note that no one has published an examination of Dewey's influence on adult and continuing education in China. When Dewey was in China, the adult educational system was still in its infancy. Further research is needed to investigate the influence of Dewey's progressivism on adult and continuing education in China. If progressivism proves to have had little impact there, perhaps a study addressing its potential benefits would be appropriate.

A Comparison of Dewey and Mao

This examination of Dewey's influence on China's educational system would be incomplete without drawing some comparisons between Dewey and Mao Zedong (1893–1976). The charismatic leader of the Socialist Revolution in China was little short of omnipotent, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Many people in the world know Mao as a famous revolutionary leader and communist politician. However, he was also the most important—if not the only—ideological force in modern Chinese education. Owing to his personal beliefs in the transformative roles of education and his supreme power over the Chinese Communist Party, its army, and its government, Mao's thoughts on education extended to both theory development and policy making. Cleverley (1985) called him "the single most influential figure in the creation of a distinctively different communist system of education in China" (p. 70).

According to Xu (1992), comparisons between Dewey and Mao date back as early as the 1950s, a period marked by political confrontation rather than an academic debate. When the new China was founded in 1949, Mao and his government were aiming to abolish the old so as to safely construct the new. Unfortunately, Dewey had too many connections with the old (Xu, 1992). First, Dewey fell easily into the category of "American imperialist." Second, his theories and ideas were closely associated with the old Nationalist Government. These connections caused Mao and his comrades to view Dewey as a threat to the new republic. As a result, his work was politicized, and the campaign against him became purely one of "ideological accusation and repudiation … rather than an objective and professional analysis" (Xu, 1992, p. 95). Dewey was condemned as the polar opposite of Mao's proletarian educational ideas.

However, Xu's (1992) comparative study of Dewey and Mao found amazing similarities, as well as many differences, between these two influential figures in modern Chinese history. Xu maintained that:

> Although Dewey and Mao emerged from completely different cultures, times, and contexts, their theories had amazing similarities. Their logos, "Learning by doing" (Dewey) and "Learning by practising" (Mao) ring a similar note. Moreover, their views on the significant connections between school and society, the social role of education, the role of experience in learning, and their stress on moral education overlap a great deal. (p. 3)

Xu also noted that both Dewey and Mao believed that education was not an isolated enterprise, but one "closely connected with, affected by, and achieved with and for social change" (p. 97). Both saw the necessity and

significance of moral education in schooling and placed it as the top priority before intellectual and physical development. Their similar notions about moral education and the socializing function of schooling led to an epistemological similarity. They both agreed that knowledge consists of experience and can only be developed through active human inquiry into experience.

In addition to these similarities, Xu identified a number of differences between these two great thinkers. Dewey's educational ideas were built on modern sciences and Western philosophy, and pursued through academia, whereas Mao's were founded on Marxist political ideology and focused on social and political transformation via revolutionary struggle. Consequently, the two had quite different visions of what constituted moral education. For Dewey, moral education bred democracy, open-mindedness, intelligence, intellectual honesty, and responsibility. For Mao, moral education had a strong political and class orientation; it demanded an absolute belief in Marxism and the development of proletarian consciousness. Their emphases on educational experiences also differed, with Dewey stressing natural sciences for personal and academic growth, while Mao's passions lay with political ideology for social welfare. Thus, the emphasis each placed on educational content was also different. Deweyan schools introduced modern subjects, a variety of topics, and experimental experiences into their curricula. Mao's schools assumed political study and productive labour as their main content, in place of academic courses.

However, it is important to point out that what Dewey and Mao did share was a progressive agenda for social development, one that challenged the traditional Confucian education and the old social orders (Xu, 1992). As explained earlier in this paper, Confucian education clung to classics as its only content and devalued any form of ordinary experience. Both Dewey and Mao advocated change and brought everyday experience into the classroom for educational purposes. Both strongly opposed the use of rote learning and imperial examination by traditional Confucian educators. Instead, they guaranteed learners an active role in learning and took their interests into consideration. Both favoured inductive methods, group discussions, and activities. They also focused on fostering imagination, originality, creativity, and the student's own capabilities of thinking and problem solving. However, Xu qualified that Mao's insistence on proletarian ideology as the only "correct" outlook undermined the freedom and originality he advocated for education. Sadly, this rigidity eventually reduced his educational methods to precisely those he had originally set out against: didactic instruction and traditional "cramming." In the end, Mao and his followers contributed to the regression of Chinese education by relying upon rote learning to cram Marxist and Maoist thought into students' minds, with no say on their part whatsoever.

Despite their approaching education from completely different cultural and ideological backgrounds, both Mao and Dewey issued challenges to the principles of traditional Confucian education. To a certain degree, their efforts drew modern Chinese education out of its isolated ivory tower and situated it much more within China's current social realities.

Contemporary Education in China: Which Force Drives It?

The final part of this paper attempts to sort out Dewey's progressivism, traditional Confucianism, and Maoism in the context of contemporary Chinese education. The roles that each has played in shaping China's educational system and the relative influence of each are examined.

Education under Deng

The death of Mao and the arrest of the Gang of Four (Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwei, and Yao Wenyuan) in 1976 marked the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of a new era. Following the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in December 1978, Deng Xiaoping came to power. Deng's rehabilitation efforts enabled him to implement his political and economic pragmatism into a number of new reforms within the scope of a new "open door" policy and a socialist market economy. Very quickly, the nation shifted its attention from "class struggle" to economic reconstruction. Modernization of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology (known as the Four Modernizations) were identified as national priorities.

Deng also affirmed the special role of education in the construction of China's new socialist economy. At the National Conference on Education in 1978, he asserted that the realization of the "Four Modernizations" would depend heavily on the development of science and technology, the foundations of which lay in education. Deng viewed education as an economically "productive force" (Zhou, 1988, p. 13). Teachers were able to reclaim their respectable status and were hailed as "glorious engineers cultivating human souls;" teaching became "the most glorious profession under the sun" (Li, 1999). With this proviso, education underwent tremendous transformation under Deng's leadership. Many schools and universities that had been shut down or moved to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution moved back to cities and resumed offering academic classes. Formal curricula with a focus on traditional academic subjects replaced those offered during the Cultural Revolution, which emphasized ideological and political study and physical labour. Meanwhile, secondary education expanded its vocational and technical education components to generate the manpower needed to

support the country's economic development. After eleven years abeyance, a university entrance examination was restored in 1977, with a strong emphasis on the learners' examination results rather than their political background. In a few years, "education was brought back to the highest point before the Cultural Revolution, [and] exceeded far beyond" (Xu, 1992, p. 35). According to Fouts and Chan (1995), "the system began to resemble once again the Confucian model" (p. 527).

Renaissance of Confucianism in Deng's China

The analysis of Deng's China reveals that, with a need for a skilled workforce to support the national agenda of modernization, economic construction, and market economy, China's educational system in the last two decades has taken on "a more decidedly pragmatic and technological flavour" (Fouts & Chan, 1995, p. 528). Although Dewey and Mao roundly attacked Confucian education, "more moderate later regimes left intact other elements to be used for various political purposes" (p. 527). Sciences, technology, Marxist ideology, Mao's Thought, and Deng's Theory have replaced Confucian classics, but "the underlying Confucian traits of education (and society) remained basically unchanged" (p. 526). Owing to limited space, the following discussion examines the renaissance of Confucianism in teaching and learning only where it has been most manifest. A number of studies (Guo, 1996; Hunter & Keehn, 1985; Paine, 1990; Pratt, 1992; Pratt, Kelly, & Wong, 1999) have demonstrated that present-day education in China is still rigid and teacher-centred. Teaching and learning rely heavily on the use of textbooks, memorization, and examination.

Pratt (1992) and Pratt, Kelly, and Wong (1999) reported that teachers in China are regarded as content experts and transmitters of knowledge, while students are perceived as the consumers of knowledge: teachers give and learners receive. Teachers are expected to be thoroughly prepared and organized for lectures. Paine (1990) described this kind of teaching as the "Chinese Virtuoso Model of Teaching," where the teacher, like a musician, "performs" for the student audience. The main intellectual thrust of this model of teaching, Paine continued, centres on the teacher's performance and minimizes or inadvertently neglects the interactive potential of classroom experience. In short, teachers in today's China remain the "sage on the stage." Obviously, this pedagogy does not draw from Dewey's learner-centred education; the active role assigned to the learners by Mao during the Cultural Revolution is also notably absent.

Learning is still widely understood as simple transference of information from teacher to learner (Pratt, 1992). According to Hunter and Keehn (1985), learning in China is largely by rote, and teaching is by lecture, with few aids other than the chalkboard. Except where learning is taking place that is

directly related to a particular enterprise, there is no philosophy of "learner involvement," and there are no "participatory techniques" or "problem-solving methodologies." Biggs (1996), however, offered a distinction between rote learning and memorization. The difference lies in the learner's intention with respect to meaning. In rote learning, learners learn mechanically without understanding the meaning of the material, while memorization is a learning strategy that employs repetition to understand content. He maintained that Chinese students may be repetitive learners, but there is no evidence that they use rote learning any more than their Western counterparts. Putting these contentions aside, it is still safe to conclude that neither rote learning nor memorization is the kind of learning advocated by Dewey ("learning by doing") or by Mao ("learning by practising").

Knowledge is perceived by the Chinese as both external to the learner and stable in its movement from the teacher to the learner (Pratt, 1992). Usually there is little doubt about what constitutes the "basics" or foundational knowledge that students are expected to master (Pratt et al., 1999). The major source of that knowledge typically comes from authorized textbooks. As Paine (1990) put it: "The textbook, as the source of knowledge, and the teacher, as the presenter of that knowledge, stand at centre stage for the activity of Chinese schools" (p. 51). Criteria used to judge the effectiveness of teaching and learning are based on how well a teacher performs or transmits knowledge and, in turn, how well students memorize or master it. Textbook learning and a strict emphasis on content mastery are further aspects of present Chinese education that disregard both Dewey's inquiry-based pedagogy and Mao's focus on political study, physical labour, and students' daily lived experiences.

Finally, present-day education in China is still examination-centred (Guo, 1996). Almost a century has passed since the Civil Service Examination was abolished in 1905. The sciences, Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought have replaced the Confucian curriculum, but, in essence, the way of testing students remains much the same. Although the content of examinations varies according to the subject and level, all emphasize the testing of facts. Formal examinations only stopped for a decade during the Cultural Revolution, resuming soon after it was over. This is another legacy of Confucianism that remains firmly intact.

Who is in Control?

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that, despite the opposition of Dewey and Mao, traditional Confucian traits still dominate teaching and learning in China today, supported in their modern iterations by the tenets of Deng's pragmatism. However, this does not mean that Maoism and Dewey's progressivism have completely vanished from China's present-

day educational practices. Fouts and Chan (1995) maintained that "elements of Mao's ideas were inculcated into the educational system" (p. 527). The authors also pointed out that Mao's aim of universal education remains relevant and that political education remains in the curriculum, alongside moral education. The core of the five aims of education (i.e., moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and social) may still be credited to Mao. Following the June Fourth incident of 1989, the Chinese government, under the leadership of Jiang Zemin, adopted new policies of sending first-year university/college students to the army for a period of military training and of requiring two years of work experience before admission to graduate studies. These policies can be traced to Mao's educational ideology and methodology. Although Mao is rarely quoted today, Xu (1992) predicted that his ideas have been and will continue to play a significant role in contemporary Chinese education.

It is true that the influence of Dewey's progressivism on Chinese education was most profound from the early 1920s to the late 1940s. Yet, like Mao, his educational theories have not been entirely shuffled into the museums. Dewey's views on education for socialization, moral education, vocational and technical education, and the connection between school and society have been partially incorporated into the Chinese educational system (Su, 1995). According to Cheng et al. (1999), "education is acquiring a new meaning" in China (p. 129). In the field of adult/lifelong education, the authors continued, the focus in the last few years has shifted from preparation or upgrading of manpower to personal development. This new notion of education as a way to realize a meaningful life resembles Dewey's view of education for personal growth.

Recently, the Chinese government has publicized plans to improve the quality of education by shifting teaching away from traditional memorization and lecture to more learner-centred and constructivist approaches that will enhance learners' initiative and creativity (Grubb, 2000). Grubb noted, however, that standardized national exams still play a powerful role in maintaining current teacher-centred practices. She believes that a new teacher educational system must be implemented before learner-centred pedagogies can take hold in any meaningful way. Probably, it is time now for Deweyan educators to begin the task of translating progressive educational theories into tangible educational practices for China. In another progressive initiative, the Ministry of Education is experimenting with a reform of university entrance examinations. The number of examinable subjects will be reduced from a minimum of 6 to 3+X (Chinese, English, math, plus sciences or social sciences). China is also planning to expand its enrolment of university students. With reduced competitiveness and less pressure surrounding exams, it is hoped that teachers will be able to experiment with more liberal or Deweyan approaches of teaching and learning. With politics dropped as a

compulsory examinable subject, it is speculated that Dewey's moral education principles may also receive more attention in the future.

Two milestone events that have taken place in the new millennium will open a new era for China. In July 2001, Beijing won the bid to play host to the 2008 Olympic Games. In December of the same year, China officially entered the World Trade Organization, becoming its 143rd member. Without a doubt, these two events will bring China closer to the international community. However, this new international presence also places pressure on China to reform her educational system in order to prepare competent global citizens for success in this new era. It is inevitable that these catalytic events will bring changes to China. Some years from now, the social, political, economic, and cultural climate in China may prove more fertile ground for Dewey's progressivism.

In fact, China is trying to avoid going to either extreme—"traditional education," as represented by Confucian educational theories, or "modern education," as represented by Dewey and his Chinese advocates (Su, 1995). Moreover, Dewey's future influence may be indirect and inconspicuous, occurring through and largely credited to Tao Xingzhi, who was one of Dewey's Ph.D. students from Columbia University. Yet, whatever form they take, Dewey's ideas will continue to thrive in Chinese education (Su, 1996).

However, Tu (1992) predicted that Dewey's ideas are not likely to become the focus of intellectual discourse in China as they did following the May Fourth Movement in 1919, nor will Mao's Thought ever regain the dominance of its force during the Cultural Revolution. "Dewey and Mao are entwined theoretically and practically with the past, thus, they are inevitably embedded in the present, and integrated with the future" (Xu, 1992, p. ix). It appears that, in the years to come, Dewey's progressivism and Maoism will join Deng's pragmatism, traditional Confucianism, and many other trends of thoughts in informing, defining, guiding, and challenging China's educational system. Since each of these theories and ideologies was developed in a completely different historical, social, political, economic, and cultural context, their implementation into practice will inevitably require interpretation, imagination, and adaptation. As Xu (1992) put it: "The implementation of Dewey would never be pure Deweyan" (p. 62). The same could be said about many other theories and ideologies as well. Each will evolve in a new social, political, and economic context. The development of each will bring changes to the educational system in China. It is this complex dynamic that makes China's educational system unique and vigorous.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper has examined Dewey's progressive education and his influence in China. To facilitate an understanding of the background in China before Dewey's visit, a historical review of education in China, especially of Confucian education, has been provided. The fortunes of Deweyism in China have been followed, from Dewey's thunderous welcome in China from intellectuals and teachers, to his tremendous influence on China thereafter, to his fall from grace in the Maoist era. Yet, despite their ideological differences, Dewey and Mao have been shown to share much in the way of educational philosophy and pedagogy, to the point of offering a significant challenge to the dominance of Confucianism.

An analysis of the recent development of education in China demonstrated that, despite opposition by Dewey and Mao, traditional Confucian traits still characterize China's educational system today. Teaching and learning remain teacher-centred, with a strong emphasis on the use of textbooks, memorization, and examinations. Still, Dewey's progressivism and Maoism have not completely vanished from China's present-day education. Some elements of their ideas have been incorporated into the educational system.

Under the leadership of the pragmatic Chinese government, educators in China are re-evaluating progressivism and considering how Dewey's ideas might be adapted and integrated into Chinese educational practices. It will be interesting and worthwhile to reassess Dewey's influence after this new wave of progressivism has settled and perhaps taken hold in the Chinese educational system.

Finally, the juxtaposition of Dewey's ideas with those of other important thinkers in Chinese education shows that China is an important ground for contesting theories and ideologies: the old and the new, the indigenous and the foreign. China's current educational system is defined and guided by a synthesis of various social and ideological forces, consisting of traditional Confucianism, Deng's pragmatism, Maoism, and Dewey's progressivism. These forces, although often theoretically exclusive of one another, have in practice been woven into the tapestry that is Chinese education today. It is the force of these ideas together that makes the education system in China dynamic, vibrant, and fascinating. Such activity is well worth being reflected upon by educators around the world who seek to learn from others and to improve their own educational systems.

In Canada, many university continuing educators continue to search for answers to questions such as the relationship between education and society, the connection between theory and practice, the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, and the deeper political and philosophical issues that underlie learner-centred versus teacher-centred approaches. China is by no

means the only site of well-intentioned efforts to experiment with favoured theories and practices in new environments. Perhaps China's rich and dynamic educational history, fraught with its own successful and less-successful educational "experiments," can inform our collective ongoing efforts.

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Biography

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