

Dewey in China: A Historical Look at His Message of Peace and Understanding

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Not long after he arrived in East Asia, a journey he eagerly welcomed, John Dewey quickly turned his thoughts to the past world war. It was a conflict that traversed the globe, ravaged the European landscape beyond anyone's comprehension, led to almost seventeen million deaths, and tumbled dynastic empires forever. As he began to pen an article for the liberal journal, *The New Republic*, he kept abreast of developments at the Treaty of Versailles. He had hoped that the victorious Allies would find common ground by putting aside partisan hatred and bitterness in favor of lasting peace.

His wish was not granted.

In some respects, he only had himself to blame. Although he would not admit that he was not entirely wrong for sacrificing his pragmatism to the call to arms, he did have his regrets. But not when the war first began.

He had endorsed President Woodrow Wilson's call for an international peace-keeping organization, which also included recognition of territorial integrity, respect for all nationalities, and freedom of the seas. It was his initial

disposition to insist that the war might strengthen American democracy at home and international progressivism abroad. He also spoke of pragmatism's help in enabling people to understand better the progressive social possibilities of war.

Initially, he tied his pragmatism to the war effort. He considered the war an expression of a conflict in culture with the vital function of helping humankind understand social change. This was a war in which the use of creative intelligence and the potentialities for growth of the human mind through advances in science, technology, economic development, and social organization could be transformed into establishing a permanent world peace. No lover of militarism or violence, his romantic support for Wilsonian internationalism was premised on the supposition that his pragmatic endorsement for this war would ultimately serve as an active process for reconstructing society through continued experimentation. The war was to serve as that process or means of experimentation in order to bring about the end: peace and progress.

But what he sadly miscalculated was the irrational forces of war. The virulent war psychology and the consequences of the peace treaty at Versailles caused him to offer up his own apologia. From China, in the fall of 1919, he would now proclaim in *The New Republic* that, "the defeat of idealistic aims has been, without exaggeration, enormous." The fault, he admitted, rested with him, as the intellectual spokesperson in support of American military intervention, and the "American people who reveled in emotionalism and who groveled in sacrifice of its liberties."¹

In many respects, his journey to China marked a turning point in his thinking about

¹ John Dewey, "The Discrediting of Idealism," *The New Republic* 20 (October 8, 1919), 285.

war and peace. It also served as an opportunity to reconstruct his philosophy and to test his ideas and theories about democratic reform and global cooperation with his Chinese counterparts.

A Valuable Case Study

At the same time, Dewey's China excursion serves as an excellent case study of how he sought to correct misleading political rhetoric for nationalistic purposes and to explain how democratic principles are far more than a governmental system.

They are actually a way of social life, a form of associated living—as he was fond of proclaiming. It was during his stay in China that he expanded upon his view of epistemological philosophy, not as a static receptor or mental storehouse of past understandings (accepting things the way things are) but as part of a larger humanistic mission to make the world a safer and better place to inhabit through democratic cooperation.

While considerable attention has been devoted to Dewey's contributions to Chinese educational practices and his social and political philosophy, few scholars have examined how this trip became a pivotal moment in his participation in the movement for world peace. Given that our current political climate is beset by partisan debates and “alternate truths,” we decided to take a closer look at John Dewey's journey to China through the lens of history.

Our objective is to examine carefully Dewey's democratic message and assessment of East Asian politics, especially China. In our own era, where emotions and beliefs are “swayed by the fabricated facts of powerful leaders whose interests may or may not reflect democratic principles,” Dewey's intellectual engagement in China illustrates perfectly how

civil discourse can provide the knowledge and means for peaceful reform.² The lectures Dewey presented in China promoted a form of educational thinking that encouraged “a world prepared for international understanding and cooperation.”³ According to scholar Barry Keenan: “under world conditions of increasingly close contact among nations, it was Dewey's hope that teachers in different countries could convey a clear understanding of other cultures, so that international contacts could increasingly be on the level of cultural exchange and replace the past record of military conflicts.”⁴

What is and should be the relationship between public educators and statements for democracy, we argue, can easily be understood from Dewey's own experience in China. Indeed, “the encounter between Dewey and China is one of the most fascinating episodes in the intellectual history of the twentieth century,” commented Dewey scholar Zhixin Su.⁵

Scholarly Significance of Dewey's Journey: A Brief Overview

Prior to American military involvement in WWI, Dewey was determined to eradicate all forms of racism.⁶ He strongly believed that so-

² American Educational Research Association Statement, (2018), 2.

³ Barry Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China: Educational Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵ Zhixin Su, “A Critical Evaluation of John Dewey's Influence on Chinese Education,” *American Journal of Education* (1995), 319.

⁶ Dewey would later expand upon this sentiment in more forceful tones in the aftermath of the world war. On this score see, John Dewey, “Race Prejudice and Friction,” in Jo Ann Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Vol. 13 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 242-254. This was first presented to the Chinese Social and Political Science Association in

ciety had the power to unite its people into one democratic nation. Borrowing on principles from nineteenth-century American educational reformers Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, he saw education as a means for inculcating this American ideal.

In a 1916 address, “Nationalizing Education,” Dewey spoke to the National Education Association (NEA). He proclaimed that:

No matter how loudly any one proclaims his Americanism, if he assumes that any one racial strain, any one component culture, no matter how early settled it was in our territory, or how effective it has proved in its own land, is to furnish a pattern to which all other strains and cultures are to conform, he is a traitor to an American nationalism.⁷

Dewey carried this strong commitment with him to East Asia.

Dewey was the first Western philosopher with an official invitation to lecture at Chinese universities and, although critiques of his visit vary in hindsight, scholars agree that his presence in China constituted an important first step introducing Western pragmatic interpretations into traditional Eastern thought.⁸ Dewey’s

journey first took him to the Imperial University in Tokyo. He later received an invitation to lecture at the National University in Peking during the academic year beginning in June 1919 and ending in March 1920. The invitation came from a group of Dewey’s former Chinese students at Columbia, led by the Chinese pragmatist and educator Hu Shih. That invitation was later extended to encompass the academic year, 1920-1921.

Dewey’s stay in China was highlighted by the fact that the country at that time was experiencing an internal social and political revolution. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, China was increasingly opened to foreign commercial exploitation. It was not until 1911, however, that a revolution finally took place, which overthrew the feudalistic Manchu dynasty and established in its place a republican form of government. Yet, despite this political advance, little had been accomplished in the way of replacing decaying and archaic social institutions, which in turn hindered China’s economic growth.

Dewey encouraged Americans to assist in China’s rebuilding of its economic infrastructure (one important component of modernization) in order to further her own prospects for self-determination and called upon American investors to curb their own imperial appetites in the interests of world peace and stability.⁹ Specifically, Dewey “assumed that China should utilize all the best points of the industrialized West on its road to reconstruction, being care-

1922. He referred to race prejudice as a “widespread social disease.” He pointed out that “many observers report a considerable revival of anti-foreign feeling in China at the present time. The strain of the late war created in the United States a distinct hostility to immigrants. Jealousies and suspicions that had been comparatively dormant were roused to life, and this happened in spite of the fact that the country was never threatened with actual harm” (245-46).

⁷ John Dewey, “Nationalizing Education,” in Joseph Ratner (Ed.), *Education Today* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1940), 114-115.

⁸ Consult the following works: Robert W. Clopton and Tsuin-Chen Ou, *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919-1920* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973); Su, “A Critical Evaluation of John Dewey’s Influence on Chi-

nese Education,” 302-325; and T. Berry, “Dewey’s Influence in China,” in John E. Blewett (Ed.), *John Dewey: His Thought and Influence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960), 199-232.

⁹ For an overview on this score consult: Charles F. Howlett and Audrey Cohan, *John Dewey: America’s Peace-Minded Educator* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), esp., 89-98.

ful to adapt them to native environmental conditions so they could flourish.”¹⁰

However, one of the first points that struck him after settling in was China’s inability to overthrow her rigid adherence to past philosophical conceptions. China is full of Columbia men,” he informed his children.

They have been idealizing their native land at the same time they have got Americanized ... they have been told that they are the future savior of their country ... and they can’t help making comparisons and realizing the backwardness of China and its awful problems. At the same time at the bottom of his heart probably every Chinese is convinced of the superiority of Chinese civilization—and maybe they are right—three thousand years is quite a spell to hold on.”¹¹

The influences of feudalism and Confucianism were deeply rooted in Chinese society. After residing six months in China, furthermore, Dewey also quixotically remarked to his Columbia colleague, Jacob Coss, that “whether I am accomplishing anything as well as getting a great deal is another matter . . . I think Chinese civilization is so thick and self-centered that no foreign influence present via a foreigner even scratches the surface.”¹²

This dogmatic adherence to past customs, Dewey reasoned, was a barrier toward future reforms. He strongly believed that it made it increasingly difficult for the Chinese people to deal with Western ideas of modernization. In order for democracy to become a working ideal in China, Dewey judged, modern

methods of social improvement had to be developed. Moreover, China’s internal instability made her easy prey for more industrialized nations like Japan. It was this issue that caused Dewey to express his concern over China’s fate in the shadow of imperialistic predators. Such presented a real danger to peace and stability in that part of the world.

In addition, given the current political instability, demands for immediate economic reform, and the young Chinese students enamored with Marxism, he worried whether or not his message of democratic hope would resonate among educators and intellectuals alike. A report he provided to the American government on this issue was most revealing:

The student body of the country is in the main much opposed to old institutions and existing political conditions in China. They are especially opposed to old institutions and existing political condition in China. They are especially opposed to their old family system. They are disgusted with politics, and while republican in belief have decided that the Revolution of 1911 was a failure. Hence they think that an intellectual change must come before democracy can be firmly established politically ... All these things make the students much inclined to new ideas, and to projects of social and economic change. They have little background of experience and are inclined to welcome any idea ... They are practically all socialists, and some call themselves communists. Many think the Russian revolution a very fine thing. All this may seem more or less Bolshevistic. But it has not been inspired from Russia at all. I have never been able though I have tried to run down all

¹⁰ Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment*, 44.

¹¹ John Dewey to Dewey children, June 20, 1919, *The Correspondence of John Dewey, 1871-1952*, Vol. 2, electronic edition (Charlottesville, VA: Intelelex Corp., 1996).

¹² John Dewey to John Jacob Coss, January 13, 1920, John Dewey Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University.

rumors to hear of Bolshevist propagandists.¹³

In light of these observations, Dewey's lectures were clearly organized to address China's current problems and to explain how his educational views and his social and political philosophy, premised on a democratic way of life, could be adapted for the benefit of the country's peoples.

An examination of Dewey's lectures in China, furthermore, makes it increasingly clear that his preoccupation with world peace was considerably influenced by his own misguided and conflicting support for World War I. Considering China's own cultural turmoil and efforts to enter the global scene, Dewey was exploring ways to encourage social reformers to apply peaceful methodologies to their transition into the modern world. He began re-evaluating his logical instrumentalism with that in mind, attempting to use his theories as a form of intellectual freedom.

The trip itself was an intellectual awakening of sorts—one, which caused him to tie the notion of freedom to intellectual development. Dewey posited that if China were going to embrace change, its educators and leaders must understand that, “genuine freedom, in short, is intellectual; it rests in the trained *power of thought*, in ability to “turn things over,” to look at matters deliberately, to judge whether the amount and kind of evidence requisite for decision is at

hand.”¹⁴ What Chinese thinkers must consider is that “to cultivate unhindered, unreflective external activity is to foster enslavement, for it leaves the person at the mercy of appetite, sense, and circumstance.”¹⁵ Reflecting on his shortcomings when he united a romantic national idealism with a realistic progressivism in supporting World War I, Dewey believed that people's thinking became enslaved to circumstance as opposed to deliberative judgment.

Nevertheless, there is a cautionary tale when judging Dewey's impact against his call for reforms in China. Certainly, it is quite clear that “the assumption that education should remain separate from politics was one of the tenets of Dewey's followers.”¹⁶ That is undeniable. However, the issue remains that “his ideas successfully captured the teacher training institutions ... [yet] the connection between educational improvements and democratic social reconstruction was not successfully made.”¹⁷ What accounts for this?

The answer had to do with addressing the problem of political power in China.

Certainly, the lesson one can draw from Dewey's trip is that “education should have been the great solvent of social conflict. Informed discussion of the origin and nature of conflicts of interest should lead to their resolution, rationally”¹⁸ At least, that is what he had hoped. He believed that “the school would continually influence society and politics to bring the needed change.”¹⁹ Unfortunately, in China, “the links between school and society, between attitude and change and political conduct, between professional non-partisanship

¹³ Dewey to Colonel Drysdale, December 1, 1920, service report on Bolshevism in China, National Archives, State Department; Dewey to Drysdale, December 1, 1920, *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, Vol. 2, electronic edition. The War Department's response was as follows: “Exceptionally good judgment and knowledge of general affairs. Particularly well informed on student movement and radical elements. A very careful and unemotional investigator.” See, U.S. War Dept., May 31, 1921, *The Correspondence of John Dewey, 1871-1952*, Vol. 2, electronic edition.

¹⁴ John Dewey, *How We Think* (Chicago: Henry Regnery & Co., 1971), 90. This is a reprint of his 1933 edition.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁶ Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment*, 159.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

and social betterment were not present” because it was the militarists who dominated the cultural, social, and political environment.²⁰ It was this realization that caused him to reassess his educational instrumentalism and his pragmatism when returning to the United States.

Dewey’s Post-China Agenda

Clearly, his China journey did have a profound impact on his efforts to reconstruct his philosophic thinking as he sought to make it relevant to the cause of world peace.

One can see this in terms of the evolution of his theories on logical instrumentalism when he finally unveiled his scientific model of thinking or inquiry, which was first posited in his revised work, *How We Think*.²¹ Dewey’s experimentalism became an important aspect of his interest in teaching about peace. In terms of developing information-processing and thinking skills, Dewey offered the following four steps: (1) define the problem; (2) suggest alternative solutions or make hypotheses; (3) gather data for supporting or negating these hypotheses; and (4) select or reject hypotheses. Problems such as wars, militarism and disarmament, patriotic conformity, and social injustice were just some of the problems Dewey encouraged educators to address in their classrooms. Although no easy solution to solving the problem of war was at hand, Dewey called for a process of inquiry as a learning tool. He encouraged teachers to address the problem of war in terms of its destructive experience, which should not be divorced from values clarification.

His classroom method of inquiry was designed to connect value analysis with problem solving. Critical thinking in education, he argued, must undertake an analysis of problems

impacting social development. It involves testing values and applying them to real world situations. Teaching students not to fall prey to sweeping generalizations through the practice of inquiry, gathering facts, and clarifying values should ultimately result in developing better moral judgments. Students need to think about how the idea of peace is a more positive hypothetical development when it comes to analyze the most pressing problem—war—plaguing civilization. Much of what Dewey wrote in 1933 was based upon his time in China as he sought to develop ways of thinking based on peace as an instrument of reform.

An analysis of his lectures in China such as “Nationalism and Internationalism,” “Intellectual Freedom,” “The Cultural Heritage and Social Reconstruction,” “Geography and History,” and “Moral Education—Social Aspects” are perfect illustrations of Dewey’s evolving postwar instrumentalism and progressive theories detailing the disparity between two ends: war and peace. In terms of war, education teaches people to accept selfish behavior, promotes authoritarian methods of rule, ignores moralistic reasons for good behavior, encourages coercion in the name of patriotic conformity, and complies with patterns of structural violence. In contrast, education for peace fosters responsibility, openness, innovation, self-motivation, cooperative behavior, and barrier-free opportunities to pursue individual interests for the common good.

To Dewey, education was a creative and self-developmental process—any form of strict discipline ran counter to his views on progressive education. Rigid uniformity was unacceptable to Dewey and a point he made quite clear in his lectures to Chinese educators and students. A sense of libertarian values plus a belief in a self-developmental form of education oriented toward a more moral way of thinking was necessary for peaceful reform.

²⁰ Ibid., 161.

²¹ The 1933 edition.

One of the distinct features in terms of how people should think, Dewey believed, should be based on the importance of moral thinking as an essential character trait—certainly in response to the world situation facing future generations of students. “They are not the only attitudes that are important [open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, responsibility] in order that the *habit* of thinking in a reflective way may be developed,” he wrote. “But the other attitudes that might be set forth are also traits of character, attitudes that, in the proper sense of the word, are *moral*, since they are traits of personal character that have to be cultivated.” In other words, thinking should not be a mechanical process but rather “how we should live our lives as moral agents if we are to think effectively.”²²

In his lecture, “The Cultural Heritage and Social Reconstruction,” moreover, Dewey promoted three ground rules, discussed below, that were necessary if schools were to create a feeling of democratic cooperation and world citizenship. He applied those rules in a groundbreaking article he wrote in 1923 in *The Journal of Social Forces*, which was based on this lecture.

In this particular article, he noted that, “as we need a program and a platform for teaching genuine patriotism and a real sense of the public interests of our own community, so clearly we need a program of international friendship, amity and good will.” “We need a curriculum in history, literature and geography,” he vigorously continued, “which will make the different racial elements in this country aware of what each has contributed and will create a mental attitude towards other people which will make it more difficult for the flames of hatred and suspicion to sweep over this country in the future, which indeed will make this impossible, because when children’s minds are in the formative period we

shall have fixed in them through the medium of the schools, feelings of respect and friendliness for the other nations and peoples of the world.”²³

So, what are those rules he espoused in “The Cultural Heritage and Social Reconstruction”? The first rule and basic aim of education was for the school to create good citizens. When asked by the Chinese students to define what he meant by “good citizen,” Dewey responded by listing four qualifications of the “good citizen”: (1) be a good neighbor and a good friend; (2) be able to contribute to others as to benefit from other’s contributions; (3) be one who produced rather than one who merely shared in the production of others, from an economic standpoint; and lastly, (4) be a good consumer. According to Dewey’s humanitarian and socially conscious outlook on life, a “good citizen” was a person who contributed to the well being of society. Above all, a “good citizen” was also one who appreciated the values of peaceful living by contributing to and sharing with fellow citizens the fruits of society.²⁴

Dewey’s second rule encouraged educators to create an atmosphere of harmony and friendliness whereby a feeling of world citizenship could be generated through the schools by making “students want to fulfill their duties to society, not from compulsion, but by curiosity and willingness, and out of love for their fellow men.”²⁵

But, perhaps, the most important rule was his last one, which directed its attention to the general desire to acquaint students with the nature of social life and to the needs of society, as

²² Ibid., 53.

²³ John Dewey, “The Schools as a Means of Developing a Social Consciousness and Social Ideals in Children,” *Journal of Social Forces* 1 (September 1923), 512-518.

²⁴ John Dewey, “The Cultural Heritage and Social Reconstruction,” in Clopton and Ou, *John Dewey: Lectures in China*, 210 & ff.

²⁵ Ibid., 211.

well as to their preparation for meeting these needs. A knowledge of one's environment and a willingness to eliminate its unworthy features, Dewey reasoned, was the main source of educational inspiration for the student. Social reconstruction, he believed, required more than sentiment. It demanded a general understanding of the nature of the problem and a willingness to adapt to new ways of thinking.

In each case, therefore, Dewey impressed upon his Chinese listeners the necessity for education to enhance the social, political, economic, and cultural institutions of a democratic society. "The school is the instrument," he concluded, "by which a new society can be built, and through which the unworthy features of the existing society can be modified."²⁶ Dewey commented further:

It is perhaps true that up to now contact with the West has brought China more disadvantages than advantages, more ill than good. But it is also true that the chaos and confusion in morality and economy have reached a point in China at which it would be ill advised, if not fatal, for China to isolate herself from the influences of Western culture. The only method by which China can remedy the present 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 compensating 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, and this is why the matter of broadening the child's environ-

ment is of such great urgency in China today.²⁷

This quote summarizes, appropriately, Dewey's belief in the next generation, and is situated in his perspective as an educator. It argues that intercultural and global understanding will be the pathway to the future.

Global Understanding

Perhaps more importantly, one of the least discussed aspects of Dewey's educational policy and advice to Chinese educators was his contributions to a fuller understanding of comparative nationalism.²⁸

His extended visit to China provided him an opportunity to encourage dialogue between the two nations as part of his mission to further the ideals of global understanding. While in China, he was embraced by educational leaders for his willingness to encourage Westerners to be open-minded. There was an understated concern that Westerners would try and press their ideas upon Chinese institutions rather than to try and understand China's historic customs and institutions as part of its political psychology. What Dewey did encourage was the idea that schooling in China be adapted to democratic ways of thinking while preserving long-established customs and ideals—ones which had given Chinese education a strong sense of community of life.

What concerned him was how outside pressures attempted to subvert the principle of nationality in China. Hence, he envisioned Chinese schooling as an instrument for furthering a sense of nationality that would understand the

²⁶ Ibid., 213.

²⁷ Ibid., 216.

²⁸ For a worthwhile analysis of Dewey's understanding of nationalism consult, Merle Curti, "John Dewey and Nationalism," *Orbis* X (Winter 1967), 1103-1119.

values of a democratic way of life based upon mutual understanding and cooperation. His views here were primarily an extension and application of what he posited in his classic 1916 work, *Democracy and Education*.

In his appeals to Chinese educators and students regarding global harmony and domestic stability, moreover, his lectures were filled with Confucian principles. Peace educators Lin and Wang wrote that Confucius observed that “people are born by nature to be kind; it is only the environment that makes people different.” This was a view Dewey clearly agreed with in his philosophy on peace. They also note that the eminent Chinese thinker was fond of pointing out that, “education is for creating social harmony ... [and] harmony enables the state and society to coexist.” Harmony, in turn, is “achieved through negotiations and proactive actions and social interventions.”²⁹

Dewey could not have agreed more with their interpretation of Confucius. Confucian “harmony” was akin to Dewey’s conjoint, communicated experience and associated living. This was a method, Lin and Wang argue, in which Confucius choose conflict and cooperation over competition and domination. Such an approach was clearly compatible with Dewey’s philosophy. Ever mindful of Confucian influence within Chinese educational circles, moreover, Dewey tailored his lectures to support the venerated philosopher’s position that, as Lin and Wang write in praise of Confucius, “peace comes from respectful and compassionate human beings, and education is the vehicle for

fostering [these] future citizens.”³⁰ Education, for Dewey, like Confucius, was about “relational co-existence.”³¹

Ever the observer and reporter, Dewey sought to convey this message in a series of articles he wrote for various periodicals, including *Asia* and *The New Republic*.³² Across the articles—“China’s Nightmare,” “The Chinese Philosophy of Life,” “Chinese Social Habits,” “The Growth of Chinese National Sentiment,” “Conditions for China’s Nationhood,” “Justice and Law in China,” “Young China and Old,” “New Culture in China,” “Transforming the Mind of China,” and “America and China”—one theme persisted throughout: the future evolution of nationalism in China should not only look to China’s traditional past, but also engage with Western democratic thought.

Such advice was certainly in keeping with Dewey’s own longstanding respect for tradition and continuity when addressing the fundamental goal of a democratic way of life. He tied his understanding of nationalism to democracy, not as a political instrument, but, rather, as the means for seeking solutions to economic, political, and social problems. Tradition and continuity were important links in establishing the kind of peaceful democratic society he envisioned for China—both could play an important role in framing problems, seeking solutions, and when encountering social unrest.

Despite the distinctive aspects of Chinese nationalism in terms of its historical roots and the question of “modernization,” Dewey urged Chinese educators to preserve these differences while appreciating the essential similarities linking China to the rest of the world. What he

²⁹ Jing Lin and Yingji Wang, “Confucius’ Teaching of Virtues and Implication on World Peace and Peace Education” in Jing Lin, John Miller, and Edward J. Brantmeier (Eds.), *Spirituality, Religion, and Peace Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2010), 3-17. For quoted material here and following paragraph, as well as general interpretations of the authors’ views related to Confucius and peace, consult the article.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

³² These articles, a few with a different title in the edited collection, were compiled in Joseph Ratner (Ed.), *Characters and Events* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1929), Vol. 1.

urged Chinese educators to contemplate was that, “the real problem of the Pacific is the problem of the transformation of the mind of China, of the capacity of the oldest and most complicated civilization of the globe to remake itself into the new forces required by the impact of immense alien forces.”³³

Distinctively, the impression that Dewey came away with was how Chinese schools can be receptive to his ideas about democratic instrumentalism. He stated, “human nature as one meets it in China seems to be unusually human . . . There is more of it in quantity and it is open to view, not secreted.”³⁴ Dewey sought to capitalize upon this notion in terms of transforming Chinese education into a vehicle for democratic cooperation and global understanding. During his stay, he witnessed first-hand “a general intellectual ferment,” whereby Chinese educators seemed open “western moral and intellectual inspiration . . . to get ideas, intellectual capital, with which to renovate her own institutions.”³⁵

If the basis of American education rests upon a democratic foundation, promoting a sense of nationality as community, then China is particularly suited to carry out its own mission in terms of nationality and cooperation. “The educated Chinese who dissects the institutions of his own country,” Dewey proclaimed, “does it with a calm objectivity which is unsurpassable. And the basic reason, I think, is the same national pride . . . The faith of the Chinese in the final outcome of their country . . . reminds an American of a similar faith abounding in his own country.”³⁶ Such faith rests upon schools with a democratic model.

In Dewey’s estimation, the best and most practical course for his educational model to work was to allow Chinese teachers to utilize “Western knowledge and Western methods which they themselves can independently employ to develop and sustain a China which is itself and not a copy of something else.”³⁷ What he heard most often from the lips of progressive reformers in China was “that education is the sole means of reconstructing China.” He continued: “There is an enormous interest in making over the traditional family system, in overthrowing militarism, in extension of local self-government, but always the discussion comes back to education, to teachers and students, as the central agency in promoting other reforms.”³⁸

Imperatively, as Dewey saw it, “this fact makes the question of the quality and direction of American influence in Chinese education a matter of more than an academic concern.”³⁹ For democratic reforms in education to take root in China, in the best interests of peaceful cooperation and communal understanding, it was crucial to address the current reality that there would be “no development of schools as long as military men and corrupt officials divert funds and oppose schools from motives of self-interest.”⁴⁰

As democracy’s ambassador to East Asia, Dewey called upon his own fellow citizens to share their resources and knowledge—to “take an active interest in Chinese education . . . [as] it would seem as if the time has come when there are some persons of means whose social and human interest . . . might show itself in upbuilding native schools.”⁴¹ If there was a way to

³³ John Dewey, “Transforming the Mind of China” in Ratner, *Characters and Events*, Vol. 1, 286.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.

³⁷ John Dewey, “America and China,” in Ratner, *Characters and Events*, Vol. 1, 306.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 306.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 308.

promote peace in East Asia, Dewey argued with vigor and passion, it would be contingent upon those willing to “train not only students but younger teachers who are not as yet thoroughly equipped and who too often are suffering from lack of intellectual contact.”⁴²

Such mission, he implored, “will not be done for the sake of the prestige of the United States.” Instead:

build up a China of men and women of trained independent thought and character, and there will be no Far Eastern “problems” such as now vex us; there will be no need of conference to discuss—and disguise—the “Problems of the Pacific.” American influence in Chinese education will then be wholly a real good instead of a mixed and dubious blessing.⁴³

This would be the pathway to peace in the Pacific and recognition of China’s democratic nationality in the world community. It would be accomplished through inquiry, conversation, and willingness to dialogue through cooperation and compromise, not partisan bickering and rancor.

Outlawry of War: A Pragmatic Solution when Returning from China

A perfect illustration of Dewey’s desire to offer solutions for peace, not just critical commentary, was the vital role he played in the Outlawry of War movement. This began shortly after his return from China. What is particularly relevant to our discussion is that it represents how

intellectuals should address troubling social and political issues even in our own time.

What could be more troubling than the danger of war? In this instance, Dewey challenged the experts on international relations by encouraging them to consider public opinion on the matter.⁴⁴ Instead of having the politicians and experts dictate the terms, Dewey used Outlawry to call upon the public to exert pressure on elected officials as a means of achieving world peace.

This crusade, largely financed by Yale-educated, Chicago lawyer Salmon O. Levinson, resulted in over fifty nations signing a treaty—the Kellogg-Briand Pact or Pact of Paris—in 1928, renouncing war as an instrument of national policy.⁴⁵ Although the treaty failed to prevent World War II, it did play a pivotal role in the prosecution of Nazi leaders for crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg Trials. Dewey was the prime intellectual spokesperson for Levinson’s campaign. The seeds for his in-

⁴⁴ In 1923 he published a very important article outlining the case for Outlawry. In this article he stated the following: “Education is limited also by range of contact and intercourse, and at present the forces that educate into nationalistic patriotism are powerful and those that educate into equal regard and esteem for aliens are weak.” This view is largely based on his observation in East Asia where the militarists in both Japan and China viewed each other with suspicion and hostility. He realized that public opinion could be a powerful force for peace if educated to find ways to achieve it without resort to military measures. See, John Dewey, “Ethics and International Relations,” in Boydston (Ed.), *The Middle Works*, Vol. 15, 53-64.

⁴⁵ Consult the following historical analyses: Dona H. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017); Robert H. Ferrell, *Peace in Their Time: The Origins of the Kellogg-Briand Pact* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1952); Charles F. Howlett, “John Dewey and the Crusade to Outlaw War,” *World Affairs* 138, no. 4 (Spring 1976), 336-55; and John E. Stoner, *S.O. Levinson and the Pact of Paris* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 308-309.

volvement in this crusade were planted in his “Nationalism and Internationalism” lecture, which he delivered at Nanking National University.

In this lecture, he called for a higher order of thinking pertaining to our understanding of nationalism. His words are clear, direct, and forceful. His Chinese audience could sense his convictions as he called for the public to consider an alternative to the long-established and passive acceptance of military strength. “I am not speaking of a peace that is merely the absence of armed conflict—a passive conception which we encounter all too frequently,” he stated. “Even unpatriotic men, cowards, and rich men who want to keep from losing their money, can want this negative kind of peace,” he added

Instead, Dewey noted, “we must work for a positive peace, a peace built upon common constructive enterprises undertaken on an international scape. Just as a nation grows strong by engaging its people in large-scale constructive activities, the world will grow stronger and the danger of war will disappear when the nations engage together in constructive enterprises that contribute to their common welfare.”⁴⁶ It was his belief, then, that the emotional and political connotations of nationalism were responsible for holding the public back from a greater appreciation for international cooperation.

His solution was to find a positive form of peacemaking—one that is based on action. In his mind, this meant not only adding a moral dimension to his pragmatic methodology, but, also, as the peace historian Nigel Young has noted, “a theory of conflict and a dialectic of action in a struggle that became an ‘experiment with truth’; testing ideas through political dia-

logue, exemplary conduct, and communication during conflict, rather than political violence.”⁴⁷

Throughout most of the 1920s, Dewey wrote and delivered speeches, insisting that public support for peace was consistent with the values and assumptions widely accepted in a democratic-liberal society. Intellectually, people value peace more than they do war, since they live in a society where individual freedom of thought is considered a protected right and, politically, the people are capable of challenging elected officials who rely on emotional appeals in matters of foreign policy. The philosophical challenge, in Dewey’s opinion, was offering up a concrete proposal that the public would accept because it would be based on inquiry rather than emotion. He believed he had found it in *Outlawry of War*.

Specifically, what was the philosophical reasoning he developed in support of *Outlawry*, one consistent with our democratic values? The basic theoretical premise, as well as the pragmatic argument substantiating Dewey’s support for the *Outlawry* plan, therefore, rested on his assumption that the means proposed to implement this new idea was an educated public opinion—cognizant of morality as justice formulated through standards of societal consciousness and as part of the assumptions widely accepted in a democratic society. This public understanding would then recognize the need for internationalism and cooperation among nations. Such cooperation would also function as the means for making a treaty outlawing war, when signed by all participating nations. Relying on a proposed code of law backed by the authority of a world Supreme Court would therefore become effective and enduring instruments of international peace.

⁴⁶ John Dewey, “Nationalism and Internationalism,” in Clopton and Ou, *John Dewey: Lectures*, 163.

⁴⁷ Nigel Young, “Concepts of Peace From 1913 to the Present,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 27, no. 2 (2013), 159-61.

What does become quite clear in terms of Dewey's philosophy is how he considered the Outlawry principle a form of morality, an extension of ethical inquiry encouraging people to rely on reflective intelligence. In this fashion, it would permit people to revise judgments in light of consequences (the realities associated with World War I) and then to act on them. Outlawry was an instrument for satisfactorily redirecting conduct when past habits proved detrimental to society's well-being.

The way to test the peoples' commitment to world peace was to put Outlawry into practice as an alternative value judgment—one that placed peaceable living backed by the rule of law above the institutionalized acceptance of armed conflict. For Dewey, Outlawry represented moral progress: it might enable people to adopt new habits by reflectively revising previous value judgments, which considered war the only way to achieve peace. War as an *a priori*, fixed principle that governments used to justify to their peoples the necessity for engaging in armed conflict in the name of national honor would, in turn, be replaced by the moral rightness of Outlawry on behalf of international harmony. The benefit of declaring war itself a crime—an illegal act contrary to moral principles—represented a positive step towards social progress in practice.

At no time did Dewey contemplate the “chimerical possibility” of successfully outlawing war through a mere “juristic declaration” or by “legal excommunication,” terms that he and other supporters were careful to differentiate when promoting their cause. The function and effectiveness of a world Supreme Court, in Dewey's opinion, rested not upon enforcement of sanctions but upon developing educated moral and ethical judgments—the means—of humankind. Achieving this end—a world Supreme Court to enforce the Outlawry principle—would be

developed through inquiry and in line with the nation's widely accepted democratic principles.

The fundamental truth is that societies can only survive, in the end, through mutual cooperation and understanding—not violence. Accepting war because it has been part of society's knowledge base—epistemic knowledge—had to be challenged.

Therefore, refining Dewey's argument for Outlawry in terms of means and end: international law should be on the moral side of the question of war. Unfortunately, in the past, the law of nations had consistently been on the wrong side of this question. However, once this is acknowledged, then it becomes possible to develop the appropriate means for realizing the end in question, which could only be the moral will or moral sentiment of civilized peoples to make war illegal. That moral will or moral sentiment would be “progressively enlightened and organized by understanding of that end itself.”⁴⁸

Clearly, Dewey considered the Outlawry of War campaign to be an extension of his democratic social psychology. For Outlawry to take hold, the right cultural conditions would have to be established to support behavior that would integrate emotions, ideas, and desires into educated moral judgments—all disposed to peaceful coexistence. The cultural continuity necessary for promoting those conditions for global cooperation in support of Outlawry, moreover, were highlighted in many of his lectures, particularly those dealing with geographical and historical appreciation for one's own cultural traditions—traditions which, if properly understood, could serve as useful democratic instruments on behalf of international understanding.

⁴⁸ This analysis is found in Joseph Ratner (Ed.), *Intelligence in the Modern World: John Dewey's Philosophy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1939), 525-30.

Describing a nation's geography as something more than just the physical landscape, Dewey focused on explaining how a society lives and works together. A nation's history should not be centered on either or and military conquests—unthinkable if Outlawry were to become a reality—but as an account of social development. Geography and history were, then, the moral mechanisms for Outlawry's success—something that would not be imposed from the top down, but embraced by reasoned judgment. It was while he stayed in China that such ideas for a moral equivalent to war, enforced through principles of international law, percolated within his thought.

Some of his lectures on education at this time addressed the importance of correct moral behavior for individuals, and for society. Instead of perfecting the art of war, nations and their peoples needed to perfect the art of peace. Outlawry could assist in establishing a proper image of the world as an interdependent whole, directed by political decisions, and aided by reasoned psychological, economic, and sociological knowledge of the probable reactions of different political systems capable of waging war. It would be binding upon nations through legal dictates, backed by the weight of moral public opinion.

It was Dewey's primary intention to see to it that reason and inquiry would take precedence over unbridled emotion, passive acceptance of knowledge as it currently existed, and blind trust. Outlawry was just the first step in the legal battle against war. The objective of the program was to influence the minds and dispositions of the public. If more people were taught—through inquiry—that war was a crime against humanity, coercive measures to prevent its recurrence would no longer be needed. Understanding would replace fear, and agreement would replace distrust. Quite clearly, the problem was not what reprisals a nation must fear

by committing acts of blatant aggression, but the immorality of doing so. If the internationalism of the modern world, in its economic, psychological, scientific, and artistic aspects, was to be truly realized, Outlawry was the most realistic, indeed the only realistic, means for firmly establishing “an international mind to function effectively in the control of the world's practical affairs.”⁴⁹

Critics who charge that Dewey's philosophy failed to fulfill its promise as a guide to useful knowledge may very well want to reconsider their position in light of Outlawry.⁵⁰ Such critics have oftentimes failed to take into account how Dewey sought to distinguish between pragmatism as a method for cultivating intelligence and the practice of intelligence itself. With respect to Outlawry, it is not a question of whether or not his philosophy worked. Rather, it was an expression of one way that Dewey believed his philosophy could help society function intelligently: addressing the problem of war by encouraging Outlawry as an intelligent means to solve it.

In short, Outlawry was in keeping with the basic foundations of his philosophy of instrumentalism. It was an outstanding example of his conception of the method of intelligence as applied to social affairs.

Conclusion

What this research reveals is that Dewey's time in China came at a critical juncture in his philo-

⁴⁹ John Dewey, *Outlawry of War: What It Is and Is Not* (Chicago: American Committee for the Outlawry of War, 1923), 16.

⁵⁰ Regarding criticisms of Dewey's philosophy consult, John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of American Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947).

sophical reconstruction related to war and peace.

He arrived in China during a period of turmoil and uncertainty. He strived to serve as a bridge between China's past, present, and future. While in China, his educational and philosophical views were influenced by the existing environment and, at the same time, he employed his pragmatic method to address traditional schools of thought by advancing his own views in the name of democracy and moral understanding. Specifically, Dewey contemplated the prevailing conflict in China between old and new cultures. When dealing with this conflict, he encouraged Chinese educators to promote purposiveness, appreciation, open-mindedness, and responsibility.

Equally important, his concern for global understanding and peace was motivated by his own misgivings regarding his World War I experience. His lectures in China addressed emerging Marxist thinking among Chinese youth and the growing militarization of Japan. He worried how these influences would affect the peace and stability of China as it entered the twentieth century. He used his views on history and nationalism as instruments for reassessing "how we should think" when it came to current social, political, and economic issues.

Of course, in the past, Dewey's writing had focused more on "how we think" as he spread his philosophical ideas within his own national context—a focus which he believed to be concrete, even though in reflection his foundational arguments did shift. What he cared most about most during this journey, however, was assisting Chinese thinkers in grappling with the ideal of democracy. In this regard, he took a middle-of-the-road approach: encouraging Chinese leaders and educators to consider that it was not imperative to adapt the Western model of self-seeking individualism that would then seek to equalize society through the power of the

state, but, rather, to use traditional social patterns as a means for protecting citizens while establishing a democratic society.

Considering the bitter partisanship clouding our political debates today, it remains instructive as to how Dewey attempted to navigate between competing Chinese factions: the young Chinese influenced by Marxism and the traditional Chinese whose moral convictions were largely based on Confucianism. Those three rules of "good citizenship:" appreciating the values of peaceful living by contributing to and sharing with its fellow citizens the fruits of society; creating an atmosphere of harmony and friendliness whereby a feeling of world citizenship could be generated through education; and directing attention to the general desire to acquaint students with the nature of social life and to the needs of society, remain valuable instruments for mutual dialogue and consensus-building.

Following his trip to East Asia, Dewey believed that he would need to work within educational and policymaking circles to promote his ideas for mutual understanding and world peace. His time in China had a direct impact on this global outlook. "After all," he wrote, "democracy in international relations is not a matter of agencies but of aims and consequences . . . the task of the United States in the problems of the Far East is not an easy one." A number of steps needed to be taken:

The first requisite is a definite and open policy, openly arrived at by discussion at home and made known to the entire world. Then we need to be prepared to back it up in action. Idealism without intelligence and without forceful willingness to act will soon make us negligible in the Far East—and surrender its destinies to a militaristic imperialism.

When all is said and done, he concluded, “it may well be questioned whether the United States has as yet awakened to the enormous power which is now in her hands. That which most impresses a visitor to the Far East is the extent of this power—accompanied by a query whether this same power is not largely being thrown away by reason of stupidity and ignorance.”⁵¹

The significance of Dewey’s trip to China, especially in terms of how each viewed the other, should be used as a guide when related to today’s global events. One should consider Dewey the interpreter and interlocutor—not the antagonist. He wanted to bring both sides together for mutual dialogue, cooperation, and respectful understanding.

Indeed, in examining the historical contributions of Dewey’s journey to China as a pathway to global understanding, it becomes clear why the late philosopher Richard Rorty insisted that Dewey’s pragmatism was an instrument for social hope—a means for connecting mind and nature to the world, through a process of inquiry and rigorous examination, and as a guide for peaceful behavior. The competing views between the progressive left (providing alternatives) and the cultural left (critical critiques), which Rorty addressed in his writings, highlight the need to appreciate the importance of Dewey’s pragmatism as a guide for civic dialogue and cultural critique.⁵²

Although Dewey recognized that his philosophy could not solve all social and political

problems in the post-war period, he did present a method of inquiry designed to revise those ideas that were barriers for understanding and address those problems which required thought and action, particularly when addressing the issue of war and peace. Dewey’s pragmatism thus favored a naturalistic, inquiry-based approach—rather than an epistemological, knowledge-based approach. Inquiry, he insisted, should not be understood as the mind passively looking at the “world as it is” and obtaining ideas that, if true, correspond to reality.

Instead, he took his philosophy one step further by maintaining that to achieve lasting peace it was essential to use our powers of inquiry as a process for examining the problems of war by challenging society’s current habits. In this way, it was then possible to modify accepted societal thinking with newer ideas—like Outlawry—in the furtherance of human action on behalf of global harmony. It was this form of inquiry Dewey developed after World War I, which called for the reconstruction of a social mindset that leaned towards passive acceptance of war. He balanced these ideas by encouraging activism in the call for peace.

As a progressive, a liberal, and socialist democrat, Dewey’s views on social and political issues still remain relevant in our search for the “Great Community,” as well as global harmony. Enlightened and energized by his journey to East Asia, Dewey’s commitment to global understanding was an attempt to use his pragmatism to speak truth to power.

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⁵¹ Dewey, “The International Duel in China,” *The Middle Works*, Vol. 11, 198.

⁵² For an analysis of Rorty’s resurrection of Dewey’s pragmatism, consult, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). Rorty trumpets Dewey as one of the prophets of postmodernism—one who championed democratic practice over the search for a general philosophical theory that would hamper social progress.

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